

Outbursts over Bow River Flow misplaced

As hard as it is to believe, it's summertime in Calgary, all the signs of the season are here: Hay bales and Wild West regalia for the Stampede, barbecues ablaze with beef and bison and beer, weekend gridlock on the highways out of town — and the inevitable annual slapfight over the Bow River Flow.

For the second year running, the Bow River Flow has become the 98-lb. patsy of Calgary's summer festival circuit.

It doesn't claim the hell-raising history of hooting, horses, and hollering we all associate with The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth.

It doesn't offer the edginess or pass-the-hat vibe of Sled Island and the Calgary International Fringe Festival.

It doesn't showcase music or global culture or neighbourhood carnivals.

Nope, the only things you'll find at the Bow River Flow are the Bow River, flowing, and a whole bunch of goons just waiting to stuff its lily-white 98 lbs. into the nearest locker.

Now, a fair number of these goons drive vehicles, as do a great many respectable Calgarians.

Most of us accept that vehicles need roads on which to operate. And as someone with substantial exposure to the tirades, rodeo song serenades, horn-tooting, gaspedal booting, and flashing of middle fingers that often

arise from driving in Calgary, I know very well how dimly local motorists view having their roadways impeded.

But the outbursts over the closure of one mile of Memorial Dr.'s eastbound lanes for the Bow River Flow are misplaced.

At the end of this past May, the Calgary Marathon completely commandeered nearly five miles of Memorial, Parkdale Blvd., and Bowness Rd. from Edmonton Tr. to Shaganappi Tr. for a six-hour stretch, much to the relief and pleasant surprise of almost 9,000 local athletes.

During the last Sunday of April, nearly 75,000 locals



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braved the elements for the Lilac Festival, for which one mile of 4 St. S.W. was barred to traffic for most of the day.

Motorists and revellers alike endured, went about their business, and moved along, despite the total closure of these local thoroughfares.

The doomsayers went home disappointed.

Because, as much as the fanatics on both sides would dearly love to paint the Bow River Flow as the battle on which the War on the Car will be decided, the brawl over Memorial Dr. is really little

more than a sideshow.

Anyone who wants to go to the Bow River Flow can get most of the way there by car, by light rail, or even by unicycle, with the last few yards to the banks of the brook a relatively easy jaunt on foot.

It would seem reasonable that the Bow River Flow's organizers would want more people there than fewer.

The issue nearly lost amidst the posturing of the past 16 months is no form of urban transportation is of much use without a destination.

Nothing more starkly illustrates the folly of seeing the Bow River in isolation than the Calgary Transportation Study of 1967, which foresaw a waterway bracketed and befouled by a freight railway and expressways on either

bank. Nothing more loudly shouts out the love Calgarians have for the Bow River than the shake we gave our heads shortly afterward, and the resolve we showed to keep this urban treasure alive.

That, ultimately, is why closing two lanes of Memorial for the Bow River Flow is worth it to Calgarians this August.

It's not about sticking it to drivers.

It's about standing up for a natural asset that we cherish as defining our city.

And it's about cramming as many Calgarians as possible on two lanes of blacktop for one day to see this glorious sight for themselves.

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