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Just looking, thanks...



MICHAEL FALLOW

An observant Aussie plays Invercargill's Civic Theatre on November 5.

CARL Barron likes to watch. The French have a word for that. Actually, they have two. Barron's not a voyeur, as far as we know. Instead he identifies as a flaneur. Unlike your excitable voyeur, a flaneur is a detached observer.

The writer Baudelaire portrayed this figure as a sort of languid cafe loungeur and gentleman stroller of city streets. Cornelia Otis Skinner would have us picture a "deliberately aimless pedestrian, unencumbered by any obligation or sense of urgency, who, being French and therefore frugal, wastes nothing; including his time, which he spends with the leisurely discrimination of a gourmet, savouring the multiple flavours of his city". Small point: Barron's not some diffident Frenchman. He's Aussie.

Still, as many a comedy audience can attest, he's an acute observer; the sort who seems to keep catching society off-guard.

He'll notice when you're pretending to look through a shop window but really checking out your own reflection.

He'll casually observe not only the way you correct your discomfiting undies, but how you set your face as you do it.

"Someone told me about the flaneurs and I realised, that's what I've been doing my whole life. And there's a name for it. I thought it was just being lazy and having nothing to do."

The flaneurs are associated with another group, the dandies. Yes, well, here's where, in Barron's case, the comparison flies to bits. You couldn't call him a foppish, Brideshead Revisited type.

Consider this: he's touring in the wake of the New Zealand Ballet, with its truckloads of gear and its impassioned dancers, each of them risking prematurely arthritic joints to create a thing of beauty...

Whereas Barron's going to show up, saunter on stage, tap-tap the microphone, and he's good to go with the fart jokes. Not even planning to dress up for it, is he?

"Well, if they want to do ballet and need three semis to do it, that's not my fault. They can do comedy if they want."

"I'm competitive by nature, though, so if they've left a few spare costumes lying around I might get bored one night, go out and do a pas de deux."

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Carl Barron

Road rules



MATE
Mark Wilson

ROAD safety is a huge issue in New Zealand; everyone has been affected by a tragedy on the roads, financial, personal loss or loss of a friend or loved one.

I have attended too many funerals as a result of our roads and the way we drive on them, so you may think I would be patting the lawmakers on the back each time they tighten the rules on how we use the country's roads. I'm afraid this isn't always the case and, currently, I'm irritated to the point of blood pressure elevation at one overriding omission in the whole road toll conversation.

So we are going to ban hand cellphones in motor vehicles from mid-November, this is to save us from being distracted from our pressing priority of actually driving the motor vehicle. This particular distraction I looked into was responsible for an average of five fatal crashes per year 2005 to 2007. Notwithstanding a comment made by John Key that he will not waste this government's time on social engineering - this appears to be, what I would call, a low priority in terms of law reform not to mention life-saving.

On average about 11 people die per year from falling off ladders, 118 drown, 5000 perish from smoking related illness and 40,000 from cardiovascular disease.

Are we going to ban swimming, KFC, cigarettes and ladders?

Cellphones are a distraction, yes, but should we ban mothers attending to their children while driving, eating while driving, adjusting your iPod settings or checking out a scantily clad lass on the roadside?

It is impossible to legislate against every distraction, so maybe it would make more sense to address the number one cause, in my mind, of accidents - that being just plain bad driving.

Like anything there are good and bad drivers, there is no law against being a bad driver or holding a license with a lack of driving skill yet there is a law against every other conceivable driving indiscretion. I am not saying for one moment we don't need to address our road safety issues, quite the opposite. I'm just saying the way we do it needs a lot of work.

Tourists can come to our country with no knowledge of our road rules and are a menace on the roads, they can leave without paying fines and are often distracted by taking photos from the car - should we ban cameras?

Young drivers get a license with no ability to drive at night, in the wet, on gravel or ice at 15!

Are you seeing my point, many of us can't drive and we have difficult road conditions, this is why we crash, speed, alcohol, phones all play a part but if you had Greg Murphy on his mobile doing 130kmh he is not going to crash because he can drive.

Make licensing harder, make tourists watch a road safety DVD and do a test on the plane and instead of speeding tickets how about compulsory attendance to driving courses?

Teach us to drive and we will save ourselves.

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