



## Subject: Driving on Indian Roads (Horn OK Please)

The Dutch enterprise software company, BAAN has opened an office in Hyderabad and has been bringing in some of their staff from the Netherlands to work in India. Here is an article written about the driving conditions in India by Coen Jeukens.

### Driving in India

For the benefit of every Tom, Dick and Harry visiting India and daring to drive on Indian roads, I am offering a few hints for survival.

They are applicable to every place in India, except the state of Bihar, where life outside a vehicle is only marginally safer. Indian road rules broadly operate within the domain of karma where you do your best, and leave the results to your insurance company.

The hints are as follows:

Do we drive on the left or right of the road?

The answer is "both". Basically you start on the left of the road, unless it is occupied. In that case, go to the right, unless that is also occupied. Then proceed by occupying the next available gap, as in chess. Just trust your instincts, ascertain the direction, and proceed.

Adherence to road rules leads to much misery and occasional fatality. Most drivers don't drive, but just aim their vehicles in the intended direction.

Don't you get discouraged or underestimate yourself except for a belief in reincarnation, the other drivers are not in any better position. Don't stop at pedestrian crossings just because some fool wants to cross the road. You may do so only if you enjoy being bumped in the back. Pedestrians have been strictly instructed to cross only when traffic is moving slowly or had come to a dead stop because some minister is in town. Still some idiot may try to wade across, but then, let us not talk ill of the dead.

Blowing your horn is not a sign of protest as in some countries. We horn to express joy, resentment, frustration, romance and bare lust (two brisk blasts), or, just to mobilize a dozing cow in the middle of the bazaar.

Keep informative books in the glove compartment. You may read them during traffic jams, while awaiting the chief minister's motorcade, or waiting for the rainwaters to recede when overground traffic meets underground drainage.

Night driving on Indian roads can be an exhilarating experience (for those with the mental makeup of Genghis Khan). In a way, it is like playing Russian roulette, because you do not know who amongst the drivers is loaded. What looks like the premature dawn on the horizon turns out to be a truck, attempting a land speed record. On encountering it, just pull partly into the field adjoining the road until the phenomenon passes.

Our roads do not have shoulders, but occasional boul-

ders. Do not blink your lights expecting reciprocation. The only dim thing in the truck is the driver, and the peg of illicit arrack he had at the last stop, his total cerebral functions add up to little more than a naught. Truck drivers are the James Bonds of India, and are licensed to kill.

Often you may encounter a single powerful beam of light about six feet above the ground. This is not a super motor-bike, but a truck approaching you with a single light on, usually the left one. It could be the right one, but never get too close to investigate. You may prove your point posthumously. Of course, all this occurs at night, on trunk roads.

During the daytime, trucks are more visible, except that the drivers will never show any signal. (And you must watch for the absent signals; they are a greater threat.) Only, you will often observe that the cleaner that sits next to the driver, will project his hand and wave hysterically.

This is definitely not to be construed as a signal for a left turn. The waving is just an expression of physical relief on a hot day, or a gesture to a fellow trucker.

Occasionally you might see what looks like a UFO with blinking colored lights and sounds emanating from within. This is an illuminated bus, full of happy pilgrims singing bhajans. These pilgrims go at breakneck speed, seeking contact with the Almighty, often meeting with success.

**One-way Street** - These boards are put up by traffic people to add jest in their otherwise drab lives. Don't stick to the literal meaning and proceed in one direction. In metaphysical terms, it means that you cannot proceed in two directions at once. So drive as you like, in reverse throughout, if you are the fussy type.

Les! I sound hypercritical, I must add a positive point also. Rash and fast driving in residential areas has been prevented by providing a "speed breaker"; two for each house. This mound, incidentally, covers the water and drainage pipes for that residence and is left untarred for easy identification by the corporation authorities, should they want to recover the pipe for year-end accounting. If, after all this, you still want to drive in India, have your lessons between 8 pm and 11 am - when the police have gone home. The citizens then are free to enjoy the 'FREEDOM OF SPEED' enshrined in our constitution. Having said all this, isn't it still true that the accident rate and related deaths are less in India compared to US or other countries..!??

### EDITORS Note:

*I am looking for articles to put in the Rangoli. It can be about your journeys through India, or abroad. It can be about traditional festivals in your native country that you would like to share with us. I welcome everything.*

*If you are interested in writing a piece, please e-mail it to me on [lesaffre@bgl.vsnl.net.in](mailto:lesaffre@bgl.vsnl.net.in) or to Elin at [ggm75@dial.pipex.com](mailto:ggm75@dial.pipex.com)*