

Chicago Tribune

Gifts for people on the move

Stocking stuffers for the transportation wonks on your list

Jon Hilkevitch's Getting Around

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The Beatles weren't alone in creating a distinctive sound in the 1960s.

A CD album, "The Beatles — Greatest Sounds of the '60's and '70's," captures the nostalgia for that era by taking listeners on a ride aboard vintage Volkswagen Beetles. How fun!

The 30-track CD reproduces the classic and unmistakable tonality of the different engines used in the 1960, 1973 and 1978 Bugs, from ignition and idling with engine revs, to going through the gears, downshifting, beeping the horn and setting the parking brake.

"With its lawn mower engine sound and notorious lack of heat in the winter, the beloved car always evokes a smile and a reminiscence of a story from days gone by," said R. Charles Gilfix, who recorded the CD while driving at night on California highways.

The CD, available at beetlesounds.com, is one of several items worthy of consideration by other transportation wonks, geeks and buffs, as well as more normal individuals.

Signs of the times

Are you looking for a stocking stuffer that might possibly reform, or more likely honk off, your favorite gas-guzzling SUV owner? Consider "Stop Signs: Cars and Capitalism on the Road to Economic, Social and Ecological Decay" (fernwoodpublishing.ca).

In "Stop Signs," authors Bianca Mugenyi and Yves Engler take a carless road trip across North America. They attempt to expose the dominance of the automobile in society and its alleged connection to corporate malfeasance and politically inspired payoffs — even to racism, Third World coups, environmental disasters and war.

In Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the first stop in the book, the authors exit a motor coach to find an environment that has good weather for pedestrians yet is almost devoid of sidewalks. People passing by in cars looked at them as if they were crazy to try to cross the road on foot. It was there that Mugenyi and Engler discovered a species unknown to them, "Homo Automotivis."

Upon arriving in Chicago, Mugenyi was happy to find an abundance of sidewalks in a seemingly pro-pedestrian, transit-rich metropolis. Then she tried crossing the street.

"In the past, my presence in the middle of the road always managed to convince drivers to stop. (I mean, they have to stop, don't they?)" she wrote. "Not in Chicago. When the light changed, there was no hesitation. Cars ripped past in both directions. I stood absolutely still, a human traffic cone."

Music to drive by

The choices of music to listen to while in the car are endless. But composer-performer Ken Elkinson is not intimidated. "Sixty of the most relaxing (music) tracks known to man" is how Elkinson describes his CD box set titled "Music for Commuting."

"I wrote the music specifically to help calm angry drivers, including myself," said Elkinson, who lives in Venice, Calif.

His music starts out with a dark tone, befitting Mondays and Tuesdays, he said. The disc containing music for Wednesdays and Thursdays is "mostly upbeat anthems, with some 1980's-inspired synth-pop," Elkinson said. The last disc, titled "Friday/beyond," features music he describes as "spacey and futuristic."

Listen for yourself at kenelkinson.com. The website contains some MP3 samples.

Also worth a look:

- "Why Planes Crash: An Accident Investigator's Fight for Safe Skies" (skyhorsepublishing.com). David Soucie and co-author Ozzie Cheek skillfully combine technical expertise with storytelling.

- "Traffic: Tomorrow Cannot be a Copy of Today" (vtd.net). In this concise 80-page booklet, authors Thomas White and Reiner Decher argue that transportation in the U.S. is "headed down a dead-end street, or would be if we weren't sitting in traffic."

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