

From: centro4[SMTP:centro4@col3.telecom.com.co]
Sent: Thursday, 5 June 1997 4:33
To: Announcement to PARtalk-L
Subject: =wc.14(E)= Ron Passfield

~~~~~ The World Congresses ~~~~~

**Ethnographic Study of Cartagena Taxi Drivers:  
Life in the Fast Lane(s)**

by Ron Passfield

While I have been here in Cartagena for World Congress 4, I have taken the opportunity to conduct an ethnographic study of the behaviour of Cartagena taxi drivers.

I chose the ethnographic approach because I was frequently (though unwillingly) in the position of participant observer and because I had no control over the action or outcomes. A limitation of my study was the fact that observation was sometimes interrupted by my perceived need to take evasive action (eg. duck under the dashboard).

My findings relate to observed social rules adopted by taxi drivers:

RULE 1: Do not feel constrained by lane markings on the road; cross lanes frequently or drive in the centre of the road to facilitate fast lane changes.

RULE 2: Do not see obstacles of any kind as impediments to progress - accelerate, trust your intuition, and rely heavily on reflexes and ingenuity.

RULE 3: When entering side streets be prepared to negotiate which side of the road you want with oncoming traffic. Remember, however, might is right.

RULE 4: When negotiating the fare with passengers, use an ambit claim approach.

RULE 5: Observe the following guidelines when using the car horn --

\* one long loud beep - use when wishing to make a derogatory comment to other drivers or pedestrians (includes other drivers who stop at red lights).

\* two sharp beeps - warns other drivers that you are going to do something unpredictable (eg. change lanes without indicating, cut in front of other driver, drive over curbing to facilitate speedy exit.)

\* three long beeps - indicates to other drivers and pedestrians that you are about to drive through a confined space where the outcome is uncertain (even to yourself as driver).

\* unspecified number of beeps - use frequently to acknowledge the beauty of young women who come anywhere within the range of your peripheral vision (can also be used to acknowledge friends).

Although it is dangerous to generalise across cultures from a single study, I have come to the conclusion that Cartagena taxi drivers are the best in the world; their evasive skills are unsurpassed.