

Car boom leaves Caracas in one big jam

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text:

commuter road rage shoot-out irritable tense
disruption stationary potholed neglect shanty town

1. If a vehicle is _____, it isn't moving.
2. A _____ is a fight in which guns are used.
3. _____ is a situation in which something cannot continue because of a problem.
4. A _____ is an area in which poor people live in badly built houses made of wood, metal or other thin material.
5. _____ is a situation where drivers behave violently towards other drivers.
6. If a road or street is _____, it is full of holes.
7. If you _____ something, you don't look after it properly and you don't pay any attention to it.
8. If you are _____, you become angry or impatient very easily.
9. A _____ is someone who travels regularly to and from work.
10. If you are _____, you feel nervous and you cannot relax.

2 What do you think?

The article gives advice on what to do if you are stuck in a traffic-jam. Which three of these six pieces of advice do you think will be given?

1. read a newspaper
2. close your eyes
3. take deep breaths
4. do a crossword puzzle
5. eat a snack
6. punch someone

Now look in the text and check your answers.

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by Rory Carroll in Caracas

The capital city of Venezuela, Caracas, has some of the worst traffic jams in the world. The situation is so bad that psychiatrists have now begun to give advice to commuters about what to do when they are in a traffic jam. The advice includes the following: eat a snack, read a book, do a crossword, listen to music but don't punch or shoot anyone.

The number of car owners in Caracas has increased dramatically and the result of this has been blocked motorways and side-streets that are jammed from early morning until late at night. Entire districts are paralysed and the situation is driving some motorists crazy. Doctors say the stress is causing both physical and mental damage and is leading to more cases of road rage, including shoot-outs.

People who try to avoid the traffic jams by leaving home at 5 a.m. have been warned that they may suffer from lack of sleep, which will reduce productivity, make them irritable and have a negative effect on their sex lives.

People are feeling more and more anxious and tense, Robert Lespinasse, the former head of the Venezuelan Society of Psychiatry, told the daily newspaper *Ultimas Noticias*. A psychologist, Hernan D'Oliveira, said that the disruption in mental processes was making people less open to criticism. Armed motorcycle gangs who attack and rob stationary motorists in broad daylight do not help the situation.

With no obvious solution, people have been advised that when they are sitting in a traffic jam they should have a drink or something to eat and occupy their minds with music, a book, newspaper or crossword.

The rapid increase in vehicle ownership in Venezuela is the result of huge profits from the sale of Venezuelan oil. Last year car sales doubled to 300,000. There are no new roads so the extra

traffic streams into potholed streets that have been neglected for years.

Caracas lies in a long narrow valley between skyscrapers and shanty towns. In the hot tropical sun it can appear to be the site of a battle against both geography and climate.

The government, with plenty of money from the sale of oil, has started a programme of building bridges and metro lines before next month's presidential election, but many of these are unfinished, including a bridge connecting Caracas to the airport, which means that drivers have to take detours through hillside barrios that can turn the 16-mile trip into a five-hour nightmare.

Everyone agrees that the traffic jams are getting worse every month. Taxi drivers say their income has fallen dramatically because they are down from an average of five to three fares a day. "It's impossible. If someone asks to go into especially heavy traffic I say no because it will take up half my day," said Fredy Afanador, a local taxi driver.

President Hugo Chávez has criticised former infrastructure ministers but has praised the present minister for doing a good job. He is also looking abroad for help. In return for cheap fuel for London buses, the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, will share his ideas on congestion charging and other policies in an attempt to solve the problem of traffic jams in Caracas.

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements True or False according to the text?

1. Traffic jams in Caracas are not as bad as in other parts of the world.
2. The jams are caused by a rapid increase in car ownership.
3. There is no simple solution to the problem.
4. The government has a lot of money from the sale of oil.
5. Taxi drivers are earning more money now.
6. There is a new bridge linking Caracas with the airport.
7. The president has criticised the work of the current infrastructure minister.
8. The mayor of London will try to help solve the traffic problems in Caracas.

4 Vocabulary Opposites

Replace the underlined words with their opposites. Check your answers in the text.

1. increase productivity _____
2. increase slightly _____
3. gradual increase _____
4. very small profits _____
5. getting better _____
6. light traffic _____
7. too much sleep _____
8. a long wide valley _____

5 Vocabulary Find the word or expression

Find these words or expressions.

1. A word meaning a street that is not a main street. (para. 2)
2. Two more words for blocked. (para. 2)
3. An expression meaning in the middle of the day. (para. 4)
4. A verb meaning to increase by 100%. (para. 6)
5. A word meaning a very tall building containing offices or flats. (para. 7)

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6. A word meaning a way of going from one place to another that is not the shortest or the usual way. (para. 8)
7. A word meaning a poor district in a city in a Spanish-speaking country. (para. 8)
8. A system of making drivers pay to enter city centres. (para. 10)

6 Vocabulary Word building

Complete the table.

Verb	Noun
1. advise	_____
2. warn	_____
3. criticise	_____
4. reduce	_____
5. rob	_____
6. disrupt	_____
7. attack	_____
8. appear	_____

7 Discussion

Do you have traffic jams in your town or city? What are the best ways to avoid such jams in the future?