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## Maybe I could marry my car...

by Joe Ferullo

NCR Today

I'm miserable. Really. This is not a play for pity or the prelude to a plea for cash. I'm just simply miserable because I spend around two hours a day sitting in my car fighting traffic. And now some scientist in Sweden says this could very well ruin my marriage.

Well, I can definitely share this: it certainly isn't making it any more fun.

Here's what happened: until six months ago, my office was about a 15-minute drive from my house. Twenty on a tough day. An easy commute by Los Angeles standards. In fact, my wife and I moved to our current neighborhood just because it was close to nearly every major media company in town -- this way, no matter where our careers took us, we'd be covered commute-wise.

But then in January, my group moved to Santa Monica. On Google maps, this adds only ten or so miles to the drive each way. But in real-LA-traffic terms, it is the seventh circle of hell with asphalt instead of fire. The commute places me on Southern California's two busiest and accident-prone freeways with few real alternatives. I get to work keyed up and aggravated; I come home exhausted and frayed.

As if I needed this confirmation, along comes a study from Sweden, which (who knew?) apparently has traffic troubles of its own. Researcher Erika Sandow reports that long commutes can actually drive up the divorce rate by 40 percent.

This sad statistic is the result of the twin havoc delivered by commutes 45 minutes or longer. First, for the spouse stuck in the car, time at home is curtailed, and is often swallowed up by trying to decompress on the couch from the freeway nightmare. (In my house, the shift has gone from "Daddy's home!" to "Uh-oh, Daddy's home.") Second, the non-commuting spouse has to pick up more of the slack in the house, to compensate for the other's increased time away. This leads to anger and frustration.

Did I mention my wife's commute is five minutes? Literally. If we lived in New York, she'd walk.

So you can just imagine.

There is, right now, nothing I can do about this situation, other than perk up when office gossip circles around to rumors that we may be moving to a more central location. But these rumors ebb and flow like the center-lane traffic on the San Diego Freeway, and, just like the San Diego Freeway, don't seem to get me anywhere.

The Swedish study does offer one bit of comfort: it gets better. Couples adjust to the commute and its effects on their relationship. So, the study asserts, if you make it through five years of the long commute -- you're marriage will probably survive.

Five years.

Oh no.

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