freeway driving

NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

bureau of
public information

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FREEWAY DRIVING IS SAFER . . . BUT —

There is a growing feeling among motor vehicle officials that driving license applicants should be required to demonstrate their ability to drive on freeways as well as city streets. Why? Studies show an entirely new set of skills is needed to drive on high-speed freeways.

Freeways are far safer to drive on than conventional roads and streets. Accident statistics through the years have borne that out. But freeways are relatively new and freeway driving is different. The plain fact is that many people do not know how to drive on them. We hope the following suggestions will prove helpful.

PLANNING THE TRIP

Before starting on a trip that requires much freeway driving be sure all mechanical and electrical equipment is in good working order. You should do this as a matter of course on any trip. Many freeways, however, have no service stations or garages. (They will be found only off the freeways at interchanges.)

Be sure to study your road map in advance, and know the route you will be taking. Freeways often bypass cities, so it is well to plan ahead your stops for food, fuel, and lodging. Be familiar with more than one name used to identify your destination.

Signs on the freeways cannot possibly include names of all the localities. They generally include only the most important to the greatest number of motorists. Because route numbers will become more important to you in determining your proper exit, be sure to be familiar with the exit number you plan to take. Then, fasten your seat belt and you're ready to start a safe pleasant freeway journey.

ENTERING THE FREEWAY

Entering the freeway can be the most dangerous period during your trip. But it is only as dangerous as you make it. When using the "on ramp" or approach to the freeway, don't stop. Drive along the acceleration lane until you have gained speed to enter a gap in the closest traffic lane and blend your speed to the traffic flow. Remember, should you stop in the ramp or acceleration lane there are probably other motorists moving up behind you, also looking back for a gap in traffic, and you are more than likely to cause a rear-end collision.

Exiting the freeway presents the same problem in reverse. Far in advance of your planned exit start maneuvering toward the outside lane. (Exit numbers are placed well in advance to allow for this.) Here again we want to emphasize the importance of knowing your exit number.

Keep up normal speed until you reach the deceleration lane. But if you miss it **don't** stop or back up; proceed to the next exit or to a rest area and study your map for the best way to get back to your destination. A stopped vehicle or one backing up on a high-speed freeway is an almost certain invitation to the hospital, cemetery or, at best, a traffic court.

EN ROUTE

Always maintain your speed according to the posted limit or the safe speed as conditions warrant. Blend your speed to the normal flow of traffic. Remember on a high-speed freeway it is often the slow driver who is the greatest safety hazard. For example, consider the driving going 35 m.p.h. in a stream of vehicles moving at 60 m.p.h. Relatively speaking he is driving 25 m.p.h. directly against the flow of traffic in his own lane. But this is not intended to invite the motorists to reckless high speed. Again, observe the speed regulations and always adjust your speed for varying driving conditions.

Make all your lane changes gradually, always using your turn signals when making the change. And signal well in advance of your intended change. A sudden decision to move into another lane with an equally sudden flick of the turn signals allows no time for others to react properly, often with crashing results.

DISABLED VEHICLES

Watch for disabled or stopped vehicles. While their occupants may feel safe wherever they may be parked, they actually are a major cause of freeway accidents. If you become disabled pull over on the shoulder as far as possible. If you need assistance, raise the hood of your car and tie a white handkerchief or rag to the door handle. At night leave your dome light or parking lights on. By all means, **don't** leave your vehicle unattended. The freeways are regularly patrolled, and it's usually only a matter of minutes before help will arrive.

TAILGATING

On highways of freeway design, where there is no conflict of opposing traffic, a major safety hazard is the rear-end collision.

Rear-end collisions in combination with same-direction side swipes, now account for 46% of all daytime accidents in the United States. New

Jersey and Pennsylvania Turnpike officials report that rear-end collisions are far and away their leading accident type. The National Safety Council reports that tailgating (following too closely) accounts for 13% of all highway smashups. Most of these accidents could be avoided if drivers maintained a proper spacing on high-speed routes.

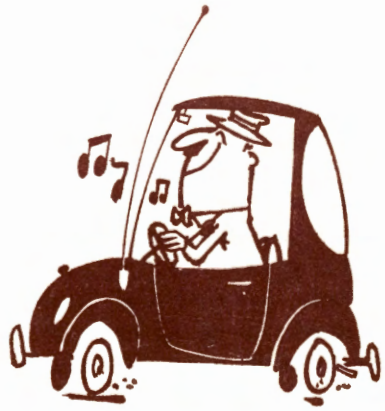
SAFE BRAKING DISTANCE

The old rule of thumb that you should stay one car length (approximately 17 feet) behind the car ahead for every ten miles per hour of speed is not enough. That would mean at 65 m.p.h. you would have a spacing of 110 feet. The National Safety Council recommends 2½ car lengths spacing for every 10 miles of speed in good weather, about the distance of a football field, at 65 m.p.h., and about double that in bad weather.

Why do you need all this distance? Because, despite what you may have heard, today's cars won't stop on a dime. Annual tests on new cars repeatedly have shown the best any car has done coming to a stop from 65 m.p.h is 160 feet after the brakes were applied. The average stopping distance of 52 makes and models was 181.8 feet. Moreover, you will not be able to stop that fast on the highways. There is always a delay called perception and reaction time. It takes ¾ of a second if you are average, to perceive there is trouble ahead, and about the same amount of time to remove your foot from the accelerator and onto the brake pedal. Thus at high-speed, say 65 m.p.h., you will have gone about eight car lengths before your brakes even begin to take hold.

FREEWAY HYPNOSIS

After driving for any length of time on a freeway it's easy to become hypnotized by your speed and the landscape sweeping by. You become drowsy, scarcely aware of what's going on around you. This is the time to begin freeway hypnosis antidotes; shift your posture, let your eyes jump briefly to the scenes around, sing, play the radio, stop at a rest area or get off the freeway for a coffee break.



Long periods of nighttime freeway driving require special care. During the day there is much to see, your eyes can roam briefly. But at night when there is not much to see and perhaps you are getting tired, then trouble begins. Your eyes, particularly when over-used on a long drive can become fatigued by the strain of picking a focal point on a monotonous ribbon of roadway unwinding out of the darkness. After a few hours, many drivers experience hallucinations. This Lorelei of the highway causes drivers to swerve from objects that are not there or crash into bridge abutments they didn't see. So while driving at night, it is more than ever important to stop often for a rest or coffee break.

AFTER THE FREEWAY

Remember when you leave the freeway you must make a rapid speed adjustment. You have probably been driving for a long time on a route geared for high-speed and you have become accustomed to this speed. Now, suddenly you are on a road or street where speed limits, of necessity, are drastically reduced; where traffic conflicts multiply. You must govern your speed accordingly and the transition is difficult. But the adjustment must be made or the final leg of your trip may end in disaster. Freeways are safer . . . but — how much safer depends on how you drive on them.

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THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY