

San Angelo takes great pride in being a city of enlightenment, supporting the public schools and colleges at near-oratorical heights in print and on the air. Churches around the Wool Capital offer elementary education. Also, often overlooked are the academic contributions by the various private institutions providing short courses for the citizens mandated by the magistrates to reform driving deficiencies, like fudging on stop lights and pressing too hard on accelerators in school zones.

My alma mater is on the west side of town. Seating is first-come. In the summer, the east part of the classroom is coolest. In other seasons, it's best to play the glare off the street side by changing seats at lunch. Fall and spring are a bit cool; a sweater or light jacket can be comfortable. (If possible to choose sections at ol' West Side, Mexicans make the best choice for graybeards, as they are inherently too kind to burst into laughter if you fail to answer to the right name at roll call.)

Another category of Angelo drivers' classes is one I just attended offered by the American Association of Retired People to evaluate and instruct members how to make a few more laps. Like short sashays before terminal

docking, before family opinion and community consensus jerks the ignition keys and the operator's license in a motion so dramatic that the car title disappears into the bank box and the numerals blur on the license plates.

Tuition costs 10 bucks at the AARP classes. The two four-hour sessions don't count for removing tickets. At the end of the course, the student receives a certificate to take to their insurer for a discount, depending on how nimble the agent is at jiggling rates and concocting doubletalk. It isn't everyone's choice, but I use the post, as once I slipped and reminded my agent I had done business with his grandfather.

The AARP class I matriculated two weeks ago met over at a huge church complex of chapels, offices, and a private school. Raucous students and solemn proctors gave us wide margin in the hallways. The expanse of the parking lot was especially noticeable. Unlike country church folks, urbanites see limits to the care and protection provided by the Heavenly Father. "His Cloak," in their credo, does not cover the fenders, bumpers and taillights of cars parked in front of a drivers' school.

Twenty-two students filled the classroom. The teacher had been a professional driver, perhaps a track driver. The lady sitting on my right was a retired third grade teacher.

Old girls following the schoolteaching dodge can't help feeling that automobiles are "get-away cars." Were a modicum of justice left in this cold-hearted republic, retired teachers would be given lifetime driving privileges for every size vehicle from a Mack truck to a Volkswagon.

Fine state of affairs when former students can tell a schoolmarm how long she can drive.

On my left sat a couple distracted by worry over their dog staying in the car so long during class. Nothing was posted excluding dogs from the classroom. I'd read that dogs were going to yoga class with their owners, but had no update on drivers' schools.

A lot was going on in Angelo on the subject of canines. Minutes from the City Council meeting contained serious indications that citizens were going to be rationed to six dogs per household.

Of the 22 enrolled, two students filled in the application correctly. We followed the lessons in a big book the Association publishes, but AARP's biggest contribution to auto safety is the membership bumper stickers. Even those wild Austin cowboys, setting and breaking speed records every day, yield to the one on my car. In fact, a few of those reverse cap-billed monkeys actually show concern for safety for fleeting moments once

a sticker is spotted. (Tip: to really stage a "Rock of Ages" effect, before hitting town, let your seatbelt drag from under the door on the driver's side. Backfiring exhausts can't win as much space as that ruse.)

Students participated by reading parts of the lessons. Personal testimony avoided confessions and included blanket condemnation of all younger drivers. One chap confided his next car was going to be a stick-controlled Mercedes, as he was a retired pilot more comfortable "behind the stick than the wheel." Brought to mind that the few herders left might do better with a set of reins to steer our rigs than a steering wheel. Didn't dare say so, but for the moment, I couldn't think how we could do worse than we were already doing herding our pickups to town.

Big rains washed away the dirt track from the ranch the second day, but I stayed in the correct lane and observed the speed limit in spite of the mud. I haven't decided whether to mail my diploma over to the insurance office. Might be better to lay low until after next renewal time.