

Newbury Group of Advanced Motorists

Advanced Driving Articles

5 – Anticipation – Asking ‘What If?’

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This time we will concentrate on another of the skills of advanced driving – that of Anticipation.

Anticipation means expecting something to happen. In advanced driving, it means reading the road and the behaviour of other traffic so that you are prepared for any eventuality. It can often involve ‘observation links’ – that is deciding what might be going to happen from what you can see, hear, and smell. One example is noticing bus stops along the road side: it’s not rocket science to move from that to expecting to encounter a bus, possibly stopped to pick up passengers just around the next blind bend. Similarly, if you see dustbins at the pavement edge you might expect to come across a dustbin lorry, and if you smell newly-mown grass you should prepare for a tractor moving slowly along the edge of the road.

A good way to use this anticipation skill is to ask ‘What If?’ every time you encounter a driving hazard. ‘What if someone in this parked vehicle opens its door just as I am passing it?’ ‘What if that pedestrian suddenly decides to step off the pavement as I approach?’ ‘What if there is a fallen tree, or a stationary vehicle, or even a child, in the road just round this blind corner?’ Then, of course, you need to adjust your driving so you can cope with the situation that you have just invented – giving the parked vehicle enough clearance as you pass it, slowing down and covering the brake as you approach the pedestrian, approaching the blind corner at such a speed that you can stop in the distance you can see to be clear, and so on.

Motor accident insurance claims often involve the word ‘suddenly’: ‘Suddenly, a car shot out of the junction...’, ‘Suddenly, a large black dog jumped out and I had to swerve to avoid it...’ If you continually ask ‘What if?’ and then act on it, you are very unlikely ever to be surprised in your driving and you will never experience a ‘suddenly...’ situation. In this way, you will continually assess possible hazards and revise your driving plan to take account of them – that is the mark of a true advanced driver.

If you want to know more, visit the Newbury Group of Advanced Motorists website at www.niam.org.uk, or contact the Group Secretary, Dick Bird, by e-mail on secretary@niam.org.uk or by telephone on 07717 366500.