

Safe Driving Habits

Have you heard of the three C's - *car*, *course*, and *competition*? Should you talk to a professional driver, that is race not limo, you would be amazed at how much is determined before the race even starts. The keys to winning are preparation, awareness, and precision. A good driver works hard to eliminate risk.

- Every driver knows his *car*. Like a pilot doing a pre-flight walk-around, a race driver will know everything about how his car will perform. The pit crew will double-check all systems. The suspension will be tuned to the track. Any weaknesses found during a previous race will be corrected.
- A driver will know the *course* by heart. A driving strategy taking into account every curve, every rise, the width of each shoulder will be committed to memory as well as the current track conditions.
- Finally, a good driver will know the characteristics of the *competition* and will adopt the appropriate tactics such as pacing, passing, or slipstreaming to adjust for their strengths and weaknesses.

A performance car owner can benefit adopting a similarly disciplined driving approach. Know your *car* and its performance characteristics intimately. Get time on a track to push the envelope in a controlled environment. Familiarize yourself with acceleration, braking, and cornering characteristics you might not normally experience. Run a slalom course. Develop confidence on a skid pad. Get comfortable enough that your vehicle becomes an extension of your reflexes.

Develop your own pre-trip checklist. Visibility is top priority. Can you see and be seen? Are all of your headlamps working and clean? Do your wiper blades need replacement? Have you applied a fresh coat of Rain-X?

Tire condition is also critical for trip safety. Are they properly inflated? Are the tread wear indicators showing? Have you lost any wheel balance weights? Are there any pebbles caught in the tread? Have you taken the time to mount/remove snow tires as seasonally appropriate? Are your tires properly speed rated? If tread wear is uneven, you should have the wheel alignment checked.

Once vehicle factors are addressed, tackle the route you have planned. How well do you know the *course* for your trip? Have you driven it before? Where are danger zones, uncontrolled entries, or blind spots? Do you know the spots where troopers lurk? Plan in advance your lanes for easy entering, merging and exiting. Challenge yourself to set up your turns. Take a tip from race drivers. Keep your eyes on the furthest stretch of road you can see. By focusing on the horizon, you get more time to react and can smoothly dial in your steering and nuance your pedal actions.

Adjust your driving style to current daylight and weather conditions. Avoid speeding in fog or snow. Don't drive ahead of your headlights at night. Exercise caution morning and afternoon for sun glare. In rain or snow, controlled braking as you start out, will dry off your disc brakes and let you test stopping distances. When the thermometer drops remember the danger of glare or "black" ice. Remember traction control not a magic wand and never pump the brakes when your car is equipped with ABS.

Only in car commercials do you get the road to yourself. So while you don't have direct driver *competition*, you count on unruly traffic on your travels and must consider the surrounding driver environment. Stay alert to the drivers and their cars that share your road. A driver driving a battered car is both more likely to have already been in accidents and more likely to take excessive risks at your expense. Trucks can lose contents or kick up stones to your windscreen.

Avoid drivers who are most likely to create problems. The very old and the very young have statistically more accidents. Is a driver on the phone? Applying makeup? Are they driving too fast or erratically? Do they fail to signal? Do they tailgate or try to leapfrog? Be patient, steer clear, and keep your distance. By remembering the three C's you will easily have more fun while safely driving your Jaguar.