

Greetings From Ghana #2

(I am trying new things, like adding pictures. Please bear with me)

When thinking of Accra -- and Accra is far from a universal experience of Ghana -- one cannot recount daily life without including the traffic. Every major city has traffic congestion, whether it is Seattle, Washington; Omaha, Nebraska; or Accra and its 2.3 million people who seem convinced that traffic lanes can be created wherever desired. Motorcycle drivers are convinced the small lines between the established lanes are markings for the motorcycle only lanes.

Drivers here will enter a traffic lane at a right angle to cut across it and go into the opposing lane. So, if you are coming out of a side street and need to go across traffic, you nose your car, or truck, or semi into the oncoming cars and people let you through. I can understand letting the semi through or the delivery and pickup trucks, but even the little, plastic, almost not much bigger than a rollerskate, subcompact cars are given way to. In America you'd get t-boned in a heartbeat. Here, it is *de rigueur*. If you get upset about being "cut off" you might as well have your stroke at home and save the roadside drama.

Cars and trucks will pass within an inch of each other here and never raise an eyebrow of either driver.

If you want to merge into a lane of traffic and no one is letting you in, you start another lane of traffic that is parallel to where you are wanting in. As the lanes bottle neck you squeeze yourself in like you are putting on jeans you should have ditched two sizes ago.

It is not uncommon for people to travel down a side street, go across a vacant lot, over a small ditch and "merge" onto an on ramp. There is one culvert about six feet tall that is used so often as an access tunnel between two roads that some guys stand on each end and direct traffic and the drivers tip them as they exit.

There is no such thing as a "fast lane" here. And no such thing as a truck lane. It is also not uncommon for people to double park on each side of the street or to break down in a lane and to leave the vehicle while they go look for repair.

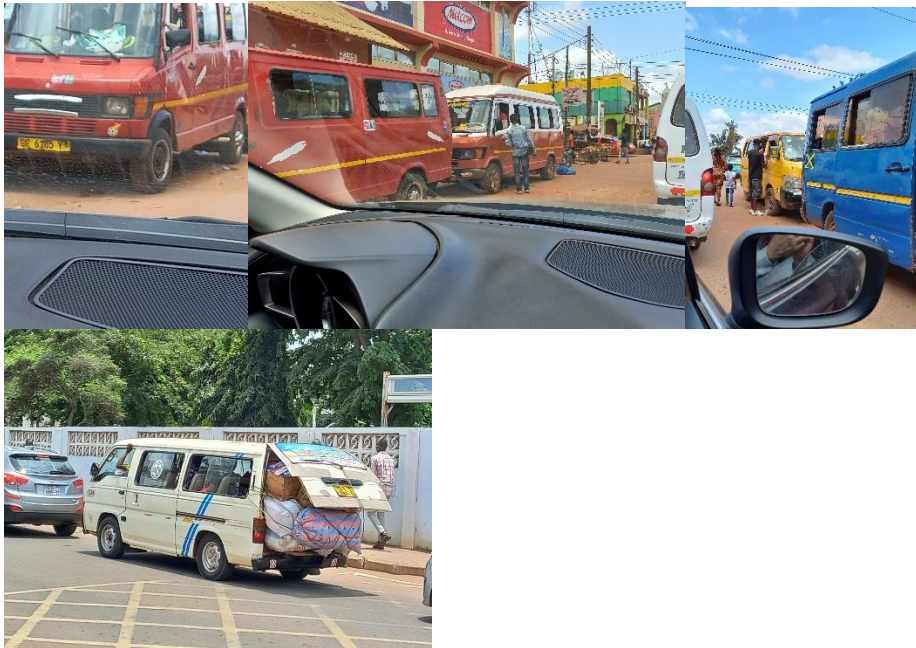
Rain storms here can be very heavy and so there are deep (close to a meter down) concrete gutters on each side of the road. Sometimes they are covered. Sometimes they are not. And sometimes the covers that had been there are missing leaving a hole about two feet long and at least a foot wide. People park with a tire half off the road or right on the edge. I have yet to see anyone whose car was swallowed by the gutters although the danger seems ever present. Again, *de rigueur*.

They say that the drivers in Accra are excellent. As it was explained to me, "If you have someone who avoids a collision -- they are a good driver. But when that driver

avoids multiple collisions every day, they are excellent!” And with the exception of my earlier experience, I have seen very few accidents.

I do not drive yet. I need to go to driving school to get my license so John, my roommate, does the driving. And need I say it, he is excellent.

There are very few things that qualify as government supported public transportation here. The majority of people get around on transit vans that have been outfitted with seats to hold 12 – 15 people. Many of them would never be allowed on the streets of any American city. I doubt they would get too far in Europe either. But here, if it moves someone will try to use it to make money and people will board a broken down tro-tro (as they are called) rather than wait or walk. People often use tro tros for hauling household goods. The conductor charges additional fees and finds a space.



The tro-tro is usually owned by the driver. The conductor hangs part way out the window of the sliding door and announces the destination as they pass by people. He collects the fares and helps people on and off the bus. If someone is on the opposite side of the street and needing a ride, it is not unusual for the tro-tro boy (conductor) to stop traffic by standing in the middle of the road and waving his arms to stop vehicles so the passenger can cross.

Many of the places people need to go to have names with soft vowels, like La Paz and Tema (timmah). The tro-tro boys have a raspy call with drawn out vowels when announcing the destinations and when you happen to encounter several at once calling out for passengers they begin to sound like a chorus of ducks.

As ubiquitous as tro-tros are, the other forms of transportation are often as prolific and also as road worthy. People here will load a taxi with building materials if they cannot find a truck for hire, stressing the springs to where the car is riding at an angle. Uber and Bolt drivers are also here. Most taxis and independent drivers use subcompact cars that look to be made primarily from plastic. If you are heading to the airport with two people and three bags, you are close to someone walking. And the odds of your driver having a car with a working speedometer or dashboard are about 60%.

Parts of the city are desirable because they have paved streets, (for the most part). We are in one such area now. But virtually every area, except where the embassies are, has potholes – some so deep that someone will throw a tire in to warn motorists.

I have a friend who specializes in alignment and suspensions. I asked him why he chose that as a profession – he just stared at me. “Isn’t it obvious? I went to the business that will always be in demand.”

Enjoy your day. I have an errand or two to get done.

Keep Smilin’

Doc