Warren Miller plucking a few roundabout feathers

But worth that much money to save 30 seconds of driving?

■ **By Allen Best**
Times Managing Editor

Warren Miller, Vails sternest critic of the roundabouts, in pre-construction days, has begun to pluck raven feathers.

In an interview last week, he conceded he was wrong about the roundabouts.

"I think it's working," he said, 'although nothing's perfect I *have* already ordered my new car with air bags on the side," he added in the style that has made him internationally famed.

In that interview, a glimpse at *his* column in Saturday's *Vail Daily,* Miller noted that while the basic mechanics of the roundabouts seem sound, he has noticed locals rushing through the roundabout approximately one mph faster every week, shunting people in rented cars aside. - - Moreover, he questioned whether it was necessary to spend $2.2 million to prevent 30 seconds of delay

But yes, *it's* working, by and large, and yes, he made a mistake - not his first in the world of skiing, where he has been well for his filmmaking during the last five decades.

Miller had predicted that metal skis wouldn't work. He predicted *failure* for double chairlifts,–too dangerous, too cumbersome, he said at the time. And in 1949, he sold a house at Sun Valley, - for 'S900. He figured he had garnered all *the* profit that place would generate.
'So Ive made a lot of mistakes, and I probably made one with the roundabout," he said.

MISTAKES HAVE occurred in the roundabouts, although fewer than in the four-way-stop days. Town officials show free property damage accidents ents occurred in the roundabouts during October-December. That compares with,an average seven for those same months during the years 1992-1994.

Injuries are down, though. On average two occurred for each July-December period during the three years preceding the roundabout. Since the roundabout came into existence last July, there was only one injury, that being to a construction flogger.

As for Christmas week, the average had been two. This year there was just one. In all fairness, though, there were two accidents in the early days of January with the roundabouts, compared with an average of one during previous years.

If the accident figures remain too skimpy other than to indicate the roundabouts aren't a sure ticket to the auto-body shop and/or hospital, the volume numbers paint a glowing success. Average 60-second delays were endured at the old faun-way Zimection when such estimates were put together several years ago, and in a very few instances delays lasted up to 30 minutes. In comparison, there have been virtually no delays worth mentioning (certainly not averaging 60 seconds) since the roundabouts carat on line. Capacity of the old four-way intersection was estimated at 3,250 vehicles per hour. That figure was derived from a count on a particularly busy day in March 1990.

"Keep in *mind that I also* predicted that metal skis would never work."
-Warren Miller

Traffic engineer Leif Ourston, who designed the project, estimates the capacity of his work at 5,000 vehicles per hour.

For the record, the north-side roundabout accommodated more *vehicles* on days when samplings were taken this year than last year – a considerable difference.

WITH TRAFFIC FLOWING more smoothly at the roundabout during Christmas week, the town experimented with several new programs. For example, *an* express van was added to shuttle passengers on the Frontage Road from Lionshead to the Covered Bridge during the afternoon rush - something impossible in previous *years,* owing to the congestion.

Also, emergency vehicles found quick access through the roundabout. In previous *years,* it *was* more efficient to route emergency vehicles away from the intersection, said Bob McLaurin, town manager.

Community *safety* officers — the traffic signalers — are no longer needed, and that figures to save the town 550,000. Five people were employed through much of last winter to direct traffic *at the inter-sections.*

Those accidents that have occurred, said town engineer Greg Hall, were mostly caused by failure to yield and approaching the intersection too *fast.*

From the Arizona Republic, July 22, 2004

Driving in circles

Our stand: When we talk traffic roundabouts, it's a safer way to travel

We don't usually take to going around in circles. But roundabouts deserve to be an exception

This updated version of a traffic circle can move vehicles more efficiently than a standard intersection. More importantly It can reduce the appalling toll of traffic accidents ¡n Arizona.

The State Department of transportation is sold on roundabouts. which it has begun installing at freeway interchanges. ADOT is also mounting a publicity blitz to *win* over suspicious drivers.

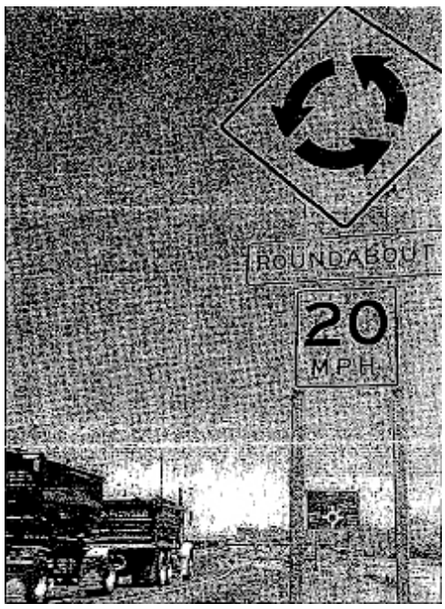
And we're understandably suspicious. Arizona has virtually no traffic circles. For many people, what comes to mind are such fiendishly complex examples as Washington's Dupont Circle or the roiling mass of vehicles spinning around the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Think again. Modern roundabouts are relatively small, laid out to keep speeds under control. The lanes are set up to reduce conflicts among vehicles. Traffic in the roundabout, which moves counterclockwise, has the right of way.

The safety record alone is a reason to give roundabouts a whirl. A study of 33 locations in the United States found that accidents fell 47 percent after roundabouts were installed.

Even more dramatic was the decline in injuries, which dropped 72 percent. Because roundabouts force traffic to slow down — vehicles enter at 15 to 20 mph — the crashes that do occur are far less likely to cause serious injury or deaths.

The Valley and Arizona are at the top of the list for red-light -running. Almost all of us know someone who was hit in an intersection. With no lights or stop signs, roundabouts can move traffic more efficiently. The design reduces the chance of T-bone collisions, in which one vehicle smashes into the side of another.



The Arizona Republic

Roundabouts have proven records in reducing traffic accidents and enhancing safety, but drivers will have to adapt.

ADOT is especially enthusiastic about the traffic-handling power of roundabouts, which can reduce delays by 20 percent and increase capacity by 30 to 50 percent. If vehicles backed up less often, then ADOT can build narrower bridges over the freeway, cutting construction costs.

Arizona is far from alone in trying to run circles around our traffic problems. New York, Colorado, Florida and',Maryland have all installed roundabouts.

Obviously, drivers need to figure out how to navigate roundabouts. They have to think ahead of time about where they want to go so they get into the correct lane. That really shouldn't be any harder than remembering to get into the turn lane to go left at a traditional intersection. And it's a heck of a lot safer.

July 22, 2004

From the Verde Valley News, October, 2003

Round and Round We Go

RAQUEL HENDRICKSON
Associate Editor

Roundabouts are a good idea for local roads.

They are not tools of the devil. And the Arizona Department of Transportation is not asking anyone to learn to drive on the left side of the road.

ADOT is simply pushing an idea that excites its engineers for a variety of reasons. Roundabouts are a different concept in traffic control for many, but "different" does not mean "wrong." ADOT has proposed installing a handful of roundabouts on Arizona 89A

between Cottonwood and Clarkdale as that road is widened. There are only a couple of other similar traffic-control devices in the state, but it is a good test area. Generally, traffic is neither excessively thick nor fast along that stretch as it is.

Slow down, look for other vehicles, do not stop. If you miss your exit, go around again. Those are the basic instructions given to drivers.

Roundabouts deal with the No. 1 concern of traffic flow: safety. No more red-light runners. No more impatient left turns into oncoming traffic. No more unpredictable U-turns.

The proposed roundabouts are not the ridiculous eight-lane circles of hell that tourists run into in Rome, where no one obeys traffic laws anyway. What ADOT is talking about are simple roundabouts similar to those in suburban and rural Ireland and Britain.

Frankly, anyone who has driven through a typical small town in the Midwest has probably driven around a town square that has the same traffic pattern. Traffic runs counterclockwise, one way. Incoming traffic yields until it is prudent to enter.

Granted, when roundabouts are combined with other traffic patterns, like interstate exit ramps, things can get complicated, but that is hardly being called for here.

Roundabouts use yield signs instead of traffic lights. Those who've been caught at the 89A/260 intersection during a power outage can appreciate this. Those who hate unsightly poles and electrical lines can also appreciate this.

The lack of signals also makes roundabouts less expensive to build and maintain. Consider this. Cochise County plans to put in four mini-roundabouts at an estimated total cost of $200,000. Two weeks ago, EME West Construction was contracted to put in traffic signals at one intersection in Bridgeport at a cost of $229,000.

Roundabouts slow traffic without stopping it. Many roundabouts have speed limits of 15 mph. Statistics show that accidents and severity of accidents decline when intersections are turned into roundabouts.

Well constructed roundabouts with proper signage are easy tc
ADOT's responsibility.

October, 2003

Any change in traffic flow is initially a problem. Just placing a stop sign where no stop sign existed will lead to near misses until drivers get used to it. While the novelty of roundabouts might strike fear into the hearts of many, that very novelty will produce caution in our local motorists.

That can't help but make us all better drivers. And that's a good idea.

-Raquel Hendrickson, rhendrickson@verdevalleynews.com

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Emails to the Cottonwood Journal

The Roundabout Is Not the Problem

Editor:

The ongoing debate on modern roundabouts is extremely revealing. As a cyclist, I find it all extremely amusing, and it's pretty obvious what the real problem is.

A roundabout is a roadway design that requires motorists to:

- Slow down
- Think
- Maneuver their vehicles with skill
- Use turn indicators
- Cooperate

Based on what I've seen of the motoring public, I can see why you're so terrified. Sadly, it's not the roundabouts that are the problem. I'm still not convinced that they're the perfect answer either. Like anything else, there are pros and cons. But I do like the idea that they force motorists to use these five skills, which have atrophied for so many. Oh, by the way, those five skills work splendidly in lots of other situations as well (like overtaking a bike).

Randy Victory

Cottonwood

Modern Roundabouts; Try to Stick to the Subject

Editor:

This running commentary on modern roundabouts is getting pretty ridiculous. It wouldn't be so bad if the folks who profess to be against modern roundabouts would actually discuss roundabouts, but they keep describing "traffic circles."

Apparently, the first modern roundabouts were installed about nine years ago in Avon, Colo. I've been on those and had no problems. And they've been pretty successful. Traffic circles have been around in Europe and the Eastern United States for years, and they have problems. The similarities? Well, they're both round. But so are apples and oranges. You can't have a meaningful discussion about apples if you keep describing oranges.

I keep reading letters that start out with something like, "When I was in England years ago," or "I spent many years driving in Europe," or "Growing up in California," and then go on to describe a traffic circle. The last letter I read was one of my favorites. The letter started out discussing European traffic circles. Then the writer drove on a newer American one and observed no accidents. The last roundabout the author had been on was "late at night and no one else was driving it at the same time." Yet, he described it as a "death trap." Umm ... good presentation of the facts. I'm trying to buy in to the whole death trap thing, but the fact that he was still alive to write the letter left me unconvinced.

As I've said before, I'm not really for or against modern roundabouts. Fearing "old coot" syndrome, I tend to want to give new ideas a chance. But it's really hard to meaningfully discuss new ideas when the debate focuses on old ones.

Folks, the subject is modern roundabouts. Not traffic circles. Please stick to the **subject.**

Randy Victory

Cottonwood

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From Public Roads, US Dept. of Transportation, January/February 2007

Roundabouts and Older Drivers

Of the many changes that come with age, the following are particularly relevant for drivers as they negotiate intersections: *narrowing of the visual field and the area of visual attention; decreased visual sensitivity to motion; a decline in the abilities to filter* out less important information and continuously refocus on what is the most critical information; *a decline in the abilities to perform multiple tasks simultaneously* and process information from multiple sources; *a disproportional increase in perception- reaction time* with increase in complexity of the driving situation; and *loss of the head, neck, and trunk flexibility* needed to rapidly scan an intersection.

In short, older drivers need more time to perceive and evaluate situations, more time to make decisions and take action, and simpler, narrower scenes to take in—all needs that are well served by the lower traffic speeds and less complex vehicle paths of roundabouts. Events play out more slowly at roundabouts, with ample time for all intersection users to anticipate and adjust to the movements of other vehicles and pedestrians. Vehicle/vehicle conflicts and vehicle/pedestrian conflicts are reduced by about three-quarters and two-thirds, respectively, in single-lane roundabouts, and to a somewhat lesser extent in multiple -lane roundabouts.

Typical circulating speeds in Clearwater's four one-lane roundabouts such as this one are 18 to 21 kph (11 to 13 mph), and typical approach speeds (measured at the crosswalks) are 23 to 26 kph (14 to 16 mph). *Photo: Ken Sides, City of Clearwater, FL.*

Roundabouts are less complicated than conventional intersections controlled by stop signs or traffic signals for several reasons: Traffic threats come from only one direction. Color-coded signal bulbs and ever-cycling phases normally are not used in roundabouts. And the approaching driver need only scan straight ahead for pedestrians and about 30 degrees to the left for slow-moving approaching circulating traffic. Above all, roundabouts eliminate the need to judge gaps in fast head-on opposing traffic. Because older persons are more fragile, crash severity is especially significant. Roundabouts, intrinsically by design, limit vehicle speeds on entry and in the circulating lane. Roundabouts also separate opposing vehicle paths, thereby virtually eliminating the most serious types of crashes that occur at conventional intersections: head-on, left-turn, T-bone, and red-light running. Crashes that do occur at roundabouts tend to be either rear-end crashes or else low-angle, low-energy merging crashes with low closing speeds of 8 to 16 kilometers per hour, kph (5 to 10 miles per hour, mph). Because kinetic energy increases exponentially with velocity, roundabout crashes dissipate far less energy than those severe crash types at conventional intersections: right angles with closing speeds of 56 to 89 kph (35 to 55 mph) or head-on crashes with closing speeds of 113 to 177 kph (70 to 110 mph).

According to ongoing studies from FHWA and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program, roundabout injury crashes are reduced about 75 percent and fatalities by 90 percent or more compared with those at conventional intersections.

—Ken Sides, City of Clearwater, FL

Clearwater, FL, has the highest proportion of population aged 65 or older of any U.S. city with populations of 100,000 or more. Clearwater has built five roundabouts and has seven currently in design and five more in the pipeline, for a total of seventeen. All but the first one were proposed by—and strongly supported by —residents.