what makes a Good Driver?

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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of Indiana, Purdue University, and U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating. L. E. Hoffman, Director, Lafayette, Ind. Issued in furtherance of the acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.
THE NEED FOR SAFER DRIVERS

Safer drivers would reduce traffic accidents more than safer cars or safer roads—yes, even more than both of these together. Drivers are often indirectly to blame even in the few cases where cars and roads are charged with the accident. For example, when brakes fail or a tire blows out, the driver may actually be at fault for failing to have a car safety checked or for "putting off" fixing a known hazard.

Likewise, many people become too familiar with certain dangerous stretches of road and risk unsafe driving once too often. The one-lane bridge or the blind corner gets the blame, but the driver who knows they were there and didn't allow for them is probably the real culprit.

Don't misunderstand. Driving is complicated enough without one-lane bridges, blind corners and all the other out-dated hazards of our highway system. It also would be foolish to halt the efforts that have been made to make cars safer. Yet don't lose sight of the fact that driver failure of some kind is the main cause of 85 to 90 percent of our traffic accidents.

WHO ARE THE VIOLATORS?

Not many will argue against the need for safer drivers. The trouble is that most of us are really thinking of someone else when we talk about need for improvement. It's true that a small percentage of the drivers account for many more than their "share" of the accidents. For example, someone has said that three percent of the drivers cause 15 percent of the accidents. However, if all of these were eliminated, we would still have 85 percent of our accidents. The remaining "villains" would be ordinary people, many of whom have been too busy blaming others and haven't improved their own driving. Basically, these ordinary people are careful drivers, although trained observers could probably detect faults that have caused or will cause accidents. Some of the mistakes are obvious, even to the guilty driver. However, most of them can probably be listed as "sloppy" driving or failure to appreciate certain dangerous situations.
WHO CAN QUALIFY AS A GOOD DRIVER

Any normal person can be a good driver. That means that most people have the ability to drive. It's too bad safe driving and ability to drive aren't more closely related.

Let's consider some of the reasons why lack of ability might (or should) eliminate some people as drivers. Physical handicaps sometimes make it impossible for some people to drive safely. However, they can often make amazing adjustments by using special equipment or through extreme personal effort. That's why it is difficult to make a list of physical handicaps that definitely disqualify a potential driver.

Amputations, poor vision, defective hearing and certain crippling diseases are the most common examples of permanent physical handicaps.

WHAT IS GOOD DRIVING VISION?

Surely, vision is the least understood of these physical handicaps to safe driving. Many visual defects already are recognized as hazards to safe driving and others probably will be added as testing continues.

Most people either have normal 20/20 vision, or their vision can be corrected to about that level. This merely measures the ability to read certain sized letters at a distance of 20 feet. Unfortunately, this is not the only quality of good eyesight necessary for safe driving.

Depth Perception

Depth perception is the ability to judge the relative distance of two objects. (In driving, they may be moving or stationary objects.) A driver who misjudges and tries to pass when there isn't enough time is likely to cause a wreck. In heavy traffic, it is almost as dangerous to misjudge the other way and stay back when there is plenty of time to pass. Lack of depth perception is to blame for many accidents, some with an "unknown" cause. Often it is mistaken for "dare-devil" driving in the first case and overly conservative driving in the last one. Depth perception ability decreases as the distance increases.
This fact becomes more important at high speed.

Field of Vision

A wide field of vision indicates that a driver can see over a wide territory on both sides while looking straight ahead. Obviously, this is very important at crossroads, railroad crossings, when passing or being passed and in numerous other driving situations. Persons who can't see well to the sides are said to have "tunnel" vision.

Physical checks of drivers indicate that many have a restricted field of vision and have been driving with this handicap for years without realizing it.

Night Vision

Night vision varies greatly with different drivers. The difference may be caused by the immediate effect of strong light as well as the ability of some eyes to recover after looking at strong lights. Vitamin A sometimes helps correct this trouble. When meeting another car, it is important to dim your headlights and look at the right-hand side of the road instead of looking at the approaching car's headlights. This is good advice regardless of the quality of your night vision or the amount of glare from the other fellow's headlights.

Color Blindness

Is the red stop light at the top or bottom of a normal traffic signal light? Usually the red light is at the top, the amber or caution light in the middle and the green or go light at the bottom. For the average person, this isn't too important. For a driver who can't tell the difference between red and green, it may be very important. However, even most of these drivers are able to tell "stop" from "go" by the difference in light intensity. People with other phases of color blindness are handicapped even less in normal driving conditions. In fact, according to the records, color blindness seldom has anything to do with traffic accidents.

Near and Far Sightedness

Both near and far sightedness get drivers into trouble
unless these conditions are corrected. Such drivers not only misjudge distances but often have trouble reading signs that are easily readable by drivers with normal vision.

ALERTNESS

Age

Age dulls alertness, but the amount differs greatly with individuals. Probably the most important need is to recognize and admit driving limitations as they are affected by age. In this way, many people can drive rather safely after they have lost much of the alertness that makes good driving easier.

Reaction Time

This may be influenced by age, but some people naturally react more quickly than others of the same age. In some simple reactions, this speed of movement is likely to be most important. In complicated driving situations, speed in "sizing-up" the situation and deciding what to do may be more important than in actually applying the brake or turning the steering wheel. Regardless of how important this last step is, it should not be taken until the best possible decision is made. That's why drivers should be mentally and physically alert, and, through study and experience, have a pretty good idea of what to do when emergencies do occur.

Drivers who do these things will notice dangerous situations sooner, will make correct decisions quicker and will react in a shorter time than others who finally act just as quickly but who take longer getting ready to act. Normal reaction time is about three-fourths of a second. A delay of only one-fourth of a second at 60 m.p.h. means the car will travel 22 more feet before the brakes are applied.

Fatigue

Fatigue tends to make any driver a poorer driver. Of course, some become tired sooner than others, and some may be more tired than they realize. Fatigue may slow down re-
action time, result in wrong decisions or cause a driver to go to sleep at the wheel. Too many drivers seem to think that sleep is the only dangerous phase of driver fatigue. Actually, a slower reaction or wrong decision can produce the same result.

Carbon Monoxide

Although fatigue can be corrected by proper rest, that isn’t the cure for a different drowsy condition caused by carbon monoxide fumes. This driving hazard apparently occurs much more often than most of us realize. We only hear about extreme cases where death results directly from poisoning, but it is suspected that many unexplained accidents have been caused by the dulling effect of carbon monoxide fumes. Here are some steps to prevent damage from this deadly gas which has no color, taste or no odor.

1. Keep manifold and muffler in good condition.
2. Make sure there are no floor cracks or other openings for seepage.
3. Avoid following closely behind cars, trucks, buses.
4. When sitting in parked cars, such as at a drive-in movie, turn off the motor.
5. Fresh air will prevent carbon monoxide damage and will help cure many cases.

Highway Hypnosis

Highway hypnosis is being listed as the cause of more and more accidents, especially on our super-highways. The Pennsylvania Turnpike provides a good example. It has many safety features, and the accident rate is low. However, strange as it may seem, running into the rear of another vehicle is still a leading cause of serious accidents on this super-highway. Highway hypnosis seems to be one of the reasons. Monotony is most important factor, and drivers must be constantly on guard.

Apparently there is a definite difference between highway hypnosis and sleepiness, although many of the same tricks help prevent both troubles. These preventive measures are many and varied. Some will work better for one person than they will for another.
The danger stage of sleepiness is often difficult to detect. Highway hypnosis may give even less warning. That's why drivers should realize what it is and under what conditions it is most likely to occur. Only then can they be prepared to prevent it.

One good way to help overcome drowsiness or help prevent highway hypnosis is to stop the car and walk around a little while. Although this surely will help make a driver more alert, some special attention is usually needed to rest and relax the eyes. Dr. Leo Manas of the Illinois College of Optometry offers the following suggestions for improving eye efficiency.

1. When drivers shut their eyes for a moment's rest, the eyes should be revolved in a large circle, five times clockwise and five times counter clockwise.

2. Rest the eyes by holding a finger at reading distance (approximately 13 inches) while looking at (for example) the radiator ornament. One ornament and two fingers will be seen. Now look at the finger. Two ornaments and one finger will be seen. Alternate back and forth a few times.

3. Get driver's vision "evaluated" once a year. Dr. Manas makes quite a distinction between testing the eyes and evaluating vision.

Effect of Sleeping Pills

A drug-like effect may be produced in some cases when drivers take pills to keep awake. This means that the results may be exactly opposite from those intended.

**DRIVER ATTITUDE**

Physical handicaps affect some drivers permanently. Lack of alertness affects most of us occasionally, from one cause or another. Neither of these account for nearly as many accidents as just plain "poor driver attitude." Almost everyone is guilty at one time or another, and some drivers seem to thrive on it.

*For a more complete discussion on this subject, see Limeo FS-32, "Driver Attitudes."
It's true that poor attitude is indicated whenever someone tries to drive when he is not alert or when a physical handicap prevents him from driving safely. From this viewpoint, attitudes are a part of most of the things that make a good driver. However, there are some more direct ways in which attitudes affect our driving.

Courteous, honesty, sincerity, understanding, selflessness and common sense are leading attitudes necessary for safe and sane driving. Opposite attitudes are so often present just before an accident occurs.

"Other drivers" do not have a monopoly on dangerous attitudes, although their excuses may not sound as logical to us. However, when we drive, just minding our own business isn't enough. Every driver must also look out for "the other fellow." This is an important part of defensive driving. It is becoming more important simply because there are many more "other fellows" involved in modern traffic. We can never be sure of their ability to drive or their attitude toward driving. Either or both may be worse than our own.

**SUMMARY**

Safe drivers must be physically and mentally capable of driving a car. It may be even more important to use our ability, sincerely first, in really learning how to drive, and next, in really driving to the very best of our ability at all times.

Physically, modern cars are much easier to operate than older models. Self-starters and push-button windshield wipers have been with us so long that many people don't realize that other methods ever existed. Automatic transmissions, power steering and power brakes were strange words a few years ago.

Emotionally, modern driving requires greater stability than was ever before necessary. There is more congestion, more regulations, and greater speed than in the past. Super-highways have improved some of these problems. However, the average driver now has more chance to "mess-up" traffic than in previous years.

Some present drivers should not be driving and all drivers should constantly improve their driving. Our traffic safety problem will be much closer to a solution if everyone (1) realizes what it takes to be a good driver, and (2) either quits if not physically or emotionally qualified, or learns to drive to the best of his ability at all times.