

Better Well Done than Well Said

by Nancy Martz

Scraps of folk literature adhering to bumpers and rear wind shields entertain, educate, and irritate other drivers at stop lights and in traffic jams all over America. Some might elicit a chuckle as in “I took the road less travelled; now, where the hell am I?” and “I’m too sexy for my hair; that’s why there’s none there.” Others provide advice such as “Don’t believe everything you think” and “Don’t let your smart phone know you don’t know what you’re doing—it can smell fear.” Some are boastful as in “My child is an honor student,” while others counter with “My kid can beat up your boy scout.”

Many stickers share religious or political identities with simple pictures of crosses, fish, donkeys and elephants. Increasingly during election cycles, bumper stickers insult other drivers who may have differing opinions. For example, “You can lead a Republican to knowledge but you can’t make him think” or “The best argument against democracy is a conversation with the common Democrat.” Regardless of their content, bumper stickers enable drivers to communicate something about themselves to strangers they are unlikely to meet.

I wonder what bumper stickers might say if they reflected original thoughts rather than clever adages offered for sale by the sticker entrepreneurs. I imagine a good number might include that common highway regret: “I wish I’d gone to the damned toilet when I had a chance.” Attitudes toward other drivers would abound like “Where did that jackass learn to drive?” and “Use your turn signal, jerk head!” Perhaps the executive on her way home might exclaim, “I just want out of this damned bra and these f-ing pantyhose!” Anyone in a hurry behind a string of slow movers might wish, “If only I had a pair of heat seeking missiles on my front bumper!”

Whatever drivers are thinking at the moment, they may never know how close they have come to being rear ended by someone trying to read the fine print of their bumper sticker. Also, it is wise to imagine the possible mental states of drivers speeding along wearing heavy metal armor inches away from you along the crowded freeways. A few years ago, a study in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* suggested that drivers who plaster their cars and trucks with stickers tend to be territorial and more likely to experience road rage than drivers who don’t use them. So, if you are going to advertise your identity on your vehicle, be sure it can be clearly comprehended from at least one car length for every ten miles per hour some damned fool with sticker envy is cruising behind you.