

Risk Control Bulletin

Pass or Not to Pass

RISK CONTROL



If all drivers are real professionals, you would have little to worry about as they go through the most critical maneuver in highway driving – the operation of passing another vehicle.

But how many drivers really know the recommended way to pass another vehicle on the road? How many still follow the technique of an earlier day – sneaking up behind the vehicle ahead, darting out into the passing lane, and scrambling to get past and crowd back in just ahead of the other vehicle?

When you are up close to the lead vehicle, how can you know the passing lane is clear of oncoming traffic? If you pull out beside the lead vehicle and face an oncoming car, it may mean a fatal, head-on crash – or just a hair rising scare, if you're lucky.

The amateur drivers may think the extra horses under the hood of today's engines could have been put there so that they could enjoy higher speed. But the pros know that reserve power is for emergencies, such as passing, and they use it accordingly.

The expert drivers do not wait and sneak up behind a slow moving vehicle to start their passing maneuver. They start preparing as soon as they decide that passing is necessary. The knowledgeable driver will never fudge on their "space cushion" (one vehicle length for every 10 miles of speed), when preparing to move around other vehicles.

As you get ready to pass, make sure your passing zone is clear by checking your rear view mirrors and turning your head to check your blind spots. You need about three-quarters of a mile for passing if the lead vehicle is moving at normal speed. If the way is clear, switch on the turn signal and move over all the way into the passing lane. Continue to accelerate until well past the other vehicle and you can see all of it in your rear view mirror. Then, use your right turn signal and move back into your lane.

Move quickly to get around traffic and get back into your lane as soon as possible.

Once back into your lane continue at slightly higher speed so as not to annoy the driver you just passed. Do not exceed the posted speed limit, or the reasonable limit dictated by conditions.

And speaking of conditions, there are many situations where driving performance separates the good drivers from the poor. If the pavement is slippery from ice, snow or rain, the better driver has already chosen the safe speed and may not wish to try passing.

There are times, though, when a slow moving vehicle may make it necessary to pass. In such cases, weigh the probability of poor traction against the need for passing, and conduct maneuvers accordingly. In some cases, more than three-quarters of a mile to get safely by is needed; pass only when the way is clear.

During a heavy rain, the rate of precipitation may be a factor in judgment of when and where to pass. Driving at high speed in water too deep may cause hydroplaning of tires. That's when you lose steering traction completely – so wait for a spot where water in the passing lane has drained off or blown off more completely.

A curtain of spray from the other vehicle's tires could cut off vision.

Good vehicle operators used to win the plaudits of other motorists by giving a "come on" signal when passing was possible, but too many ill-advised signals, however well meant, got the passer into trouble when the signal giver failed to see danger ahead. If the experts respond to such signals, they still know they are responsible for their own driving and will continue to allow themselves plenty of room for passing.



There are three circumstances when the better drivers choose not to pass:

- When the road has a high crown;
- When the road surface is bumpy;
- When they can't see a clear road ahead for more than three-quarters of a mile.

The good drivers know that with modern, powerful engines, they don't have to grab the first passing break that comes along. They pick the time and place that leave control in their hands.