

Accident-free driving

Defensive driving skills a must

By GREG COATES
Business Editor

• Last year, 200,000 people were injured and more than 4,000 killed in accidents on Canada's roads and highways.

• If current accident rates continue, one out of every two Canadians will be involved in a fatal or injury-producing accident in their lifetime.

• Traffic fatalities are the leading

cause of death for Canadians under the age of 34.

• Sixty per cent of all new drivers in Ontario get little or no professional driver training.

• Drivers aged 15 to 24 account

for more than 25 per cent of all drivers killed in Canada each year.

• Half of all traffic accidents occur with 40 kms of the victim's

home and at speeds of 60 km/hr or less.

• Traffic injuries and fatalities cost the nation an estimated \$2.5 billion annually.

• Federal government statistics show that 85 per cent of all traffic accidents are caused by human error, with driver inattention being the leading cause. Also included are poor judgement in emergencies, breach of traffic laws, failure to adjust to weather conditions and wilful neglect of mechanical problems.

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"The whole concept is to adapt to a constantly changing traffic environment," he added. "What I'm talking about is aggressively pursuing space."



— Bill Lanning

Economist and Sun Business Editor Greg Coates scans traffic during a recent driving test with Markham's Dave Baker, classroom instructor for Young Drivers of Canada. This is National Safe Driving Week in Canada.

While many of these statistics are alarming, they are still fact and must be considered by all drivers. This is National Safe Driving Week in Canada and good time to review those driving habits.

Dave Baker of Markham is a classroom supervisor with Young Drivers of Canada and teaches accident-free driving using your mind and eyes.

Describing a collision as two vehicles attempting to occupy one space, Mr. Baker said the key to safe driving is driving alone.

"You want space and you want visibility. I call it driving alone," he said, adding that traffic moves in clusters. "The rest of traffic is not an obstacle, just part of the stream you're part of."

Mr. Baker said driving alone allows you to control your space and if someone does enter, it's at your discretion.

"You know they are there and you let them enter," he said. "You're not totally at the mercy of other drivers. You have some control over what the traffic does to you."

Taught rules only

He explained that when most people learn to drive they're taught the rules of the road and how to operate their vehicle. Everything else they learn from experience.

"That's why you have insurance. They expect you to go out

and hit someone," said Mr. Baker.

"The whole concept is to adapt to a constantly changing traffic environment," he added. "What I'm talking about is aggressively pursuing space."

The Young Drivers of Canada approach to accident-free driving is to follow these five basic habits:

Look well ahead — maintain a minimum eye lead time of eight to 12 seconds; maintain a safe following distance of two to three seconds; your eyes must always lead your wheels; and respond to hazards properly.

Move your eyes — move your eyes every two seconds; check rear view mirrors every five to eight seconds; scan steering wheels of parked cars; use the ground viewing habit; and sweep intersections with your eyes, left, centre and right.

Look around

Spot the problems — look for problems 360 degrees around your car; spot conflicts from vehicles, pedestrians, road conditions; avoid blind spots; react to problems by moving into available space; use the lane of least resistance; and ignore the unimportant.

Keep space — maintain a space cushion around your car; avoid being boxed in; cover the brake; scan left, centre, right and create space; use the point of no return; never block an intersection; and when stopped in line, leave a minimum of a half car length in front.

Be seen — communicate with other drivers and pedestrians with horn and signals; get eye to eye contact; and keep your lights on at all times.

Mr. Baker stressed that looking far enough ahead is one of the most important aspects of accident-free driving.

"You should look at least a block and a half ahead," he said. "It's the only way to effect a plan of defense."

It's Safe Driving Week

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- Be a defensive driver.
- It's easier to stay out of trouble, than it is to get out.
- You should always be ready to take evasive action if the other drivers around you do something unexpected.
- To be a defensive driver, all you have to do is know and obey all laws relating to traffic and take into account road, weather and traffic conditions while driving.
- For the safety of yourself and your passengers - buckle-up.
- Keep your eyes open and be alert for the mistakes of others...and you must concentrate on your job of driving at all times.
- Slow down - remember speed kills.
- Keep your distance - don't tailgate.
- If you drink, don't drive - think seriously of the consequences of impaired driving.
- Drive with your headlights on and be seen.
- Winter driving calls for extra care - extra smooth, precise steering, gentle acceleration and gradual application of the brakes.
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