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Handling Dubai's traffic chaos calmly

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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Notwithstanding the opening of the new floating bridge over the creek and the extra lanes on the Maktoum Bridge, twice in the past few weeks, official directives have recognised the stressful effects of Dubai's fast-growing traffic congestion.

This is particularly apparent not only at Deira City Centre and Shaikh Zayed Road but also in the newly developing areas around Arabian Ranches and elsewhere.

The Department of Health and Medical Services quotes it as a major cause of deaths through high blood pressure (three times higher than in the rest of the emirates). And the Dubai Executive Council has asked the government to adopt flexible working hours, largely in order to ease rush-hour traffic that is now becoming a serious problem.

It is accepted that cars bring out the worst in many people, turning a normally reasonable adult into an angry belligerent child, the moment things cease to go smoothly. Part of the problem in the UAE is that with a diverse expatriate population from India, Pakistan, Iran, Europe and elsewhere, the standard of driving seems to depend more on ethnic culture than on the Highway Code.

Blame game

This presents a basic challenge - which is to learn to stop blaming all the other drivers. The more motorists who need to use the roads, the more congestion there will be, so that more traffic-lanes will have to be built, causing more opportunities for collisions, and requiring more closures for repairs etc.

It is no good just feeling indignant about it, for this will cause needless stress and solve nothing. You really do have to step away from the cosy mental image of your next journey as an uninterrupted drive in a perfectly-functioning vehicle along wide open roads, with green lights all the way.

Allow extra time for hold-ups. Even make creative use of them. Listen to music or a motivational talk. Learn a new language, step by step. You'll find you're less-stressed than the ones who don't.

Listen to your car

You might even see the point of taking more care over the maintenance of your car, so that it does not break down and

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become the cause of worse jams. (But it makes sense to carry a first-aid kit and some bottled water on your journey, just in case!)

Unfortunately, in the UK, I have seen the birth and burgeoning of a very ugly habit indeed, called 'road rage'. Two drivers try to overtake each other at speed, or compete for the only available parking space. Insults are hurled. Fists fly. Sometimes actual murder is committed.

This has shocked and baffled a nation usually identified with good manners and common decency, and its origins are not fully understood. But it is at least partly caused by simply too many cars on the road. I can only sincerely hope you don't get the same unacceptable effect here.

- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

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