

Catching the Wave

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

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When I lived in town, my friends and I would wave at each other. Stopped at a stoplight, a few cars back on the opposite side of the intersection, an arm would be extended in an energetic, loose-armed, floppy wave. This was often from some model of Volkswagen.

Locals Wave

Country locals always wave. This is not a phenomenon of my county or even my state. I have discussed this with friends from all over the United States and Canada. If you are driving in a rural setting, locals always wave.

In an urban, or even suburban setting, it is possible not to know your closest neighbor. Maybe there are just so many people that you can't wave to all of them. Maybe it's best not to act too friendly in the city. For whatever reason, city folks don't wave.

Permanent Waves

Waves come in a variety of styles. Several styles are recognizable and widely prevalent across this continent. Others have been adapted for specific purposes and are quite regional. Here are some of the more common types of waves.

Piano wave. The arm is raised to face level, and the fingers are wiggled as if playing a piano.

Goldie Hawn wave. If you've ever seen Goldie Hawn on a red carpet, you've seen this wave. One arm is fully extended upward and the whole hand is flapped between straight up and a 45-degree angle.

Parade wave. This one was made popular by parade princesses and royalty. The arm is extended out to the side, elbow bent, with the arm in a "V" shape. The hand is held in an upright position. The wave begins with bending the elbow back and forth, and then as the elbow is held still, the hand is waved by bending the wrist. So it goes: elbow, elbow, wrist, wrist. It takes a bit of practice, but it keeps

your arm from being too tired to hold up on a long parade route.

Wave wave. I've only seen this on TV in sports stadiums. You must have more people to do this one. A really big crowd is better, and best of all, if they are on bleacher seats. It starts at one end of the seats and ripples along the crowd in sequence. The first people stand up and fully raise both arms overhead. Then the arms are dropped, and at the same time, the waver retakes his or her seat. As some participants sit down, the next people on the bench stand up and wave, creating a wave of wavers.

It is quite impressive if you have a cooperative crowd.

Kama 'aina wave. In Hawaii, the locals, or Kama 'aina, have their own wave. It is also known as the "hang loose." Extend the arm, elbow slightly bent. Fold index to ring fingers into your palm, leaving thumb and pinkie extended. Waggle the whole hand back and forth.

When Bob-O and I went camping on the big island of Hawaii, Bob-O's friend loaned us his car. It was older, slightly rusted, and had Hawaiian license plates. Everyone waved at

us. We were quickly reciprocating with the Kama 'aina wave. We felt like locals. Then we had to return the friend's car and drive a rental car for the last day and to get us to the airport. Nobody waved at us; there were no smiles, no nods. We would wave, but no one would wave back. We felt shunned.

Steering Wheel Variations

When locals wave at you, it is usually while you are driving along country roads. This means there are several wave variations related to driving.

Steering wheel wave. For this wave, the hands never leave the steering wheel. It can involve one, two, three, or all four fingers held upright, but anchored to the steering



Kathleen and her niece Tesla decorate their hands with henna for some extra-fancy waves at Oregon Country Fair.

wheel by the thumb. Usually this wave is done with the right hand, although the left hand has been seen.

Nodding acquaintance wave. On blind corners, since both hands are on the wheel, you usually get “the nod.” The face is inclined upward and then back down at the same time as the eyebrows.

Window wave. This wave is performed with an open driver-side window and the elbow resting on the sill. The hand is raised and brought towards the driver’s head in a casual mock salute. Or maybe it is an indication of the old-fashioned politeness of doffing one’s hat.

Flat hand wave. The driver or passenger raises a full, flat hand, with the palm presented outward and tilted slightly upwards towards the windshield. There is usually no other movement of the hand, although a slight wave sideways is an uncommon variation.

Why We Do It

Why do country locals wave? It is like hat doffing. Everybody used to do it. Then it became complicated in heavily populated places. But in the country, you are not speeding down the road. You are taking it slow because animals can and do jump out into the road. Corners can be sharp and blind. The scenery is better in the country. You feel like waving. I don’t know most of the regulars I wave at on the fourteen-mile journey to the freeway from our house. It doesn’t matter—not to me, not to them. We wave.

Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is juicing apples and crushing grapes at her home in northernmost California. c/o *Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520 • kathleen.jarschke-schultze@homepower.com

