

CAR CULTURE You Want A Revolution.

More cities are using roundabouts to help save drivers time (and gas money)

BY TIM PADGETT

CARMEL, IND., IS DRIVING IN circles. Since 2001, the Indianapolis suburb has built 50 roundabouts, those circular alternatives to street intersections that have become a transit fixture in much of the rest of the world. Because roundabouts force cars to travel through a crossroads in a slower but more free-flowing manner—unlike traffic circles, roundabouts have no stop signals—in seven years, Carmel has seen a 78% drop in accidents involving injuries, not to mention a savings of some 24,000 gal. of gas per year

per roundabout because of less car idling. “As our population densities become more like Europe’s,” says Mayor Jim Brainard, who received a climate-protection award this year from the U.S. Conference of Mayors, “roundabouts will become more popular.”

About 1,000 roundabouts have been built in 25 states, and research bears out the benefits to states like Kansas, where the new design has produced a 65% average drop in vehicular delays, according to a recent Kansas State University study. Most roundabouts are also more aesthetically pleasing and cost much less to

construct than stoplight intersections. The problem is teaching Americans how to navigate them. (Folks, cars entering a roundabout yield to those already in it.) But the heightened anxiety people feel in roundabouts makes them drive more carefully and remember that intersections are dangerous places. And as Tom Vanderbilt notes in this summer’s best seller *Traffic*, “The system that makes us more aware of this is actually the safer one.” ■

Why They Work

Here’s a look at one of the 50 roundabouts in Carmel, Ind.:

- 1 Cars entering a roundabout must yield to those already in the circle
- 2 With all cars traveling in the same direction, roundabouts eliminate head-on collisions, as well as left turns, one of the most dangerous moves in an intersection
- 3 Because drivers are anxious about merging with roundabout traffic, they slow down, which helps reduce accidents
- 4 With no traffic lights to divert drivers’ attention upward, roundabouts keep motorists focused on the cars and pedestrians around them
- 5 In addition to improving traffic flow, roundabouts are often easy on the eye, with elegant landscaping



BY THE NUMBERS

Did you know ... France has about **30,000** roundabouts, nearly a third of the world’s total ... Unlike traffic circles, which were invented at the turn of the 20th century, roundabouts preclude the need for any stop signals ... Roundabouts cut hydrocarbon emissions at intersections by as much as **42%** ... Ten roundabouts in Virginia save **200,000** gal. of gas a year (no more idling!) ... In Kansas, roundabouts have eased traffic delays by an average of **65%**