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Driving in a funeral cortege

Life Skill

Do's and don'ts for motorists in a procession, and for those encountering one

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Consider this tip from an eHow.com Web entry on how to drive in a funeral procession: "Do not do anything illegal while driving, such as drinking beer. Do not think that the police officers guiding you will let you get away with such behavior."

Drinking beer in a funeral procession. Really?



The funeral procession for former First Lady Betty Ford probably had a police escort, but not all funeral processions do. Here are tips on how to drive in one. (Robyn Beck/Getty Images)

Unfortunately, most of us would not be surprised. Funeral etiquette has almost expired in this anything-goes age. And riding in a cortege is far too often a frightening experience as the bereaved must contend with impatient, ill-mannered road hogs set on getting where they're going quickly — even if it kills them. "The basic rule of thumb is just respect," says Jennifer Moses, director of operations for Funeralwise.com, a website offering free information and planning advice on all things funereal. "One should never, ever, cut into the middle of a funeral procession."

As for those in the cortege, Moses says the big rule is to follow the leader. "A (funeral home) staff member will drive the lead car and will be responsible for leading the procession through traffic lights," she says.

Here are some practical tips from Jessica A. Koth, public relations manager for the National Funeral Directors Association, on surviving a ride in a funeral procession with your dignity, your life and your automobile all intact. Koth has tips for onlookers as well.

Level of difficulty: Easy, although it can be a challenge when road hogs get in the way. All passengers should wear seat belts.

You should follow the vehicle in front of you "as closely as is practicable and safe."

No speeding. Don't drive over 55 miles per hour on a highway with a posted speed limit of 55 or greater; drive 5 miles per hour below the posted speed on other roadways.

Turn your headlights on. The first and last vehicles in a procession should turn on their hazard lights.

When the lead car enters an intersection, the cars behind it should follow through the intersection "as long as it is safe to do so, even if the traffic light turns red." Funeral processions have the right-of-way in intersections unless an emergency vehicle approaches with lights or siren activated, or a law enforcement official directs the cortege to give up the right of way.

For drivers who encounter a funeral procession, the National Funeral Directors Association advice boils down to four simple words: Stay out of it.

Unfortunately, many motorists need to have it spelled out for them:

Do not drive between vehicles in a funeral procession unless instructed to by law enforcement personnel.

Do not join a funeral procession to secure the right of way.

Do not pass a funeral procession on the cortege's right side unless the line of vehicles is in the farthest left lane.

Do not enter an intersection, even if you have a green light, if a funeral procession is proceeding through a red light signal.

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Original article on the Web: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-07-27/features/sc-fam-0726-lifeskill-funeral-process20110727_1_funeral-procession-funeral-etiquette-funeral-cortege