Feature headline writing assignment

Previous research involving animal subjects had only been able to understand a small part of how the cognitive skills of animals work, so researchers from the University of Richmond in Virginia want to take things a step further. They wanted to figure out if animals, like rats, were able to be taught how to complete complex tasks like driving a vehicle.

To do this, the researchers needed to build special tiny cars for the rats which they did with transparent plastic containers. These small cars were equipped with an aluminum floor and its own tiny wheels. The “steering wheel” was made out of three copper bars.

When the rat stood on the car’s aluminum floor and held onto the bars, they would ignite an electrical charge that made the car move.

The rats were even taught to steer the car in different directions by touching different bars to propel the vehicle in various directions. The scientists used Froot Loop cereal pieces as a reward to motivate the rats to drive the car toward different spots of the driving arena. Luckily, the animals’ surprising driving skills were captured on video.

“They learned to navigate the car in unique ways and engaged in steering patterns they had never used to eventually arrive at the reward,” the study’s co-author Kelly Lambert said. The rats’ driving abilities showed their “neuroplasticity,” which refers to their ability to respond and adapt to changes.

The researchers tested out 17 rats — six females and 11 males.

Besides being hilarious to watch, studying the rats’ driving capabilities revealed how quickly they can pick up new behaviors. The researchers also found that some of the rats actually enjoyed driving and felt a sense of accomplishment similar to how humans feel when they’ve completed a task.

Every year in Japan, the Naki Sumo or Nakizumo Crying Baby Festival is held to celebrate the belief that crying babies bring good health and fortune as well as ward off evil spirits. To top off the hilarity, each crying baby is paired with a giant sumo wrestler who is given the unfortunate task of holding the babies as they wail.

The celebrations are held in temples across Japan but the biggest one is at the Sensoji Temple in Tokyo. The rules of this centuries-old competition are simple: the first baby to cry wins. A sumo referee is assigned to make the infants cry which can be done through a number of gentle methods.

One way is to goad the babies by chanting “naki! naki!” (“cry! cry!”) repeatedly into their faces. Another way to induce tears is by wearing a mask, usually of the bird demon tengu, one of the evil spirits believed to be drawn away by the sound of bawling babies.

Meanwhile, the sumo wrestlers gently jiggle the participating baby up and down to help get the waterworks flowing, sometimes even making funny faces to help the referee make the baby cry. The baby who starts crying first wins the duel. However, if both babies start crying at the same time, then the one who cries the loudest and the hardest wins.

The festivals are meant as fun gatherings and are also a chance for the families to show off their new bundles of joy. This year, tears were shed by more than 160 babies.

Drinking and driving should never go hand-in-hand even if you’re driving a horse and buggy. In September, two Amish men were busted doing just that with a 12-pack of Michelob Ultra while driving their buggy tricked out with a stereo system that was blasting music.

Officers from the Trumbull County Sheriff’s Department in Ohio made the discovery during a routine traffic stop around 1 a.m. When Deputy Eric Hermsdorfer asked the two men to pull their buggy over on Donley and Mahan Parker Roads in North Bloomfield, the unidentified men lept off the buggy and disappeared into the woods.

The horse, meanwhile, continued to trot down the road until it was stopped by local police. During an inspection of the buggy, authorities found several open bottles of alcohol beside the sound system. The vehicle was then towed and the police kept the horse until its owner could claim it.

But nobody came forward.

While the Amish community at large doesn’t forbid its members from consuming alcohol, many of its sects do, though it has not been confirmed which sect the two men belonged to — perhaps their quick escape indicated as much. It’s still unclear who the men were and what they were doing on their joyride.

Regardless of which sect they came from, drinking while driving is illegal even if it is on horseback and members of the Amish community have received DUIs for such behavior before.

In April, a 21-year-old Ohioan ran a stop sign and subsequently admitted he drank 10 beers beforehand. In 2012, four Amish people were arrested for drinking while underage and crashing their buggy into other buggies, then fleeing the scene.

Bronx resident Louise Jean Signore was born in 1912, the same year that the Titanic sank.

This July 31, Signore celebrated her 107th birthday, making her one of the oldest living New Yorkers. More than 100 people gathered to celebrate, eat, and pay their respects in honor of her special day.

Still, Signore couldn’t understand what all the fuss was about — which is likely just what happens when you’ve had more than 100 birthday parties.

“I’ve had enough parties,” Signore said. Born in Harlem before her family relocated to the Bronx when she was 14, Signore looks incredibly well for her age and doesn’t even use any walking or breathing aids.

She lives an active life that is made up of daily dancing and exercise, and she also enjoys some bingo to cap off her days. It’s reasonable to assume her very active lifestyle is the reason why she is still so spry even after living more than a century. But the elderly woman believes the secret to her long life and good health is more than that.

“I think the secret of 107: I never got married. I think that’s the secret,” Signore shared matter-of-factly. “My sister says ‘I wish I never got married.'” Signore added that Italian food “is very good for you” and eats it on a daily basis.

But Signore’s longevity might also be from good genes. Her married sister is also still alive and well, and is now 102 years old.

In March, a Court of Appeal in Australia mulled over a peculiar case that involved an employee who claimed that his boss’ constant farting was a form of bullying. The court had to decide whether or not flatulence could indeed be considered harassment in the case of 56-year-old David Hingst, who quit his job at Construction Engineering because of the stinky treatment.

In his 2017 lawsuit against his former supervisor, Greg Short, the engineer accused Short of routinely farting on him throughout the week. Hingst referred to his alleged bully as “Mr. Stinky,” and said Short regularly “thrusted his bum” at him and passed gas.

“I would be sitting with my face to the wall and he would come into the room, which was small and had no windows,” explained Hingst. “He would fart behind me and walk away. He would do this five or six times a day.”

To counteract the attacks, Hingst said that he would spray aerosol deodorant at his bully. The suit, which also claimed Hingst received bullying phone calls from other coworkers, sought damages of 1.8 million Australian dollars or $1.28 million.

But every case has two sides and Short retorted that his alleged serial-farting was meant in a humorous way. Short alleged that he “may have done it once or twice, maybe,” and claimed it was not “with the intention of distressing or harassing” Hingst.

Whether the fart attacks were meant to be harmful or not, we’ll never know as the Court of Appeal ended up dismissing the case.