

# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



In all of Lima, Peru, there seem to be only half a dozen traffic lights, and most of these are out of order. There are few stop signs and even fewer traffic policemen. Cars speed down the twisting streets, dart in and out of the heavy traffic on the broad thoroughfares and jockey for position while travelling bumper to bumper at 50 miles an hour, four abreast. There seems to be no order at all. Every driver is doing his own thing.

I was in Lima for a few days, stopping over before heading on out across the towering Andes into the Amazon jungle to spend two weeks on a writing assignment. I had come prepared to battle crocodiles and boa constrictors on the twisting jungle rivers in the Amazon basin, but was totally unprepared for the madhouse traffic in this city of three million souls.

The traffic in Lima gives the appearance that the entire city has gone mad. Everyone is fighting his own battle in a dog-eat-dog conflict between battered old automobiles, donkey carts, bicycles and jitney buses that seem to break down every other block or so.

My jungle pilot friends, whom I had come to interview, say that jungle flying is made up of 40 hours of boredom and two minutes of sheer terror. But driving in Lima is just the opposite. I held on to the wheel, closed my eyes, and prayed that my car would sprout wings and lift me out of this jumble of brakes and horns.

However, after being in the city a while, I began to sense a certain pattern about the traffic, a pattern that is uniquely Latin American.

Unlike the efficiency of the North American system of traffic lights, stop signs, speed limits and high speed freeways, the Latin American pattern is that of freedom. Here each driver is an individual, and his individuality is respected by all the other drivers. Despite all the jostling, changing lanes, horn blowing and near misses, no one seems to really get mad at the other fellow, giving and taking with a smile.

The second day there I was on my way back out to the airport to catch the plane which would fly me over the awesome Andes into the steaming jungle. I had spent the night at the group house operated by the Instituto Linguistico de Verano, a group of American and European linguists. A beautiful young Swiss girl had volunteered to drive me out in her VW bus, and we were caught in the inevitable surge of traffic, roaring five abreast down a cobblestone street with horn blowing.

Then, in front of us, we saw an old beat-up car, driven by a brown-skinned Peruvian, weaving his way toward us — going the wrong way on a one-way street. Unbelievable. I closed my eyes and breathed another prayer.

In the good old USA he would have been cursed, blown at and spat upon. But here in Lima all the cars, somehow, managed to squeeze aside and let him through. Only then did it dawn on me how all these cars were able to reach their destination. They respect each other's personhood. If that old man wanted to go the wrong way on a one way street, that was his business. No one tried to give him a driving lesson. They just figured he had a good reason and respected him enough to let him do his thing.

Refreshing. Maybe it's that kind of golden-rule-driving that we need here in our Eden-by-the-sea in Florida. It may not solve the problem, but it sure would make it easier to live with.