



**Driving Like Crazy: Thirty Years of Vehicular
Hellbending, Celebrating America the Way It's
Supposed to Be--With an Oil Well in Every
Backyard, a Cadillac Escalade in Every Carport,
and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Mowing
Our Lawn**

P.J. O'Rourke

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Spanning 30 years, this collection chronicles famed humorist and gearhead P.J. O'Rourke's love affair with the automobile from mid-20th century to now, from heyday to sickbay.

Driving Like Crazy: Thirty Years of Vehicular Hellbending, Celebrating America the Way It's Supposed to Be--With an Oil Well in Every Backyard, a Cadillac Escalade in Every Carport, and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Mowing Our Lawn Details

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From Reader Review Driving Like Crazy: Thirty Years of Vehicular Hellbending, Celebrating America the Way It's Supposed to Be--With an Oil Well in Every Backyard, a Cadillac Escalade in Every Carport, and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Mowing Our Lawn for online ebook

Noah says

O'Rourke is one of my favorite writers and humorists, so I expected a lot more from this book. In most of the new material, it feels like he's playing a caricature of himself, and in the old material, he hasn't finished sharpening his voice yet. Maybe he just loses something when he's not talking politics. I'm not sure what the root cause is, but this book is very skippable, even for a big P.J. O'Rourke fan.

thewestchestarian says

Often hilarious, sometimes droll but for a limited audience. Last year after smoking marijuana at a Westchester County campsite, a woman loaded several children and a bottle of vodka into her minivan and after the equivalent of 10 drinks drove for 2 miles the wrong way down the Saw Mill Parkway North eventually killing herself, the children and two unlucky men in a Chevy Trailblazer. With this story in mind read P.J. O'Rourke's tales of 30 years of frequently drunken vehicular shenanigans across the U.S., Baja Mexico and India and his often hilarious stories take on a bit of a dark humor tinge. The conservative Republican O'Rourke is on par with the best in the satirist trade equal to Russell Baker, Art Buchwald and Andy Rooney and this collection of 30 years of mostly car magazine pieces demonstrates that he brings more than just politics to the party. The vignettes can be divided into travel pieces including 2 trips down Mexico's Baja peninsula with ex-Monkey Mike Nesmith, a trip across the U.S. in a '56 Buick and trip through California in a 1930's Chevrolet. Although fully readable and often laugh out loud funny, these, like the road trips they describe, can go on beyond the point when they are still entertaining. More enjoyable are his musings on cars and their place in society. As the too lengthy subtitle suggests, O'Rourke likes his SUV (he owns a Land Rover Discovery II and his wife a Suburban) mammoth, his gas cheap and, if he is to be believed, his speeds death-defying. His rationalizing on why these things are no inherently evil makes for a fascinating "devil's advocate" argument particularly a piece for a British publication which both defends and admits that his home country maybe has a consumption problem: beer, gas, land for 8 lane interstate highways, metal, rubber for tires and sometimes all of these at once. Now in his 50s with a wife and three children and with a minivan test-drive piece under his belt, he admits that some of his automotive-based tours of bars when he was younger may have been ill-advised but he stops well short of siding with those he terms "funsuckers" whose DUI laws, he claims, are taking all the fun out of life. Although more than just politically incorrect but actually morally incorrect some of the stories are very humorous and well worth the read.

Karl Kindt says

I put off reading this one even though I had it the year it was published. I wanted to wait until I had a car

worth driving, or else reading this book would have driven me crazy. Now that I am the proud owner of a 2014 Mustang, I am glad to say this was an enjoyable read. The articles have mostly been previously published, but P.J. revised and improved them and made them read like they are chapters in one narrative. I read P.J. for the same reason I read Shakespeare--the sheer joy of reading the way he puts together language and the way he shares his thoughts. He is predictably unpredictable in how he shares his thoughts in a way that is just pure fun. Reading his writing is like flooring it down an on-ramp in my Mustang. Fun, thrilling, a bit scary--but in a good way--and never gets old.

Mark says

I have greatly enjoyed O'Rourke's political satires, "Parliament of Whores," and "Eat the Rich," but this is a book of a different sort. O'Rourke, who is one of the best conservative political writers, began his writing career as a pot-smoking, carousing, hedonistic anarchist, writing first for National Lampoon and then for Car and Driver. Somewhere in the Car and Driver days, he "saw the light" politically speaking. This book as a collection with commentary of his writing concerning American car culture. To that extent, since the book is more-or-less chronological, the earlier chapters reflect more of his hedonist period, while the concluding chapters were clearly written by the more conservative O'Rourke. This, for me, made the book somewhat uncomfortable at the beginning, but down-right delightful at the end.

Robert says

You have heard of a book you cannot put down? This is one you CAN put down.

I thought I would go waaaay off course for my reading taste and try it. I suspect if you are a gearhead it might be something to read.

It was an interesting choice after reading Chris Hedges, Empire of Illusion. This culture is part of what he was ranting about.

Maybe it's a generational thing. I don't know. I found it uninteresting and unfunny.

Trever says

Entertaining and at times hugely funny, but also disjointed and largely composed of material I'd already read in Car & Driver. There's PJ's usual streak of conservative politics laced throughout which will probably put off or offend some readers, but I enjoyed his observations even when I didn't agree with some of them. (I enjoy reading considered opinions that challenge my own preconceptions - I'm weird that way) At its best, it's a rousing series of car adventure stories that will have you laughing out loud; at its worst, it becomes a jumbled bunch of disconnected vignettes that often don't really go anywhere and then just sort of 'end'.

Todd Stockslager says

P. J. O'Rourke's writing style, when applied to a serious topic like politics and the economy (see On The Wealth of Nations (Books That Changed the World)), actually works better than it does here when applied in

mostly and decidedly non-serious style, to cars. The shock of O'Rourke's ribald and manic humor actually enlivens that potentially dead subject, while here reads too much like a fawning student of the Hunter S. Thompson school of writing.

Not that "Driving Like Crazy" is bad, just that much of it seems too much a product of its time and place--the 70s and early 80s when O'Rourke made much of his living writing features for car magazines like Car and Driver. His accounts of running the Baja 1000 in a customized truck with Mike Nesmith (parents: yes, the Monkees' Mike Nesmith. Kids: ask your parents) then later with a couple of company-provided Jeep vehicles take up a big chunk of the book, and serve as a fascinating word-picture of a wrecked (literally) landscape (no actual pictures provided, more's the pity). The tour across India in a pair of Land Rovers is also fun reading, and I wish we had politicians with the moxie and political (and tax) capital to take seriously O'Rourke's call for a drivers' national park: "a road, or network of roads, where we can drive the way we'll be allowed to drive in heaven after we succumb to apoplexy caused by being stuck for six hours on I-95 when a Prius full of vegans swerves in front of a livestock truck and an oil tanker, causing America's least wanted barbecue to be hosted at the off-ramp to the Washington beltway." (p. 229)

But the writing style can be tedious, and the glorification of drugs and drunken driving, even when tongue-in-cheek, just isn't funny any more. Sorry, O'Rourke, I guess I've become one of "them."

Rich says

I can't write about P.J. O'Rourke and not put in endless quotes. He is the funniest man writing today. Every night I pray God will turn me into P.J., or at least give me the direct phone number and email addresses of his agent and editor.

Recently I read "Peace Kills," which is a little more somber than I'm used to, but then having been written in the shadow of 9/11/01, what else could it be?

Here he's back to his usual irreverent, hilarious self--a collection from his 30 years of automotive writing. These pieces have appeared in all kinds of magazines--Rolling Stone, Esquire, Automotive Week, Car and Driver, and even National Lampoon.

For those of you who are not into the political, this is a perfect book with very few political shots. But just enough to retain his political wonk status.

"It's time to say . . . How shall we put it? . . . sayonara to the American car. The American Automotive industry--GM, Ford, even Chrysler--will live on in some form, a Marley's ghost dragging its corporate chains at taxpayer expense. The fools in the corner offices of Detroit (and the fool officials of Detroit's unions) will retire to their vacation homes (in Palm Beach and St. Pete). They no more deserve our sympathy than the malevolent trolls under the Capitol dome. But pity the poor American car when congress and the White House get through with it--a light-weight, vehicle with a small carbon footprint, using alternative energy and renewable resources to operate in a sustainable way. When I was a kid we called it a Schwinn."

On NASCAR mechanics:

"There was one ole boy there, hunkered down with all manner of folksy verb tenses. I asked him something about what kind of steel the tube frames are made from. He launched into a Nobel Prize lecture on metallurgy in which, 'molybdenum' was the smallest word I noticed."

P.J. goes to Baja not once, but three times--and that's probably 2 1/2 times too many; he goes to India, Russia, defends the American SUV to the British press, runs all over LA in a beat up Mustang, and several other wild and wooley adventures.

On the Los Angeles automotive scene:

"Contrary to received wisdom, Los Angeles was a tiresome place for an automotive enthusiast to be. Not because of lack of wonderful automobiles but because of an excess. The city was full of desirable, arousing, priapism-inducing cars of every kind: Bugattis, Facel Vegas, Cords, three-wheeled Morgans, SS100 Jaguars, Testarossa Ferraris, Lancias, Aurelias, not to mention bevvies of MG TCs and TDs, slews of bug-eyed Sprites, more bathtub Porsches than Germany had bathtubs, and ranks and files of plain vanilla cars-you'd-love-to-own. . . The problem was with the folks who owned the view. . . . The Hollywooden heads would buy a car for almost any purpose except a worthy one. Many automobiles were purchased to attract members of LA's eight or ten opposite sexes. Since the denizens of America's Gomorrah, were incapable of verbalizing any idea more complex than "box office gross," the expensive car served as a substitute for witty come-on and seductive chat. (It should be noted that the pursuit of libidinous satisfaction was such a mania in the '80s in LA that if the local citizens had ever performed any normal acts of copulation our country would now be three fathoms deep in twenty-eight-year-olds named after astrological signs.)"

This is fall-down laughing funny, Coca-cola out the nose guffawing hysterical stuff. It almost made me love life again.

Chris Walker says

There are several laugh out loud moments in this book but I also felt rather horrified at times, like when laughing at Pulp Fiction. It took me several chapters to get over what Mr O'Rourke said he'd like to do to Ralph Nader's brain for writing Unsafe at Any Speed in the introduction, for example. The section on driving in the Baja Peninsula and India was rather predictable, too, but would be enjoyed by Top Gear enthusiasts. The witty turns of phrase are plentiful but maybe a little too clever. Still there are plenty of Baby Boomer men who will enjoy O'Rourke's defence of SUVs and big cars for big Americans, generally. I did like O'Rourke's suggestion that the reason Schindler didn't mind taking on and beating the Gestapo was because of his love of motor racing, a sport which is at heart a whole bunch scarier.

Peter Tillman says

Full title:

"Driving like crazy : thirty years of vehicular hell-bending, celebrating America the way it's supposed to be--with an oil well in every backyard, a Cadillac Escalade in every carport, and the chairman of the Federal Reserve mowing our lawn"

No real memory of the book, but great title!

Scott says

This book is based on automotive magazine articles done by O'Rourke, re-issued and (more than once) re-

worked for the current political situation, where the Obama "fun-suckers" rule the roost in Washington. O'Rourke is a conservative libertarian, and he skewers both political parties, as well as anyone else in his way. His gonzo writing style recalls the manic, nervous pace of Hunter Thompson. There is plenty of abuse here for most anyone not named P.J. O'Rourke, and he occasionally finds great humor in his middle-aged self as well.

I enjoyed every chapter of this book. O'Rourke can be quoted effectively by simply picking up the book, opening to a random page and putting your finger on any given sentence. Example: "My personal theory about the visceral appeal of the Jeep is that it is purposeful-looking while having no clear purpose."

This is fun with wild abandonment of sensibility. If you want serious writing, go elsewhere. If you want to have a good time and laugh out loud, you'll enjoy this diversionary reading.

Brooks says

A lot of re-tread material from O'Rourke's magazine articles. Some stuff from the early 1970s. Only 5-10 pages of new material on the current crises. However, still had me giggling.

Larry Hostetler says

One of the more humorous of the O'Rourke books I've read. Covering decades of writings for car magazines, the book nonetheless maintains interest.

Several chapters cover P.J.'s friendship with Michael Nesmith, and the escapades they enjoyed. But the stories go far beyond the subject of those chapters (off-road racing through Baja and the western US.)

The first chapter was a bit unsettling as it glorified drunk driving, and afterward O'Rourke explained it in part as the stupidity of youth. Other than that, it was enjoyable and educational reading. But because of that I could not give it five stars.

A quick read, with a variety of stories to interest anyone who drives.

Kelley says

I love O'Rourke. It is just that simple. While he is best known for his political writing he has covered a multitude of topics over the years. True O'Rourke fans know he has written for "Car and Driver" over the years and that he loves muscle cars. "Driving Like Crazy" is a collection of automotive essays and adventures. The humor that succeeds so well when describing how Congress doesn't work also succeeds when describing a drive through Baja California with Mike Nesmith.

I give the book a high rating, knowing that it isn't for everyone. It is not a good introduction to PJ O'Rourke, but it is good O'Rourke.

William says

I've been, and remain a huge fan of P. J. O'Rourke's. I've always liked his PG-13 Gonzo style of writing--a tamer version of Hunter Thompson. Witt, & Cynicism are the accounting firm of O'Rourke's mind, and they are well used here. Part travel book, part car book, with digressions into politics/economics/family life, offer something for everyone. While not my favorite O'Rourke book ("Eat The Rich" retains that honor), it is a nice book to escape into, after watching the evening news or having just tried to replace the wiper blades on your Honda.
