

Water.....

Indeed very many summertime car crashes are caused by drivers not appreciating that the most dangerous road surfaces on which they may be required to practise their skid control are not in the winter. They are in the summer, after long hot and dry spells; and immediately following short sharp spells of heavy rain or prolonged showers.

The term 'aquaplaning' – eloquently described so often as '**the brakes just stopped working and I seemed to be flying along the road**' – effectively means just that. Even with a new car, with good tyre tread, on a wet surface, at speeds only a fraction over 30 mph, a wedge of water can build up in front of the wheels and create a friction free zone under the tyre tread.

In summer the sun heats the road surface; tiny bits of rubber from tyres mix with droplets of oil and grease to form nice sticky rubbery solutions filling in the gaps in the tarmac that normally create a tyre gripping surface. Rubber tyres are now running on 'rubbery' roads. They only need some lubrication to provide a skidpan surface.

Water is rubber's natural lubricant and a sudden shower instantly creates a very thin film between the tyres and the road surface, breaking the grip. In effect this turns the road into an instant skidpan; as drivers who need to brake or steer in a hurry 'suddenly' find out to their cost.



Suddenly.....

Nothing on the road ever happens suddenly. It only appears to be 'sudden' to those drivers who fail to read the road far enough ahead to appreciate what will be happening to them and other road users in the next five, ten and fifteen seconds time. As you will have heard so many times, at training meetings in every aspect of business, 'Failing to plan is planning to fail'. This applies just as much to driving as everything else, except that lives and limbs are in danger as well as sales and production targets. Safe driving in the summer is just as important as at any other time of the year; but the dangers can be much greater because drivers can easily be lulled into false senses of security.

The sun was shining, the birds were singing and all was well with the world – until.... Until, that is, someone in front braked hard and stopped suddenly – except to those safe, confident, defensive drivers who were planning on that possibility occurring and were able to cope with the situation in perfect safety.

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Hints and Tips On Safe Summer Driving

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Suddenly it is Summer again

The sun is shining (well somewhere, even if not here); the birds are singing; trees are blooming; and Fleet or HR or H&S Managers *and* company insurers are busier than ever, reading the latest accident forms from their company drivers. If only they'd been more careful.....

But firstly, in the heat of summer, or in a torrential summer downpour, the last thing any driver needs is to be stressed ... so let's revisit a few hints for stress-free driving.....

1 Stay alert

Even the best driver can make mistakes if tired. Try and get a good night's sleep, especially before long journeys, and stop for at least 15 minutes every two hours and take your time. You can always call ahead if you're running late.

2 Learn to communicate

Clear communication with other drivers is essential to both your safety and theirs. Make friendly eye contact, avoid driving in blind spots and in conditions of poor visibility remember to use the correct lights.

3 Revisit your Highway Code

Avoiding problems is so much easier if you know what they are in the first place! Quick reactions won't stop you having an accident – spotting and responding to problems ahead in plenty of time will.

4 Plan ahead

A little planning can really reduce stress. Work out the best route to travel and always try to take familiar roads.

5 Keep your car in check

Breaking down is stressful and 50% of breakdowns are the result of poor motor maintenance. Give your car a weekly once-over—remember FLOWERS—and check in for regular

servicing and MOTs.

6 Put yourself in their shoes

Don't show frustration by making gestures to other drivers who make mistakes – it could be you on the receiving end! Try to stay calm and avoid provoking or fuelling road rage, which could cause unintended damage.

7 Exercise some Etiquette

When traffic is merging, let one car in, then go yourself. Not only is this polite, it will make you more confident in your decisions and reactions. Remember you should be driving like you own the car, not the road!

8 Use driving to de-stress

Using your car journey to make the most of precious quiet time alone can actually leave you feeling more serene when you get to the other end.



9 Keep it Fresh

Try to circulate as much fresh air as possible through your car and take deep breaths. Shallow breathing restricts the flow of oxygen and can heighten feelings of panic and stress, as can a stuffy or uncomfortable

atmosphere.

10 Follow the Beat

Choose music that has similar bpm (beats per minute) to your heart rate – about 60bpm is best. Medical research shows this is the optimum beat to help you relax, de-stress and chill out. In other words, lose the banging techno!

So—now you're driving unstressed, but what about the other factors that come into play...

Punctures.

High summer temperatures heat up tyres and aggravate any existing damage to the rubber. Under-inflation compounds this, causing friction and added heat which can prove too much for weak spots, causing punctures and blow-outs.

Check your handbook for the correct tyre inflation pressures, especially when towing—and don't forget to check the tyres on your trailer as well.

Hayfever

If you're doing 70mph and sneeze you lose your vision for as much as 100 metres. Have a 'fit' of, say eight sneezes in a row, and you've just travelled 'blind' for nearly half a mile!

Hayfever is particularly bad in the summer but accidents could be minimised if sufferers take action.

- Only take medication which doesn't cause drowsiness
- Get someone else to drive if you are having a particularly bad hayfever day
- Enquire about pollen filters, if available for your make of car
- Keep a box of tissues on or near the dashboard for easy access
- Slow down and drop back if you're about to sneeze
- Wear sunglasses to block out bright sunlight
- Close windows and air vents to reduce pollen grains in the car

