

Local farmers stress driving patience for motorists

As harvest season arrives, incidents increase with field-to-field travel

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NORTH PERTH – Doug Johnston sits comfortably and confidently at the controls of his New Holland combine harvester, and makes the turn onto Perth Road 147 that runs adjacent to Maplevue Farms just north of Britton.

He and his brother, Dave, manage the extensive dairy operation that their family has before them for multiple generations. Things have changed significantly in terms of the technology the Johnstons and most farmers utilize; the 2021 New Holland CR8.90 Doug is operating, for example, has all the bells and whistles – better overhead and rear lighting, rear camera, audio indicators in the cab, even Bluetooth for hands-free phone calls.

Despite all the additional safety measures modern heavy farm equipment has, one thing farmers can't account for is the unpredictability and impatience of other motorists while they are attempting to move from field to field. More accurately, they can usually count on too many motorists taking unnecessary risks in an effort to get where they're going just a little bit quicker.

Doug believes the problem of drivers making unsafe and sometimes high-speed passes around large, slow-moving farm equipment has become substantially worse in recent years.

"Because people are always in a hurry. They always have to get somewhere," says Doug from his perch roughly 10 feet up. He has been operating heavy farm equipment for a solid four decades. "If you're on a back road, respect the equipment."

"It's a different look from up here. And if everyone had a ride up here they'd understand. It's hard to picture until you're up here."

The New Holland combine, with auger secured and the side access ladder safely locked in

traveling position, is 17 feet in width. Road 147 has lanes approximately 11 feet wide, meaning when it's traveling from field to field it's taking up the majority of the road. Side roads are even tighter, typically measuring 21 feet across, which Doug points out as he makes a right onto Line 82.

"When I'm on this road, I need the whole thing," he says, adding that he has had motorists pass him on the left – and the right – while driving down side roads.

Unseen culverts or dips in the ditch could be disastrous for passing motorists, especially on side roads. Their visibility is also typically poor with the combine blocking the view ahead. Both Doug and Dave will employ a blocking method when necessary to ensure impatient motorists stay put behind them. It's simply a matter of safety.

"I don't block them because I'm an ass, which is what some people think I'm sure," he said.

"I'm trying to save the guy's life, and they don't even realize it. If I'm blocking you, it's for a reason."

"There's nothing worse than a guy passing you and giving you the finger. That pisses us off. Just because he's two minutes late to get his

coffee. I'm sorry, I'm trying to get to the field to give you milk to put in your coffee."

Doug has never had a collision in all his years driving, although he typically has two or three close calls a year. Dave had a very close call just last week while attempting to turn left into the Maplevue Farms lane.

"I can see from the mirrors he's coming, so I actually block the road because it wasn't safe for him to pass and I didn't want to end up in the ditch with 30 tons of corn," said Dave. The motorist disregarded the blocking measure, however, basically driving on the shoulder and nearly onto the Johnston's front lawn to make the pass. "Some of these



Dan McNee Photos

Doug Johnston manoeuvres his New Holland combine harvester around a parked excavator on Perth Road 147 just north of Maplevue Farms, he and his brother's rural Britton dairy operation. Johnston has plenty of 'war stories' to share when it comes to close calls he's had over the years between him and impatient motorists. Also pictured: Johnston's mirror view of a pickup truck performing a pass; frontal view of the 17-foot wide New Holland combine. The Johnstons never travel roads with the harvester's header attached, but even without it the combine spans a 17-foot width.

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– Doug Johnston



people need to see the farmer's perspective of what we can see and what we can't."

Doug said that with the summer wheat harvest upon us, there is going to be an influx of tractors, wagons and combines traveling the roads soon. And with it, there comes an influx of close calls between motorists and farm equipment.

He added people should remember that it sometimes takes a few hundred metres for a tractor hauling crops or equipment like manure spreaders to come to a

complete stop. The best way to avoid a potential incident is to again, slow down and be patient.

"You live in rural Ontario," says Doug as he safely makes his left-hand turn into Maplevue. "If you're on this road, you're out in farming country, so you'd better respect farming vehicles."

"I've never had a collision, but it's been awful close," added Dave. "If they just be patient, chances are we aren't going far. Most farmers are not going more than two or three miles. Give us five minutes to get from field to

field. We try to stay off the roads as much as we can, but we have to get from field to field.

"Give us five minutes – it's all we ask. You're going to get there safely. I don't want to have to stop and call 911 because somebody just got smoked by the combine."

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FREE COMMUNITY EVENT hosted by Promar Karate Listowel! Karate Back to School seminar. This will show kids how to have more focus and concentration for studies and how to deal with bullying. Ages 4 and up. Saturday, August 20th at 11:00am. Space is limited, book by your spot at shihan@promarkarate.ca.

GARDEN PARTY - Atwood Presbyterian Church, 140 Monument Rd, Monday, August 15, 12:15 p.m. \$15/meal. Dine in or take out. Let us know when you order your meal. You must pre-register by Friday, August 12 at 3 p.m. with Community Outreach Services 519-595-8755 or email milvertonoutreach@knollcrestlodge.com

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