



# “Danger Will Robinson”\* – rotaries ahead!

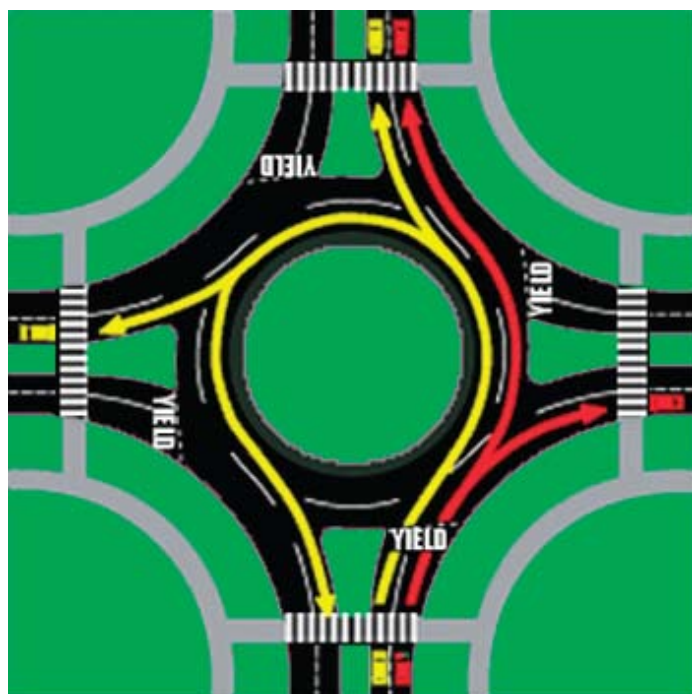
In the very first article I wrote for Boston Bimmer I mentioned in passing the one feature of Massachusetts’s roadways that has caused me more moments of abject terror than any other. I speak, of course, of the **rotary**. Also known as **roundabouts** or **traffic circles**, depending upon where you are from, these insidious odes to efficient traffic flow literally keep me up at night, clutching at my blanket with white knuckles much in the same way that I grip my steering wheel when steeling my nerves prior to entering a rotary.

I know that most of you who are reading this grew up with rotaries, and feel absolutely no apprehension at all when zipping through them even in a semi-conscious state on the way to work in the morning. My partner is much the same way, and she enjoys chiding me when she sees my eyes widen upon approaching this Satanic traffic artifact. Massachusetts born, she takes each swirling circle of concrete and iron in stride and can’t understand why I am incapable of doing the same thing.

## Insane Drivers

Let me tell you why. In Quebec, rotaries are a rare beast indeed, something that is only encountered in out-of-the-way municipalities with little or no traffic. They loom up at you from the night mist like the many-headed Hydra of Greek legend, confuse your wits and then spit you out seemingly at random onto a new road. There is a very good reason why there are so few rotaries in Quebec – it is because most drivers in that province are insane.

I don’t mean “insane” in that casual sense that every state, province or even country uses to describe their more creative license holders. When I use the term “insane” to describe the driving habits of Quebec residents it is merely because I am being polite and holding back



**ROTARY ANXIETY?** Use this educational illustration produced by the city of Monona, Wisconsin, to help citizens maneuver a rotary. They also offer a video on rotaries at <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/motorist/roaddesign/roundabout-works.htm>.

from using adjectives such as “dangerous” and “irresponsible”. Combine these attitudes with the most complex traffic signage in the world – the Minister of Transport has never been able to score higher than 60% on a Quebec signage test – and you have a recipe for disaster.

## The Dorval Circle

Just how incapable of handling complex roadway configurations are the drivers from my home province? Let me give you an example. Many years ago, the powers that be in Montreal decided that a rotary would be an excellent way to handle the surge of traffic leaving the highway towards either the town of Dorval or the international airport located just on the other side of the 4 lane route. Unimaginatively called the Dorval Circle, this rotary was a complete and utter disaster. Accident after accident caused by drivers being completely unable to agree upon right of way or proper yielding strategies forced the province to install 4 traffic lights along the rotary just to keep the peace. A populace accustomed to flexible speed limits and optional red lights were flummoxed by the very strict law of physics that states two objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time – particularly if they are both made of plastic and steel.

The Circle has remained such a snarl that it is slated to be completely replaced with standard intersections at the end of this decade.

My experiences at home have caused me to adopt a deep distrust of rotaries no matter where I find them. Imagine my horror when I discovered that Massachusetts possesses more rotaries than any other state in the union! I did make a valiant effort to get over my fears, but try as I might, and despite the best efforts at explanation by my partner, I have been unable to figure out exactly how these diabolical circles seem to work so flawlessly down here.

## Is there help for “Rotary Anxiety?”

It seems that whatever motor vehicle mind meld that allows drivers to effortlessly navigate a rotary is instantly shattered by my mere presence. As soon as I edge past the yield sign the flow of traffic completely engulfs my car and I become swept up in multiple lanes of cars and trucks attempting to either merge through me or conspiring to keep me circling the median until I die of extreme old age. The subtle social signals that Massachusetts residents seems to use to indicate their exiting

intentions to each other are lost entirely on me, and I end up darting out at the most convenient juncture rather than risk life and limb by attempting to make it to my original destination.

Perhaps one of you kind BMW club members can direct me towards a support group where I can sit in a – gasp – circle along with others of my kind and have the entire concept of rotaries gently explained and then re-explained to me over and over until I feel safe enough to try negotiating my way through one again. Until then, I will have to continue my sad habit of meticulously planning out each trip so as to minimize my chances of encountering that which has become my single largest driving-related anxiety. ♦

*Editor’s Note: Benjamin Hunting is a professional Canadian writer who divides his time between Boston and Montreal. When not training his team of sled dogs back home, he enjoys participating in BMW CCA events in his E34 and covering the automotive and music industries for a variety of publications. You can reach Benjamin Hunting at [benjamin@benjaminhunting.com](mailto:benjamin@benjaminhunting.com)*

\* A line from the 1960s TV show, *Lost in Space*.



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