

Speed, even on the way to Kamloops, is not everything, argues Jack Bleiler.

Waiting on the side of the information highway

Despite the recent upgrade at my place of employment to a "lightning-quick" ADSL connection, I still find the Internet to be a sluggish, clumsy, point-less waste of time, which is why I haven't been racing down to my local Compu-weenie MegaMart Digital Discount Virtual Warehouse Superstore (or its on-line equivalent) to fork out a few grand for a new computer and sign myself up for the latest heap of Internet services. (my almost complete lack of expendable cash is also a contributing factor, but not the main focus of today's column).

Even with all the new advances in computer technology, I still use computers primarily for only three things:

1. word processing.
2. sending/receiving e-mail.
3. playing Tank Wars at the shockwave.com website.

Sure, our ADSL connection makes accessing Tank Wars a lot faster and easier, but that's probably not the "increased productivity" the company had in mind when they upgraded the system.

To be fair, there are many business-related activities that are far more efficient with a faster Internet connection, but it seems that every substantial increase in access speed is accompanied by an even more substantial increase in the number of worthless and annoying Internet roadblocks and detours, which effectively defeats the purpose.

Whoever designed the "information superhighway" felt that it would be a good idea to place all the billboards right in the middle of the road. You can be sailing along on your way to whateverhell.com, pedal to the floor, eyes on the horizon, when

suddenly you have to slam on your brakes for a helpful notice from the fine people at Goobersoft that you haven't yet downloaded the latest hourly upgrade of Internet Spitoon, and are therefore wasting valuable nanoseconds clearing E-mail Phlegm from your Digi-puweenie.

Post Inbox. There are more such billboards every second. With all that stop-and-go driving, it's no wonder your search engine is constantly seizing up. This "superhighway" couldn't be any less conducive to the free flow of traffic if it were strewn with overturned digital transport trucks carrying several thousand head of virtual livestock.

The only activity more frustrating than lurching around the Web is attempting to navigate our actual highways. In many ways, the Internet seems to have been patterned on our highways system, which also features frequent impediments to break up the monotony of travelling at a constant rate of speed in more or less the direction of your destination.

This fall, as a provincial election looms on the not-too-distant horizon, we naturally have a bumper crop of roadway projects on the go. Or, at least, we have a bumper crop of roadway project signs being erected, which, although requiring less tax dollars than legitimate construction, are equally effective at creating angry clots of motorists with little or no regard for the rules of the road, who will gladly run each other off the road if it will shave ten seconds off their ETA.

On the long weekend, we drove south to Kamloops on Highway 97, expecting to encounter a considerable amount of traffic. Oddly enough, there weren't a great deal of vehicles on the road. Fortunately, construction was underway at a number of locations, and we were able to gather frequently along the route,

preventing us from getting too lonely.

Just as the traffic spread out again, and began roaring along at speeds in excess of 40 kilometres per hour, more signs would appear, announcing yet another "construction speed zone". We would be urged to "prepare to stop". There would be a minimum of three signs reminding motorists that "traffic fines double in construction speed zones". And we would crawl along for several miles without

witnessing any evidence of construction, not even dormant construction equipment, vehicles or workers. Then there would be a happy little sign saying "Thank you! Resume speed!"

By then, of course, we were all travelling at gravitational escape velocity, trying to make up for lost time. And when confronted by future alleged "construction speed zones", we refused to slow down until there was a flagperson on the hood.

Hey, you can fool some of the drivers some of the time, but you can't teach an old horse to drink out of a silk purse. Or words to that effect.

The lesson to be learned here, I suppose, is that maybe we should be sinking less time and money into technology, into faster cars and faster computers, into the blind pursuit of speed—and more into plain old, run-of-the-mill planning and common sense. Otherwise, we'll just keep find-

ing faster ways to run into stop signs. Someone has to clear all that clutter off the road. Someone has to pay attention to the boring, niggling details.

It'll have to be someone other than me. I'd love to help, but getting past level 12 of Tank Wars is currently demanding all my spare time and energy.

Thank you for pausing to read this alleged "column." You may now resume flipping the pages at breakneck speed.



Jack Bleiler



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\$8
Safeway Club Price

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\$8
Safeway Club Price

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\$7
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Shrimp Rings
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\$4
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2 for \$5
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Shrimp Rings
Frozen.
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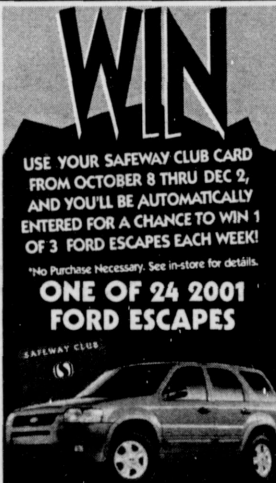
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