



David Matthews

Creatures great and small

From the snakes in your subway car to the rats with the rental cars, modern transportation can be a real jungle

Time to cowboy up

A carriage ride through downtown Memphis started out like a romantic comedy, turned into an action-adventure and ended up a western.

Under twinkling February stars and a full moon, a horse-drawn carriage ride seemed like the perfect way to kick off a night to remember with that special someone on Beale Street.

But then suddenly—trouble! The horse's shoe was caught. The carriage wobbled. The horse went down. Crash! Is everyone OK? Yes, but our horse has fallen backward into a sewer drain!

A crowd gathered, police arrived, but no one was sure how to free the 1,200-lb horse. All seemed lost, until . . .

Right on cue, five cowboys emerged from a saloon across the street. In town for the 2011 Muddy River Classic U.S. Team Roping Championships, the team reckoned they'd stop to say howdy and offer the city slickers their assistance.

"If the horse went to thrashing it might have broken both legs," one of the cowpokes told the local *Commerical Appeal* newspaper. "But we reached down, got a hold of his tail and slid him out—easy as you please—and he didn't hardly have a scratch on him."

The crowd on Beale Street erupted into applause after the horse was freed, and police said they were much obliged. "Don't worry, we've been in tighter spots," one of the cowboys replied, and with a tip of their Stetsons, the cowhands moseyed on home.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it

Did you know that car-rental companies are allowed to keep recalled cars in their fleet without fixing them or notifying customers of their potential risk?

Not only is this practice allowed, it's apparently quite common. A recent survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that the big three rental companies—Hertz, Enterprise and Avis/Budget—typically repair fewer than one-third of recalled cars in the first month after a recall is issued, and only 50% after a full year.

The best overall performance in the study came from Enterprise. Reviewing 10 recalls between 2006 and 2010, Enterprise fixed an average of 65% of affected cars within 90 days. At Avis/Budget only 53% of the cars were fixed, and Hertz only got around to repairing 34%.

Suddenly that horse-drawn carriage in Memphis is sounding like a pretty safe option.

Snakes on a train

Boston transit riders, you can rest easy. There is no longer a boa constrictor living in one of the subway cars.

The 3-ft snake, named Penelope, boarded the Red Line train back in January wrapped around the neck of her owner, Melissa Moorhouse. Now you'd think that Moorhouse would be very aware of the presence of something around her neck that has "constrictor" in its name. But she became so engrossed in her ride that she didn't notice Penelope slither away and hide.

The snake made herself known to a subway passenger, who notified authorities and then headed home to change his pants.

When Moorhouse reached her stop and couldn't find Penelope, she alerted subway officials, who apparently shared her lackadaisical attitude toward snakes and kept the car in service.

After riding around with unsuspecting commuters for a full month, Penelope finally made herself known to a passenger, who quickly notified authorities and then headed back home to change his pants. The train was decommissioned until Penelope was safely retrieved and returned to her owner.

Moorhouse was delighted to have her pet back, but not so thrilled to receive a \$650 bill for the cleaning and disinfection of the subway car where Penelope had taken up residence. **R&B**

Matthews has been chronicling the unexpectedly humorous side of transportation news since 2000. The stories are all true.