

## Daily danger on our roads

The most dangerous activity most of us undertake on a daily basis involves getting behind the wheel of a car.

I realise we don't consciously consider it in such terms every time we buckle up and pull out of the yard - I know I certainly don't - but if one had to draw up a personal daily risk assessment of regular activities, surely nothing comes close to driving. And if driving is your day job, be it deliveries, commandeering a tractor or if you're involved in the emergency services, you see more of the road than most of us each and every day.

And the chances are, by virtue of the more miles you drive, you'll see more dangerous and occasionally lethal driving behaviour at first hand.

With over two million vehicles currently in the national car park, there are more of us on the move now than ever before in terms of vehicular transit. And for all the excellent drivers there are undoubtedly out there, given the increase in traffic - granted, a visible demonstration of economic growth - the chances are that there are also more careless and downright dangerous drivers out there. On Tuesday night last, as the rain sheeted down, I was driving from Waterford to Portlaw. There was enough surface water on several stretches of the road to flood an engine if one drove through it without showing sufficient regard.



We've all seen examples of irresponsible, even downright idiotic driving during wet spells.

Being someone who considers himself a safe driver (granted, that's a universal default position, let's face it), I proceeded with as much caution as I felt necessary, while a steam of soil-slicked water flowed across the Pouldrew Bends. Things didn't get any better as I drove through the Darrigal townland, just a field away from the River Suir on my right, and I didn't anticipate the level of water gushing from a stream which, during poor weather, regularly bubbles across the road. The left side of my car sent a surge of surface water upward and across my windscreen, which forced me to decelerate even further.

It was a dreadful night, in fact it was one of the worst nights I've ever driven on since first sitting into a driver's seat 16 years ago. I was on my way home, I wanted to get back to base in one piece and didn't particularly care how long it took me to get there. If only everyone else felt like that. With water spanning the entire width of the Bog Road, less than 200 yards from the left turn to Portlaw (a revised junction crying out for lighting since it was amended), I clicked on my indicator, again a facility in a vehicle which some motorists are only vaguely familiar with. A car travelling in the opposite direction which had passed the junction still had its full lights on. I flashed mine and figured since we were both moving relatively slowly, that it'd be better for both of us if we both had just our dims on. Whoever my fellow motorist was took umbrage at my action and flashed his/her lights back at me. All the same, we passed by each other safely and all was well.

Within 10 seconds of my turning left to Portlaw, as an angry sky continued to dump its contents, someone behind me in a white van decided it would be a good idea to overtake me while I drove between 50kph and 60kph.

Now, this driver didn't have blue lights on top of his van (it's safe to assume that it's a male we're talking about here) or a siren blaring, and since he was travelling way from UHW, there was precious little chance of there being someone in labour in the passenger seat. What hurry was this guy in on a night like this? Had he forgot to leave the cat in? Had he left the immersion on? Had he left his common driving sense at home that night and was now ironically speeding home through

water-soaked roads in a bid to retrieve it?

Now it might be considered a driving cliché but since 2003, I've seen my fair share of white van motorists taking stupid unnecessary risk while I've been driving, endangering both himself and others.

A 2014 AA Roadwatch survey saw 57 per cent of its 9,520 respondents describe drivers of white vans as aggressive, while 38 per cent labelled them reckless. Interestingly, the poll was prompted by an electrician who believed that "van drivers often get a raw deal". However, despite the claims of aggression, some 42 per cent of those polled believed the "white van man stereotype is unfair and inaccurate". According to the AA's Conor Faughnan: "While it's true many of the van drivers on our roads may be in a hurry when they're working, the bottom line is that they're fundamental to our economy and our society...In almost every van you see there's a person trying to earn an honest living...While you might come across the odd incarnation I suspect they're exception rather than the rule."

I cannot claim to have stood on an overpass and noted the colour of each vehicle driving at illogically ill-advised speed. I do not have mathematical, scientifically proven research to hand which proves that someone driving a white van is any more dangerous behind the wheel than I am myself. But I know what my eyes have borne witness to over the past 16 years, and this in my experience also applies to younger tractor drivers pulling trailers anchored with freshly cut silage each summer. They and indeed all drivers need to slow down.

I suspect there are more irresponsible drivers out there than there are bad roads and if we all dropped our cruising speed on motorways or main roads by 10kph, we'd all be a good deal safer. So let's all slow down, just a little. It might just save a life or two.