

Have you tried to register a trailer in RI?

The State of Trailer Trash in the Ocean State

by TODD CORAYER

So a guy walks into a bar. Let's call it the Wakefield branch of the Department of Motor Vehicles. He orders a drink. The nice lady behind the counter refuses him.

"But I want to buy one, ma'am. I have money and paperwork showing I'm legal," he protests.

A new customer steps up; the cycle continues. It's not a joke; it's an all too common revolving conversation at the Department of Motor Vehicles involving logic, trailers, reality and the value of our time.

Many of us own small trailers. We need them to take our toys to the beach and the woods, to gather up things and deliver them as well. The DMV is part of The Department of Revenue or DOR, which is what I was shown twice this week. It has six branches and 90 different fees, all designed to raise revenue.



According to the House Fiscal Office, our state will begin the new budget year with a roughly \$112 million deficit. Trailers require registration which of course requires a payment. Why then, would the DOR refuse money for something as innocuous as a legal small boat trailer?

A few years ago, I purchased a trailer which apparently had never been registered. After initially being refused to register it, I made the time to obtain a "Certificate of Origin" from its Florida manufacturer. I have a copy of the sales receipt when it was purchased in Maine by someone I do not know, but apparently resides in Texas. It passed through another set of hands and I have both notarized bills of sales.

On a second attempt at the Wakefield branch, a lovely and pleasant woman told me, in an alluring far away accent, that because there existed no proof of taxes paid in other states by people I do not know, I couldn't register it.

When asked about a number I might call to avoid driving 53 miles and missing out on a few hours of absolutely anything else, she said that no such line exists. Of course not, why would there be a land line between branches which might save a customer time, gas and aggravation?

A priest, a rabbi and a Muslim walk into a bar. The barman says, "Is this some kind of joke?" A Texan, a Swamper and a writer walk out of a registry. Together they say, "Was that some kind of joke?"

For a third attempt, I took even more hours out of work to visit the Office of Taxation in Cranston, that dreaded, cold paper mill moated with a stream of people in a low American Spirit haze, clutching wrinkled papers, blabbing into flip phones.

"A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life," wrote Charles Darwin.

Administrator Walter Craddock's main mission was to "focus

on improving customer service and reducing wait times at the DMV – an agency that touches the lives of nearly every Rhode Islander." It certainly has touched mine.

With the exception of one starchy FTE planted behind some smudged glass, disproving Darwin's theory, the people I met on this fool's journey were quite pleasant and accommodating. Having a greeter as your first stop has been a wonderful addition for streamlining visits to the DMV. Cheers to them.

Rarely are trailers daily drivers. Many use them to dunk skiffs in lakes and salt ponds after a first Spring freshet then yank them as the last lingering stripers steam for the Chesapeake.

Small boat trailers don't cause weight damage to roads. Occasionally they throw a dry rotted tire then spend a night on the breakdown lane, but that scene is part of the point.

If we were able to register and use them they wouldn't so often seize bearings and rust away next to our wood splitters and jon boats we don't have a prayer of registering. Trailers like this are not responsible for the Governor's fiat to bridge the gaps in failing bridges by bridging breakdown lanes with money and data grabbing toll gantries.

A sandwich walks into a bar. The barman says "Sorry, we don't serve food here."

Once there, a not-lovely woman behind not-clean glass was not-helpful but she was well versed in negatives, like no. After countless episodes of similar circus routines, Rhode Islanders have built such muscle memory for the DMV.

Before I could produce any paperwork or checkbook to help reduce a deficit I never created, she bit into my sentence, saying my visit was for nought. My protest was met by her admonishment, "you made an illegal purchase."

Apparently in the eyes of our state, including this sedentary state worker who, just like me, works for the taxpayers, who should see each new person as a customer first and not the reason she was missing "Ellen," that because I could not prove someone I never met ever registered the trailer, I was a criminal.

"There's nothing I can do for you," she told me flatly.

I told her how I was sent here by her coworker to see her. "There's nothing I can do for you," she told me flatly.

"I have all this paperwork," I told her.

"There's nothing I can do for you," she told me flatly.

I reached out to my local legislators and with the exception of a note from Senator Susan Sosnowski saying she would look into it, which I know she will, there was no response. This is likely because there's nothing they can do, the system is big and difficult.

What did the fish say when he hit the wall? "Dam!"

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