

Irish Independent

Hey you! Right, get back to the end of the queue!

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"If a bad event has probability zero, then to the unlucky probabilist it will happen with probability one." That, believe it or not, is a cracker of a joke. Don't get it? Here's another: "The lucky probabilist works on deterministic problems." Still not rolling around clutching your sides? Me neither, but then I'm a newcomer to the science of queues.

You'll find those jokes on an absorbing website devoted to all aspects of queueing. (And if you think they're bad, just be grateful I've spared you the ones with the punchlines "a Barbie queue", "a miss queue" and "No Wait and the Seven Dwarfs".)

The site contains a treasure-trove of queue-related info, from how to cut the line at Disney World's Magic Kingdom to the odds of dying while on the waiting list for heart surgery in Canada. It has tips on reducing golfing tee-times, on foiling ticket touts, and there's even a spreadsheet formula for how to ensure the shortest toilet queues at major events (it even factors in time for everyone to wash their hands.)

There are pages where experts in Queueing Theory seek jobs, where you can subscribe to queue magazines, and where you can sign up for the Second Madrid Conference on Queueing Theory which has just been announced for July 2006. There is even a page devoted to The History Of Queueing Theory. Admittedly, this potentially illuminating section could do with a bit of fleshing out.

It opens with the line: "The history of queues goes back to primitive man." After that, however, its short on specifics, unless you count an illustration of Noah lining up the animals two-by-two outside his Ark. The rest is disappointingly uninformative, with a gap in the record spanning all of human history until the next entry in 1909.

Aware of this shortcoming, the author has invited anyone who's made "a long or important contribution" in the field to get in touch. So if you can shed light on how the GPO accommodated three million visitors in Easter Week 1916, or how a similar multitude squeezed into Dandeloin Green for U2's legendary shows there in 1979, please contact www2.uwindsor.ca/~hlynka

[/queue.html](#).

I owe my newfound interest in queueing to Dan McGuinness, the director of a marketing firm which has established that, when it comes to standing in queues, the Irish are the grumpiest people in Europe. His firm orchestrated the Irish leg of a Europe-wide survey, conducted in April by the Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA). Over several Fridays, MSPA agents (of which McGuinness has some

2,000 Irish part-timers on his books) queued at a range of outlets from banks to burger joints, supermarkets to train stations.

The survey found that the French, after centuries ground down by Europe's heaviest bureaucracy, were most resigned to shuffling along stoically, while the Irish were most likely to turn to the person next in line and observe: "Would you f**king look at those smirking f**king f**kers having a f**king chat about last night's Big swinging Brother behind their f**king Hatch Closed signs."

Okay, it's highly unlikely, but if, in years to come, you're asked where you were during that glorious June week when U2 filled Croke Park, REM played Dublin, and Bob Geldof's global jukebox was at the fine-tuning stage, you might want to reply: "Which time?"

It's 20 years to the week since U2's first shows at GAA HQ, supported by REM, and with Live Aid a fortnight away. (A soccer match was played at Croke that day between music types.) But, while in 2005 we hear much whingeing about Garda-bashing by the media, in 1985 the boot was in the other face when a row exploded about media-bashing by the Garda.

When U2's fans streamed away from the gig they headed for O'Connell Bridge, where the Laserama lightshow spectacular was to light up the skies for 20 miles at 11 o'clock. As the tired and emotional punters headed downtown to join the Dublin Street Carnival, they guzzled six-packs from illegal hawkers' lorries while the watching gardai decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

Traffic came to a standstill. Packed buses went nowhere. A man was hurled from the upstairs emergency exit of a double-decker stalled on Bachelor's Walk. The city's selfless taxi drivers tackled the transport crisis by knocking off early. 11 o'clock arrived. Jazzer George Benson did the countdown. Three, Two, One. Then, nothing. At least, nothing you couldn't manage with a wonky torch and a bicycle lamp.

A horde of drunk and deflated people went walkabout. Some gougers on Grafton Street got stropky with gardai. The response was a baton-charge up and down the narrow street flattening the good, the bad and the ugly. Another Garda phalanx then charged O'Connell Street, laying into all and sundry. When journalist John Waters began making notes, a guard wrestled away his notebook.

By midnight Grafton Street looked like a bomb site. The windows of Switzers and Dunnes Stores were smashed, their contents looted. BBC deejay Kid Jensen, one of several media-bashing victims, sported a nasty baton-gash. Restaurant diners ordered an umpteenth coffee, afraid to leave.

The official Garda report is due any day now.

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