



International road hogs

If you thought South African drivers were bad, Nick Dall advises that you think again...

Drivers in South Africa have to be among the world's worst, don't they? Capetonians are so firmly under Table Mountain's spell that lane markers become mere decorations, and anyone with a GP number plate is pushy, bombastic and almost certainly speeding. Taxis dance to their own tune, and all cyclists seem to have a death wish.

It could be worse though – we could be in Italy... When the government there made seat belts compulsory, a niche clothing market opened up. Within days, T-shirts with diagonal black swathes across the front were available on the streets of Napoli. Similarly, South American bikers reacted to the introduction of the helmet law by hanging their headgear from their handlebars. Talk about getting off on a technicality.

If you think that's overboard, then you obviously haven't been to India. In Delhi, I came across an accident in which a Sikh had ridden his scooter straight into a wall, for no apparent reason.

'Why?' I asked my taxi driver.

'It's midday,' he deadpanned. 'Everyone knows the Sikhs go crazy at noon.'

It's usual for traffic policemen to step into the breach when traffic lights are out of order, but in Mumbai, cops serve as traffic light 'interpreters' even when the traffic

lights are functioning perfectly. I never could work out why policemen stood in ornate canopies in the middle of intersections, valiantly translating their message. For the colour-blind?

But at least I didn't have to drive myself in India. In Vietnam – my home for two years – I was forced to hop on a scooter and face the music. The plan was to ease myself into it. Only when I was comfortable riding around the backstreets of my dozy neighbourhood, would I brave the open road. So much for the plan. Within minutes of setting off, I'd taken a wrong turn and was consequently swept up by the convulsive torrent that is Hanoi's manic traffic – a minute speck in a sea of scooters laden with everything from pot plants and goldfish to live pigs and fridges.

Much like Derek Zoolander, I could only turn left, and before I knew it, I was in the industrial outskirts of the city without a map or a cellphone. By the time I finally made it back home, I was a Hanoi driver.

The traffic rules in 'Nam are simple. Rule one: the bigger vehicle has right of way. Rule two: you're responsible for whatever the person in front of you chooses to do. It sounds petrifying, and it is. But the exhilarating reality is that riding in Hanoi is like PlayStation on steroids.

Do I miss it? Of course I do... ✨