

Insider's Tips for Driving and Parking in RVA

There are certain things one comes to know if they live in this town long enough.

Mother's Day Brunch reservations at The Jefferson must be made at least 25 years in advance; you never take the Nickel Bridge during Arts in the Park if you don't have to; and for most Richmonders, Martin's will never, ever live up to Ukrop's, even 100 years from now when anyone who ever shopped at Ukrop's is long gone.

Then there are the little things – specifically, for my purposes here, the driving and parking quirks of this town. That's right, the driving and parking tips and tricks you pick up by living in one place and knowing it well.

Here are my Top 10 Insider's Tips for Driving and Parking in RVA, garnered after years and years (and years) of experience parking and driving in Richmond proper.

Restaurant Parking

I shouldn't share this, but I will: most Richmond restaurants offer off-street parking, even if it's just a few spaces. It's required by law; or at least it used to be. Just swing around back and take a look. Most of the spaces are usually taken by restaurant staff, but if you time it right, you can find one or two.

No Parking

No Parking signs are tricky in this town. There are some that mean what they say, No Parking – ever. Others that are more like guidelines: sure, it says No Parking, but it means No Parking during business hours, any other time is just fine. And then there are the No Parking signs that are just decorative. Regardless of what the sign says, you can pretty much park there whenever you feel like. How do you know the difference? Trial and error. That's the only way.

Seasonal Street Cleaning

Here's the thing about city street cleaning: you will be towed when the city sweeps the streets, but only when the temporary paper signs are used (as opposed to the permanent, metal ones) and only if you live in the city proper. That's right: the Fan and Museum District gets towed, South Richmond (at least in my neighborhood), does not. They clean around the cars over there.

Regular Street Cleaning

You know those signs in the Fan that say No Parking on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.? Those are for regular, weekly street cleanings. The regular, weekly street cleaning happens about twice a year. You will be towed if you're parked there during street cleaning, but only when it's actually happening. Any other time is fine ... unless you're within three blocks of VCU. Then you get ticketed.

Tickets

So if these rules are all so fluid, what must it take to get a parking ticket in this town? It's difficult to say for sure, but a good rule of thumb is this: if you're parking in downtown Richmond, the Shockoes or the Fan immediately around VCU, you can and will get ticketed for almost anything, including "parking on the sidewalk" - even if it's just one part of one tire on the sidewalk (happened to me). If it's anywhere else in this town, you could leave your whole car blocking an intersection for up to a month and nothing will happen.

Carytown Driving

Avoid it all costs. Avoid it at any cost. One should never, ever drive down Cary Street through Carytown if they don't have to. Take Floyd instead. There's another work-around road, but I'm not willing to give that one up. I've got to get around in this town.

Honor Lots You might wonder how honor lots know whether you stuck one dollar in the slot, or three. I can't answer that for you, but I can tell you this: they know. Don't ask my how, but they know. And they boot.

Monument Avenue Parking

This is a Richmond parking fact that has always confused me, but it appears to be true: if you are from the West End, you can turn the second lane of Monument Avenue into a parking lot whenever you feel like it.

Avoiding Main

So I've written before about the horror of driving down west down East Main Street in rush hour, but insider's tip: there's a way to avoid it. Grace or Canal can get you to the same place, in a heck of a lot less time.