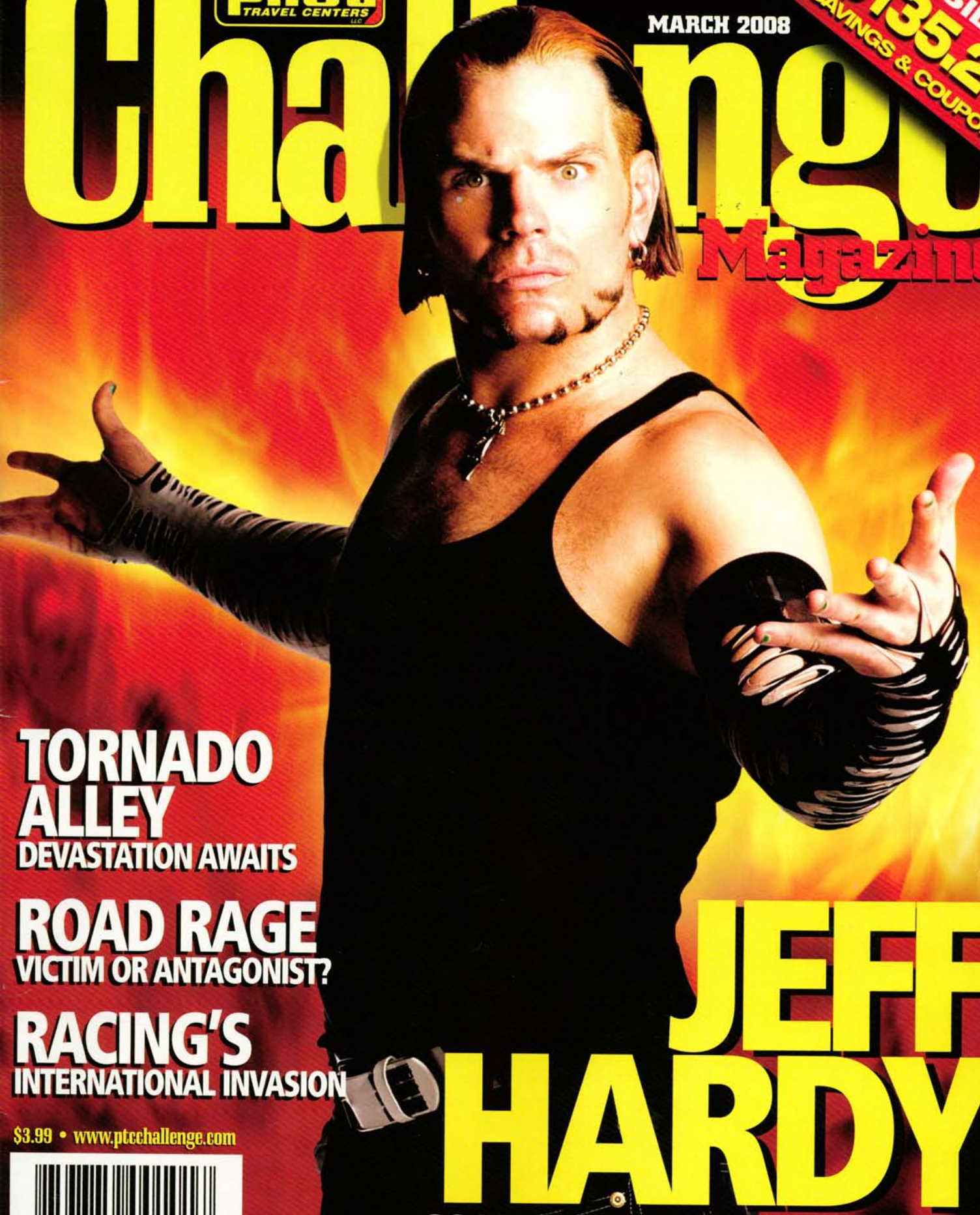


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ROAD RAGE

THE RISE OF VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

BY CHARU SURI

Brenda Fraser knows the repercussions of road rage all too well. A speeding driver killed her mother and severely injured her in California.

This is just one of the several incidents that are caused each year by road rage, reports of which are on the rise in the United States.

Road rage ranges from an impatient honking of the horn to the more bizarre cases, like that of a man hitting another driver's head with an orange in Brooksville, Fla. The man who threw the orange also tried but failed to ram the victim's car with his own car.

In England, a motorist was jailed early this year when he assaulted 76-year-old William Hone during an argument about a driving incident after the victim was cut off at a roundabout. The perpetrator, Ian Bullows,

repeatedly punched Hone, wounding him in the nose and eye.

It's pretty easy to see how road rage can harm others, but it can be difficult to acknowledge that you may have it. "It's the way people respond to angry feelings," says Pamela Garcy, Ph.D., author of "The Power of Inner Guidance: Seven Steps to Tune In and Turn On." "Displacement of aggression is one way of dealing with anger."

The United States is notorious for workaholics who don't know when to quit. As stress increases, the potential for violent and bizarre actions can climb, especially when you're driving for a long time and for several days.

"This is a pressing issue," says Garcy. "I also think there is a de-humanizing factor to being in a vehicle."

Meanwhile, some states are becoming more lenient about gun-control laws. A Dallas Morning News article in January reported that a new state law allows Texans to carry

guns in their cars. According to the "carjacking law," law-abiding citizens can carry a gun for protection.

Attorney Craig Watkins has said that criminals may benefit the most. And people who have road rage? Well, that's entirely another can of worms.

➤ Stress and the Body

Dr. Kathleen Hall, founder and CEO of the Stress Institute, says that since one in 12 heart attacks is related to stress on the road, the ramifications of stress are huge. When you are stressed, you produce more of the hormone cortisol, which is referred to as the "stress hormone" because it increases blood pressure and sugar levels.

It can happen to the best of us, and chances are that you have been on the road often enough that you've witnessed the effect of stress: The ricochet effect is strong enough to make one swerve off the road.

The AAA Foundation reports that some incidents of road rage are caused by simple misunderstandings between drivers. Since human beings tend to be territorial, they can view the road as "their" space, and anyone who occupies the space in a frivolous or unhurried fashion can be the victim of a territorial driver.

Others can engage in a verbal encounter, which can be very dangerous and possibly fatal. Hall recalls a case in Atlanta when two drivers engaged in a heated debate on the road. The drivers ended up pulling their vehicles aside and arguing about who was right and who was wrong. Then one of the drivers pulled a gun from his trunk and shot the other driver, right in front of his wife and children.

Tragedies like these can be avoided if you acknowledge any proclivity toward anger, substance abuse and fear. In particular, experts offer the following tips:

1. **Know if you have an anger problem.**
If you are an aggressive driver, you can train yourself to be calmer. "Don't think a fairy is going to tap you on the shoulder and tell you to slow down," says Hall.
2. **Learn how to share the road.**
As a truck driver, sharing the road isn't easy. The

vehicles are so big that you may feel that you own the road.

"If you have a Type A personality, this is something to work on," says Hall. "If someone merges into your lane, think of it as an opportunity for growth. Take a deep breath. Memorize an affirmation, so you produce less cortisol."

3. **Make your vehicle a "Zen" zone.**
Listen to music you like and make your vehicle a peaceful, happy place. You'll be surprised how this can influence your mood.
4. **If you are the victim of road rage, surrender.**
Many Americans are Type A personalities and they feel the need to get even with others who hurt or offend them, especially on the road. If you are the victim of someone who does this, you must surrender. This is no place for arguments (do that on your own time – at home). Smile at the offender, no matter how loud, obnoxious or rude he or she may be. This may be difficult, but it could save your life. Frederic G. Reamer, Ph.D., a professor at the School of Social Work in Rhode Island, works with victims of assault, violence and road rage. He advises not to engage with the perpetrator at all. Reamer is also the author of the book

"Heinous Crime: Cases, Causes, and Consequences."

"I would pull to the side of the road and hope [the perpetrator] would just go on their way," he says.

Be proactive, not reactive.

5. **Enroll in a course if you know you suffer from anger issues.**
There are tricks to staying calm, experts say. And those tricks need to be honed through repetition and counseling. You can think about the repercussions your anger could have. "Instructors try to help these people identify the trigger points," says Reamer. "I really do believe therapy and courses reduce the likelihood of injury." Courses that promote "rationally motivated behavior" are appropriate. There are several people Reamer has met with (in prison) who say they wish they had thought through the situation more carefully before they committed second-degree murder. He recalls an instance in which two people got into an argument at a gas station. One of them got so upset that he reached into his glove compartment, pulled out a pistol and shot the other man. If only the perpetrator had restrained himself, or considered the repercussions of such rage, he wouldn't be spending 30 years behind bars.
6. **Reward yourself for staying calm.**
Human beings are goal-oriented, and rather than striving toward "getting even," try to become a better person and stay calm. "Tell yourself you are giving yourself, say, \$5 in the jar for staying calm," Garcy suggests. "Just keep saving until you can get what you want." This is a great way to turn a negative situation into a positive, goal-oriented one.

▼ MISUNDERSTANDINGS

▼ Most road rage incidents result from misunderstandings between drivers. They start with a sense of invasion into one's personal space.



7. Respect the other driver, even if he or she is angry.

This might seem like an impossible proposition, but sometimes you need to put yourself in the other person's shoes, even if he or she is a raving lunatic. The driver might have had a bad day, or had a terrible time at work. Anger usually manifests because the person has other underlying issues, such as family trouble, stress, drug abuse or alcohol abuse.

"When you get very angry, the typically logical part of your brain is switched off," says Garcy. "The frontal lobe – the rational part of your brain – inhibits you from doing certain [rash] things."

When rage temporarily switches off this part of your brain, people tend to do irrational things. Once you understand this, you may be in a better position to forgive the perpetrator and understand where he or she is coming from.

One of these "influencers" could be drugs or alcohol. In late January, police arrested a man in Connecticut who was throwing bottles at a truck.

They found half a pound of marijuana in his car.



TRAFFIC JAMS

can often be the source of road rage, as people become impatient and increasingly irritated, waiting for the lanes to clear.

>> The Last Straw

A roadside billboard shows a picture of an infuriated driver screaming at another vehicle while her toddler observes her movements from the back seat. The caption reads, "She learns by watching you."

You want to set an example to others, and as commuters are on the rise in the United States, this makes for some really testing times to be on the road. Nearly 3.5 million people travel at least 90 minutes each way to work, and we certainly know the long distances traveled by truck drivers across the United States.

One in 12 heart attacks can be linked to traffic. That's a statistic to be afraid of! Take a self stress test and find out if you have a proclivity to road rage. Try to talk to friends who have been in similar situations and find out what they did.

Above all, remember the repercussions of road rage. The best thing is to smile and walk away. Who knows – the angered may have far fewer problems than the angry. **PCM**

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