

# Survival Driving

by Roger Johnson, Editor

Traffic is a perpetual motion machine. It's not really that much of an exaggeration to call it a red hot, 35 mile an hour river of lava. You better be ready and you better be paying attention when you start "surfing" this super highway.

Driving safely in modern traffic environments requires so much more concentration than the average driver thinks that it would be laughable if it wasn't so scary. Even scarier is the fact most drivers don't even learn from their mistakes in "minor" wrecks.

Not long ago on a Friday morning my wife and I were taking our normal route to the office. I noticed a guy in a little VW Jetta driving very aggressively several cars behind us. Two stoplights later he had worked his way up to our rear bumper and continued to tailgate. Finally we came to a stopsign at a 3-way intersection. He attempted to pass us at the last minute but tucked back in behind our Mustang when he realized it was too late to go around. Since the fool didn't think I'd come to a 'complete' stop (like he wouldn't) he hit my rear bumper.

When this guy approached me at the scene, the first words out of his mouth were, "I don't want to scare you, but I'm a lawyer". I assured him the only thing that scared me about him was his driving. This "lawyer" told the policeman his foot "slipped" off his brake pedal. He suggested to the officer that otherwise his driving was absolutely wonderful. The only possible way he could ever be involved in anything even remotely like this would be if his foot somehow, somehow 'accidentally' slipped off that nasty old brake pedal.

This guy learned absolutely nothing from this experience. For me, it reaffirmed two suspicions: be doubly careful when you drive in Friday-traffic because it's a rougher game than any other week day; and always watch your rearview mirror when you are about to stop for whatever reason.

Many insurance companies and other organizations involved don't even use the word "accident" when referring to some sort of automotive collision. The reason is as simple. Hitting a car you were travelling too close to on a wet road is NOT an accident. On the contrary. Statistically you should have an excellent chance of doing just that if you get just a little closer and go just a little faster. See what they mean. It's no accident, because you actually set the stage yourself.

The goal of the serious driver should be to always have themselves in a position in traffic so the chances of being "involved" with another car are reduced. This perpetual motion machine sometimes referred to as 'traffic' is not forgiving at all. It doesn't give "a you know what" about seniority, or how long it's been since your last "non-accident". If you don't make a concerted effort to stay out of harm's way in traffic, harm will find you. It thrives on those not paying attention, or taking too many chances.

Driving is extremely serious business and always will be. Just because it's been 10 years since your car was last wrecked doesn't automatically mean you'll be "cool" for another 10 years. Pay attention to that intersection ahead with all your might, then do the same to the one after that. Because when it comes to survival driving, it only matters what you're doing right this second.

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