

Welcome to the Spring 2004 driving safety newsletter from Applied Driving Techniques.

In this issue we look at two topical items, car-jacking and driving in floods, along with our regular safety features. We are working with your company to make you safer and help ensure that you do not become another statistic.

Car-jacking—Don't become a statistic!

There has been a lot of recent media attention focused on the crime of "car-jacking". Because of improved security systems, many criminals are targeting unlocked vehicles being driven, and either taking them by force or stealing items from the vehicle. Whilst this is a worrying trend, there are a number of things you can do to prevent you becoming yet another crime statistic:

- ◆ Always keep your doors locked whilst driving. Get into the habit of locking the door as soon as you have entered the vehicle. This will prevent anyone getting easy access into the vehicle. This is especially important in stationary or slow-moving traffic where these incidents are more common.

- ◆ Keep valuable items out of sight in a locked boot. This will prevent the opportunist thief breaking into your vehicle. In estate cars, al-

ways use a cargo cover to keep items in the boot out of sight. This is especially important for expensive items such as portable computers. This also prevents them becoming potentially lethal projectiles in the event of a crash.

- ◆ Make sure that you have planned your route thoroughly so that you do not have to stop to consult a map—this will make you more vulnerable.

- ◆ When stopping in traffic, always leave a gap between you and the vehicle in front so that, in the event of an emergency, you can manoeuvre quickly out of the way. As a "rule of thumb" you should always stop so you can see the rear tyres of the vehicle in front.

- ◆ If the worst happens, and somebody threatens you, hand

over your keys immediately—your life is much more valuable than your vehicle!

Floods!

The scene below is getting more common throughout the UK. But what can you do to ensure that you do not put yourself, or your vehicle, at risk?

The first thing to do is to plan your journey carefully to try and avoid flooded roads. Local traffic news on the radio is useful for this so always listen to these reports on your radio.

If you find yourself faced with a flooded road you first have to ask yourself, "Can I get through safely?" If there are already stranded vehicles then it is not worth you risking it. It is very difficult to judge the depth of some flooded roads, and often the only way is to get out and test the depth—a pair of welly boots in the vehicle will be helpful!

Once you have decided that it is safe to drive through you should

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follow this procedure:

- ◆ Wait for any on-coming vehicles to clear the flood—there is often only room for one lane of traffic using the least-flooded part of the road.

- ◆ Select 1st gear (in a manual or automatic) and ensure that you keep the revs up as you drive through the flood. As you should drive through slowly, this may mean slipping the clutch (or braking slightly in an automatic).

- ◆ Drive through slowly and avoid making a bow wave, as this increases the likelihood of water getting into the engine.

- ◆ After you have driven through safely it is VITAL that you check your brakes. Perform an emergency stop after ensuring that there are no vehicles immediately behind you. If you suspect that the brakes are not performing correctly then you should dry them out by driving SLOWLY with your left foot applying slight pressure to the brake pedal—this will dry them off. Check them again and only proceed with your journey when they are working effectively.

How good is your eyesight?

Having good eyesight is fundamental to safe driving, but how many of us are driving with defective vision? It may surprise you to learn that up to 1 in 10 drivers would fail the standard eyesight test!

Research has also shown that many drivers who use glasses or contact lenses to correct defective vision do not wear them when they are driving, even though they know it is a legal requirement!

As we get older our eyesight changes, and we should have our eyes checked by an optician at least once every 2 years.

Andy's Safety Tips

In this regular feature we look at some tips that will make your driving safer.

Rear-end shunts are one of the most common crashes, but they can be avoided by adopting the following technique.

When approaching stationary traffic, try to pull up short of the last vehicle in the queue and keep a close eye on your rear-view mirror. If you see a vehicle approaching that you think may have not seen the queue, flash your brake lights and be prepared to take evasive action. If you see stationary traffic just around a bend, try to stop on the bend to help following drivers see that they will have to stop.

The legal minimum standard for driving is to be able to read a vehicle number plate in good daylight at a distance of 20.5 metres (or 20m for the new-style number plates). This is approximately 5 car lengths—why not test yourself the next time you're behind the wheel, and make an appointment to visit an optician if you find yourself having to squint.

This simple test, of course, cannot detect any other vision defects, so it really is a good idea to have your eyes regularly checked. Here is some practical advice to ensure that you remain safe whilst driving:

- ◆ Always keep a spare pair of glasses or contact lenses (+ solutions) in the vehicle. This is a legal requirement in some European countries (e.g. Spain). Users of contact lenses can suffer from tired eyes, and it is often better to change to glasses to help your vision.

- ◆ Specify glasses with an anti-reflective coating as these help cut down glare, especially at night.

- ◆ Always ensure that your glasses are clean—dirty glasses are as bad as a dirty windscreen.

- ◆ If you normally wear glasses, make sure that if you use sunglasses that these are to the same prescription.

- ◆ If you are tired, or if you are taking certain prescription medicines, your vision will be impaired. Always read the warning label on your medicine (and if in doubt, check with your doctor) and if you are feeling tired, stop driving and take a short nap.

Are you a dipstick?

Do you think that the red oil warning light tells you when you need to top up the oil? If you do, you could be in for a nasty shock.

The oil light warns of low oil pressure, and indicates that you should stop IMMEDIATELY to prevent damaging the engine. A few company car drivers are currently paying for new engines having made this mistake!

The only way to reliably check the oil is to get your hands dirty—open the bonnet and physically check it using the dipstick. This should always be done when the engine is cold and the vehicle parked on a level surface. The dipstick will have two marks indicating the maximum and minimum levels, and you should keep the oil topped up so that it is within (but not over) these limits.

Your vehicle's manual will advise you how often you should do this, but as a *minimum* this should be checked weekly and before long journeys.

So, don't be a dipstick and put yourself at risk by breaking down with a blown engine—regularly check your oil level and avoid paying for a new engine!