

DRIVING IN THE COUNTRY

Information Fact Sheet



Holiday destinations are often a long drive from home and many people enjoy motoring adventures that involve long hours behind the wheel.

Fatigue is a major cause of death and injury on Australian roads, particularly in the country, where it contributes to around 20 per cent of fatal crashes. Fatigue can overwhelm a tired driver in a matter of moments.

Weary drivers who try to push on to the next town before taking a break are inviting tragedy.

Dawn is the most dangerous time for the fatigued motorist, when heavy eyelids may involuntarily slam shut to block out the rising sun.

Medical experts believe that even a fresh driver needs to stop every two hours for a stretch and refreshments. Use the break to thoroughly clean bugs and grime off the windscreen.

Driving beyond the speed limit or in defiance of bad weather or road conditions brings its own problems. If the police don't get you, then a skid on a wet road or another hazard may.

DANGER ON THE OPEN ROAD

- Timid motorists tend to fear driving in heavy city traffic. The reality is that shuffling along bumper-to-bumper at 20-30 km/h is less hazardous than driving at the speed limit on the open road, often with broken, gravel-lined verges.
- Should you edge off the tarmac onto the (often) loose gravel verge, don't panic and wrench the wheel. Simply and gently ease the car back safely.
- Overtaking on twisting country two-lane roads, where long straights are few and far between, is often hazardous. Drivers raised in the modest pace of city traffic can have trouble judging closing speeds and distances.
- Impatience often leads to risky manoeuvres. The time difference between driving rashly and taking due care is probably less than fifteen minutes in a journey of 500 km.
- On single-lane country roads, vehicles can approach at closing speeds of 200 km/h, separated by just a white line on the bitumen. Front-seat occupants in late-model vehicles equipped with all the desired passive safety equipment are unlikely to survive a front impact at those speeds.
- In adverse conditions, such as heavy rain or fog, it's a good idea to forget about overtaking unless on dual carriageways.

The golden rule: if in doubt, DON'T! Wait until the road is clear for a long stretch or until an overtaking lane comes along.

- Country driving often brings city people into contact with dirt or gravel roads. Here, road-holding is reduced and stopping distances extended. Remember an anti-lock braking system, so useful in wet or dry on bitumen, is nowhere near as effective on loose surfaces. If your vehicle is fitted with an anti-lock braking system (ABS), give yourself 50 per cent more space in which to stop on dirt or, particularly, gravel.
- When approaching an overtaking lane or multi-lane freeway, don't veer into the right-hand (passing) lane unless you're preparing to pass another car. The right-hand lane is for overtaking only and it is an offence to stay there unless you're actually overtaking.

Learn more in our **Slide Rules fact sheet**.

IN THE DARK

Night driving brings even greater challenges. It starts not when the stars are out, but when the sun slips below the horizon.

You should dip your headlights to low-beam as soon as you see the lights of oncoming traffic. If the other driver doesn't, remind him with the briefest flash - not a lingering eyeful - of your high-beam. Eyes take a few seconds to recover from staring into the dazzling lights of an oncoming car, so take care. Instead, look at the road immediately in front of your bonnet and use the centre line as a reference. If the glare continues to be disconcerting, slow down and look a little to the left towards the edge of the bitumen.

If following drivers fail to dip their lights, simply adjust your mirror so the light doesn't shine into your eyes. The accepted signal to request a driver to dip his/her lights is to hold your hand over your inside mirror for a few seconds.

As we get older, we need an increasing amount of light to see things that younger eyes more easily register. To see clearly what a 21-year-old sees, a 60-year-old needs six times the illumination. Keep this in mind when driving after dark and use it as an incentive to make your vehicle as visible as possible.

As well as tyres (and pressures), brakes, oil and water levels, radiator hoses, tail-lights, blinkers and accessory drive belts, check the operation and alignment of your car's headlights before setting off on a country trip.

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