



Ross Bentley's High Performance Driving Tips - #4

COLLISION AVOIDANCE

Imagine this. You're driving down the road when all of a sudden another car pulls out of a side street directly in front of you.

What do you do?

If you're like many people, you'll slam on the brakes and skid right into the other car. Bang! It's only natural. When an emergency situation presents itself, you panic - and the first thing you think of is STOP! And that's fine, as long as you remember to brake properly - "threshold braking", where you brake at the very limit, or threshold, of traction just before the tires lock-up and start to skid. (This is where a vehicle with Anti-lock Braking System is so great - no matter how much you panic and slam on the brakes, it won't allow the car to skid.)

But what else could you have done?

Well, don't forget your steering. Most drivers do. In fact, many collisions could have been avoided if the driver had only used his or her steering. Usually, they just brake too hard, lock-up the front wheels, losing all steering effect, and plough straight ahead. Or, in a vehicle equipped with ABS, brake and steer right at the crash. Why? Because wherever you look is where your car will go. In the panic of a potential crash, your natural instinct is to look at what you're going to hit - and the steer there! So, the solution is simple, right?

Just look and steer where you want to go. In this case, to either side of the car that pulled out in front of you - look for the gap. And keep your eyes up. Often, when you begin to brake and the front of the car nose-dives, your vision follows. Keep looking down the road to where you want to go. And, of course you have been watching the mirrors so you know whether it is safe to move to the right or left!

So, *steer to avoid!* Don't hit the brakes! At speed, just a slight turn is all that is required, then immediately steer back in the direction you want to go.

Now I'm not saying don't ever use your brakes. In fact, when faced with any emergency situation, try to reduce your speed as much as possible, without *slamming* on the

brakes. Obviously, the less speed you're carrying, the less damage you'll cause if you do crash. More importantly though, the better your chances are of *avoiding* the collision in the first place.

If you can't avoid the object in front of you - your path is completely blocked - this is an emergency stop situation. Most people panic stop with locked brakes, or with not nearly enough braking effort (as little as 50% of their maximum in an emergency situation!). But once you lock-up the brakes, you have lost all steering control. Practice "threshold" braking until it becomes second nature to you. Learn to feel the limit on all different types of road conditions so you can modulate the pedal properly. This may be the single most important skill you can learn to save your life.

If your car is equipped with ABS, learn to apply the brake pedal as hard as possible - let the system do the modulating work. Standing on the pedal may not be as easy as it sounds; after all these years of training yourself not to lock up the brakes, it may be difficult to all of a sudden start pushing the brake pedal hard enough to activate the ABS. As with any driving technique, it takes practice.

Remember, it is extremely important not to give up in a crash situation. Isn't one chance in a million better than no chance at all? Even if it is inevitable you're going to crash, try to choose the best place to do it. Wouldn't you rather hit a shrub on the side of a road or a car at an angle than head-on?

So, consider your options, never give up hope in trying to get out of the collision and even practise avoidance in your mind. It's amazing how having reacted to a situation previously in your mind can improve your reaction time and decision making process. And, always drive with an escape route in mind. Know what's going on around you and if an incident is about to happen, look and steer where you want to go.

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