

# **Stall Progress Stalls**

by  
**Randy C. Finch**  
(2000)

It is high time for someone to raise a stink about a topic sorely needing attention, but which most people are reluctant to discuss: public toilets. I am well aware that this is a touchy subject for some people. If it is for you, please let me know so that I can avoid shaking hands with you. Hands that touch public toilets will never touch mine.

The problems associated with public toilets and the stalls in which they are enclosed are reaching crisis proportions. And while there has been some minor progress on the stall front, it has not been nearly enough to compensate for the rising number of problems. To make matters worse, research in this area has stalled, making the likelihood of significant improvements during my lifetime unlikely.

One problem stems from a resurgence of the pop art culture of the 70's. The mangled artwork of that era led many people to believe that they could produce artwork that was just as good as the next guy's. No longer were artificial constraints placed on the artist's toolbox. Art could be produced from anything. That is why more and more people are compelled to leave behind, in public toilet bowls, an "artistic" creation of their own. These original works of "art" can be quite disgusting. While many will disagree, I find this artwork to be even more disgusting than much of the artwork funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Not being satisfied with simply creating the art, the artist is always compelled to frame his or her art with reams and reams of toilet paper. It's crisscrossed over the seat, wadded up on the floor, and sometimes streaming from the stall walls. These would-be artists stop at nothing to thrust their original creations upon the unsuspecting. One by one those seeking relief peek into the stall to conduct their customary inspection only to be confronted by a previous visitor's artwork. Just as quickly, they one by one move on to the next stall hoping against all hope that its previous visitor had no artistic inclinations whatsoever.

One attempt at rectifying the artful toilet syndrome (known as ATS by syndrome experts) resulted in the invention of what I call the toilet art shredder (TAS). While they are not available on all public toilets, they are becoming more prevalent. This device consists of a sensor that has the capability of flushing a toilet without human intervention. Theoretically, the sensor detects when a person removes himself from the toilet seat and then automatically flushes the toilet, sweeping away any would-be artistic creation and delivering it to the sewer where it belongs. As usual, however, theory is much more pristine than reality. Based on real life experience, I know that in many cases the TAS's do not operate as intended. If they work at all, they do so during the "inspiration phase."

This is where the artist shifts side to side on the toilet seat working up to producing his artwork while simultaneously avoiding the large red ring that forms around his buttocks when sitting still for too long on a toilet seat. Depending on the length of the inspiration phase and the sensitivity of the sensor, the TAS may flush the toilet several times spraying toilet water on the artist's underside. However, once the artist is finished producing his art, he can get up and leave the stall without so much as a sizzle from the toilet.

Another problem related to the TAS is the paper toilet seat covers that are available in select stalls. Theoretically, these covers offer enhanced sanitary conditions by acting as a divider between the toilet seat and your buns. But have you ever tried using one of these things? It has that center flap that must be separated from the annular seat part by tearing a few tabs where the two sections are joined. This is a required step that produces an opening that your soon-to-be-produced artwork can pass through. Unfortunately, the tabs are apparently made of steel, as they are much tougher than the rest of the cover. This means that no matter how carefully you try to detach the center flap, you will almost always tear the cover. Sometimes it gets ripped up so badly, you have to just start over with another cover.

Once you have separated the flap without mangling it beyond use, you must place the cover on the seat. A nifty little feature of the flap is that it doubles as a suck-it-down-the-drain attachment. This works by dropping the flap into the water after carefully positioning the cover over the toilet seat such that all bacteria are smothered. When the toilet flushes, the water grabs the flap attachment and jerks the entire cover into the water so that it disappears into the sewer. This is all well and good when it works properly. However, as I mentioned before, the TAS sometimes flushes the toilet while its occupant is still aboard. This can cause discomfort as the toilet seat cover begins jerking against the occupant's underside. In fact, I have calculated that for a person weighing less than 120 pounds on a toilet with an average flush flux force (called the flu-flu force by scientists that study such things), the person is in grave danger of being jerked into the toilet bowl. To compound the problem, the suction of the flush can pull the person further into the bowl causing them to become wedged so tightly that assistance is needed to get out. This can be quite embarrassing. Perhaps warning signs are needed to alert lightweight artists to this problem. Also, I have heard that some toilets flush so swiftly and forcefully, they can actually sweep the cover out from under you like a magician pulling a tablecloth out from under a table full of china and crystal. This can happen regardless of the occupant's weight.

Another problem with public toilets is the size of the stall itself. Typically, the walls are as close to the toilet as they can be. As a further insult, the door opens INWARD! Were the designers NUTS? How are you supposed to get IN the stall and then SHUT the door? Squeeze back into the corner? Step up on the toilet? It's enough to make you go to the handicapped stall which, if you will notice, is the only one where the door actually opens OUTWARD! If they can put outward swinging doors on these stalls, why not all the others? The problem is exacerbated at airports when you have your two bags (properly sized for the overhead bins, of course). The airport stalls are bigger, but not that much

bigger. So here you go opening the door inwards, putting your two bags inside, and then walking inside yourself. Now you are faced with a difficult choice. Do you stand on the toilet, balance your bags on your shoulders, and close the door with one foot while balancing on the other, or do you just forget modesty and leave the door open so all can see? Well, as you know, most artists don't like for anyone to watch while they produce their art, so most will opt for the first option. Of course, once you complete your artwork, the procedure used to enter the stall must be reversed in order to get out. Good luck!

Once the door is shut, the toilet seat cover is in place, and you are comfortably seated on the toilet (if indeed anyone can call this comfortable), it's time to read the graffiti. This can be quite a struggle for far-sighted individuals as the door and walls are way too close to be read without reading glasses, which are buried in the bottom of one of the bags still balancing on a shoulder. This is truly a bummer since reading the graffiti is the only fun thing about this whole experience. Where else can one find such extremes of literature so close together? Typically, one can see "Jesus Saves!" next to "S\*ck Me!" next to "John 3:16" next to "For a good time, call Felicia at XXX-XXXX." (Forget it! If you want the number, go look it up yourself.) Is this eclectic literature or what?

But the joy of graffiti comes at a price. Eventually, the walls will have so much writing on them that it will be difficult to make out what any of it says. How many times have you twisted your head and squinted your eyes trying to make out some indiscernible writing only to become so frustrated that you purposefully waived your hand in front of the TAS just to see if it would jerk the seat cover out from under you? If the stall owners would just shell out a few bucks every few days to repaint the stall, all this frustration could be avoided. My secret desire is that someday the stall walls will be big erasable pads like the kind I used as a kid. You remember. The ones we wrote on with a plastic stick and then erased by jerking up on a piece of plastic covering that strange gray stuff. Even further in the future, the walls may be giant computer screens that talk to you. "I am sorry, but there is no available space to add your graffiti. Would you like for me to erase a portion of the screen?" To which I would respond, "Yeah! Remove Felicia's phone number. We're getting married on Saturday."

Lest you think that I am exaggerating the stall problem, let me tell you what happened at my place of employment recently. Someone on my floor suddenly had a great desire to be an artist. After leaving his artwork in Stall #1 (of two stalls), someone ("Not I," said I) left the following typed message on the inside of the stall door. I quote it word for word.

**ATTENTION !!!**

**WILL WHOEVER IS RESPONSIBLE  
FOR THE FILTHY CONDITIONS OF  
THIS BATHROOM STALL (I.E.  
INSUFFICIENT FLUSHING AND  
USED TOILET PAPER ON THE  
FLOOR) PLEASE DISCONTINUE  
THIS CONDUCT FOR THE  
BENEFIT OF ALL PEOPLE WHO  
USE THIS STALL.**

**THANK YOU**

Apparently the offending artist was not farsighted, or at least he wore his reading glasses to the bathroom, because soon after this posting the artwork ceased. However, about two or three weeks later it started up again. Was it the original perpetrator or a copycat? We may never know.