

Hi

How **HOT** buys
can be **COOL** buys

Are you up on
Breakdowns?

Checks are
most definitely in

shoes
what's **IN** what's **OUT**

checks are in

Your car is probably
the most complicated
machine you own



Routine car check-ups can be as painless or as painful as you make them - the choice is up to you.

- Do it yourself, save money and build confidence
- Have someone else do it for you and save time, but pay money
- Don't do anything at all and risk breaking down or worse!

If you're going to do the checks yourself remember the golden rule - always find a safe place to carry out your car checks, or if you prefer, take your car to a reputable garage, preferably one that's been recommended to you, to have the checks done. Remember, never undertake a journey when you know there's a problem - make sure you resolve it before you set out. If the worst does happen, don't attempt maintenance at the side of the road, especially not on the hard shoulder of a motorway. Call your rescue service from your mobile, or wait for assistance from the Highways Agency Traffic Officers.

If you haven't carried out any of the routine checks on your car before, your first stop should be the owners' manual. Your vehicle is probably the most complicated machine you own; learning the details about its parts, how it runs and when to perform routine maintenance not only gives you a great sense of safety and security, but also helps to cut down on costly breakdowns. So you're never overtaken by anything unexpected!

Looking good with your POWDER check

Petrol - Red isn't your colour

Many motorists have been caught out trying to run on red and this can be particularly hazardous if you're caught out on a motorway! Unless you plan every journey, you never know where the next petrol station is going to be. Unlucky enough to be stuck in traffic? Well that really guzzles the gas. So never drain every last drop and make sure you fill up regularly.

But remember, don't overfill your tank either as leaking fuel on road surfaces can be especially dangerous for motorcyclists. So stop fuelling up after the first click of the nozzle.

Oil - Get slick

Oil is the absolute lifeblood of your car. If your engine doesn't have the right amount of oil you could seriously damage it, perhaps so badly you could end up needing a new one. Check the oil level about once every two weeks. Always do this when the car is on a level surface and

the engine is cold. An engine oil dipstick can usually be found somewhere on the side of the engine. Check your owners' manual if you have trouble finding it. Pull it out, wipe it clean with a cloth or paper towel, reinsert it all the way, and pull it out again for the check. If the oil is between the two marks it's OK. Return the dipstick and make sure it's fully sealed.

If the level is at the lower mark, remove the oil filler cap. You'll usually find it on top of the engine - it'll be clearly marked - and add fresh oil gradually. Make an effort to take a look at your owners' manual to see exactly what the cap looks like and precisely where to find it. Use the markings on the oil container as a guide as to how much has been added. Wait about thirty seconds for the oil to settle before checking the level again. If it's between the two marks then the job's done. Just wipe the oil from the dipstick tube and return the dipstick. Make sure that you replace and fully tighten the filler cap. As you're wiping the dipstick take a moment to check the colour of the oil. It should be a pale brown or yellow and

clear. If it's very dark brown or black, then it's time for an oil and filter change, and that's a different job!

Water - Advice that's easy to swallow

Look for the reservoir cap and check for screen wash. You can just use water, but commercial wiper fluid is better at keeping your windscreen clear; and it's cheap. Pour enough fluid into the reservoir to fill it and that's it. Simple! You should also make sure that you use the washer fluid that's right for the time of year.

Overheating can be a problem so you need to make sure that your coolant levels are always correct. To check this - take a look at the level from the expansion tank - it should be on or near maximum. When temperatures start to drop, you need to start thinking ahead about an anti-icing fluid. Don't wait until the snow arrives.

Driving position - Are you sitting comfortably?

The correct seating position helps you stay alert when driving. Most car seats are



designed by men, so women may need to re-adjust their seat to find the correct seating position. The following eight tips should help you find this.

Seat reach

Make sure that you adjust your seat so that you can fully depress the clutch pedal with a slight bend in the knee and your legs are comfortably supported by the seat.

Seat height

Adjust the height so that you can see and read the instruments easily on the dashboard.

Seat base

Sit with your back fully against the seat. Simulate driving actions and adjust the base angle if any slippage down the seat occurs. The angle between the base and seat back should be reduced until the legs receive maximum support without affecting the operation of the pedals.



Seat back

Recline the seat until your shoulders and upper back rest comfortably and the arms are slightly bent when the steering wheel is held in the ten-to-two position - the whole length of the spine should be supported.

Lumbar support

If you have lumbar support then make sure you slacken it off completely. The level of support should only be increased if a lack of lumbar support is felt and even then, should only be increased until a gentle, even pressure is felt in the back. The steering column should be adjusted so that hands are resting a little lower than the shoulders when in the normal driving position.

Head restraint

The base of the head restraint should be level with the skull where it meets the neck. It should be about one inch from the head while you are driving, and your eyes should be approximately halfway up the head restraint to make sure the restraint offers the best protection in the event of an accident.

Seatbelt

The adjuster should be moved until a firm pressure is felt over the top of the shoulder. The pressure should not be excessive, and there should not be any gap between the belt and the front of the shoulder. The adjuster should not be lower than the height of the shoulder. The belt should have no twists and should be securely fixed in the correct retainer.

Once you have adjusted your seat correctly, your hands should fall naturally on the steering wheel with just a slight bend in the arms. If the wheel is too high and far away from you, tension will build up in your shoulders and upper back. If it is too low and close to you, the wheel may be touching your legs, which will reduce your ability to turn it freely, so putting strain on the wrists and the muscles of the upper back and putting your legs at risk in a crash.

Even though the position is safer, you may need to persevere with the new posture until your muscles adapt to this position.

It is the law to make sure that any children travelling with you use the right type of

restraint. It used to be acceptable to simply use an adult belt once a child had outgrown his or her child seat. Now they need to have the seat or booster seat appropriate for their age and size to make sure that they are kept safe. Remember children love mimicking adults, so make sure that you lead by example and always wear yours!

Small children need the protection that baby seats and child seats are designed to provide. Children who have grown out of child seats still need to use booster seats and booster cushions. It is estimated that these changes could prevent over 2000 child deaths or injuries each year.

For more detailed information on:-

- The law relating to child car seats
- The most appropriate child car restraint for your child and
- How to persuade your child to use a child car seat/booster

Log on to www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk

Interior rear-view mirror - Reflecting well on you

When positioned correctly, your rear windscreen should be framed in your rear-view mirror with a slight bias to the right. The driver should see their left ear and the side of their head in the bottom right corner. Be sure the day/night switch found on most rear-view mirrors is in the day position during daytime operation. The night setting reduces the headlight glare from cars behind you and improves your visibility.

Wing mirrors - Winging it

Positioning of wing mirrors is vital if you are to have an unrestricted view of the road from your car. To check your wing mirrors from the driver's side simply place the side of your head against the window, then adjust the mirror until the side of your vehicle comes into view.

For the passenger's side mirror: while sitting in the driver's seat, lean to the left so that your head is in the car's centreline. Adjust the mirror until the side of your vehicle comes into view.

Exterior mirrors give you a wider field of vision and should be used in conjunction with the interior mirror. Ideally you should see clearly down each side of the vehicle without adjusting your seating position.





Clean up your act

It doesn't just look bad, dirty windows and headlamps can actually affect your safety. Your headlights should be clean and properly aimed. Dirty headlamps can drastically reduce how well you can see the road when you're driving - if you can't see something on or alongside the road, you can't avoid it. Make sure you have good visibility through all windows. Keep your car clean, if for no other reason than safety. And make sure that you keep your number plate clean - it's the law!

Electrics - Light up your life

Modern vehicles can have a huge number of warning lights. Sometimes, the behaviour of a warning light - a flashing 'check engine light' versus a steady one - may indicate two entirely different issues. It's important to understand each warning light's purpose and what to do if they light up or flash. Find out today by taking a good look at your owners' manual.

Lights...and action

Lights and electrics should be checked. It doesn't take long and is best done after dark or with a friend. Start your car, put it in neutral and engage the hand brake. Turn the headlights full on. Open both doors (don't get locked out) and check your lights as follows:

- Two operating headlamps
- Left and right side lights
- Left and right rear lights

Switch to high beams and check for two operating headlamps again. If either

headlight is out - book straight into the garage for a replacement or you will be stopped by the police. Turn your headlights off and check your sidelights are working. Switch on your left turn indicator. Confirm both front and rear left indicator lights are flashing. Do the same for the right indicator light. Turn the lights completely off. Put the car in reverse and check in the mirror for the white reverse lights. Finally, put the car back in neutral and step on the brake pedal. Check the red brake lights come on.

Rubber - Bouncing back

In 2007, in the UK, the legal limit for minimum depth of the tread on your tyres is 1.6 mm, across the central ¾ of the tread going around the complete circumference of the tyre. Lack of tread can affect the handling of your car and significantly increase your stopping distance because of reduced grip on the road.

If your tyre treads drop below this level you could face a penalty of up to three points on your licence and £2500 per tyre. 'Bald' tyres will also mean your car fails its MOT test and mean you can't stop if you need to.

Tyres are made with tread wear indicators in the grooves along the tread to help drivers see when their tyres are nearing the legal limit. Although the legal limit is 1.6mm, most motor safety organisations suggest that the tyres should be replaced when the tread depth reaches 3mm.

Tyres - Under pressure

Check the air pressure in your car's tyres. Under-inflated tyres can cause tyre failure or flats. Under-inflated tyres increase CO2 emissions and decrease fuel economy by as much as ten per cent, hitting you in the pocket.

Tyre pressure is measured in pounds per square inch (psi), and the right levels for your car will be listed in your owner's manual. Remember, these recommended pressure figures are for cold tyres, so for an accurate reading always check them when your tyres are completely cold. If the amount on the pressure gauge is below the recommended psi, inflate the tyre on a garage forecourt until the right amount is shown. Even better, invest in a pressure gauge and foot pump costing around £20. If you accidentally put too much air in, depress the pin at the centre of the valve

to release some. Don't forget to check the pressure of your spare tyre. If any tyre is deflating regularly it is a good idea to get it checked at a garage.

While we're on the subject of rubber, when was the last time you checked your windscreen wipers? They can be your best friend during bad weather. Don't wait until they smear rather than clear. High visibility, especially in adverse weather conditions, is essential if you want to stay safe on the road.

And just to be on the safe side...

Get into the habit of routinely checking your vehicle's vital fluids. It can prove to be a real timesaver as well as literally a lifesaver! The fluid levels you should be checking include your radiator coolant, power-steering fluid, brake fluid and automatic transmission fluid. The owner's manual provides details about fluid levels and recommended maintenance. If you feel there's a problem or you are not certain, just ask at your local garage. Again, ask around for a recommendation.

And remember, if you're planning a long journey, it's always worth booking your car in for a service beforehand.

What's in a name?

Many of today's vehicles come with a healthy dose of alphabet soup: ABS, TCS, ESP, etc. Believe it or not, these letters represent a computer-controlled function that enhances the driving experience. So here's a quick run-through of the latest automotive terminology:

- ABS (anti-lock braking system) is a computerised system that prevents wheel lock-up and skidding during braking. If your ABS light comes on and stays on, you should take your car to a mechanic for inspection because there could be a problem with the system.
- TCS (traction control system), helps eliminate wheel spin during acceleration.
- ESP could mean an electronic stability program is part of your car's features.

Is there no end to the acronyms those technical boys bandy about? If you're really not sure, don't worry. It's not important unless it's associated with your car, and you can always look in your trusty owner's manual to find out what it means, so you can flash the acronyms with the best of them!

Getting to grips with tyre changes

- Check you have a spare tyre. Most new cars do, however some old vehicles or small new vehicles such as Smart cars don't carry a spare.
- Make sure you know where your spare tyre is kept in the car and can get to it if you need to. Most spares are found in the boot, under the bonnet, or underneath the car.
- Regularly check the pressure and that the jack and wheel brace are present and serviceable.
- If you have lockable wheel nuts, check you have the unlocking device handy.

Changing the tyre

If your car gets a puncture and you're away from home on the move, the first priority is to get it - and you - to a safe place. Consider calling a breakdown rescue service, particularly if on a busy or poorly lit road.

Drive slowly, at no more than 5mph, on the punctured tyre until you are out of danger. On the motorway, this will be the hard shoulder, though you should not attempt to change a tyre on the hard shoulder as this can be extremely dangerous - instead, walk to the nearest and safest emergency telephone to call for help. On a busy A-road, select a lay-by, another parking place or a side turning. Wherever you choose must be a level surface and, preferably, well lit. If you are on a high-speed road, call for assistance. But if you can get to a safe place away from the highway, here's some sound advice.

Having moved the car to a safe spot, taking into account the traffic around you, switch on the hazard warning lights, turn off the engine and apply the handbrake. Put on a high visibility jacket if you have one. If the transmission is manual, select reverse gear; if the car is automatic, select 'park' to ensure the car doesn't move. If you carry an emergency warning triangle, place this a fair distance behind the car - 50m if possible - but remember, never place a triangle on a high-speed road.

1. Get yourself and all passengers out of the car and safely away from the road. Remove luggage from the boot if it's heavy or if it's obstructing access to the spare wheel and tools.
2. Remove the spare wheel and tools from the car. Consult owners' manual (if available) for detailed instructions.

3. Remove plastic wheel cover (if fitted). Prise this off using the end of the wheel brace if necessary. Then, using the brace, loosen the nuts on the wheel you intend to change by half a turn. If they are stiff, use your body weight on the brace to shift them.
4. Use the jack to raise the wheel, first consulting the handbook to find the correct lifting point on the car that's nearest the wheel you are replacing. Warning: a car can easily slip off the jack, even on a level surface. Never get under the vehicle with only the jack supporting it.

5. Only jack a car using a jack point - it may collapse and seriously damage the bodywork if you don't. Once the car body is raised sufficiently (but before the wheel you are raising is off the ground) push the spare wheel under the body. This will act as a safety cushion should the car slip off the jack.

6. Keep raising the car. Once the wheel is just clear of the road, unscrew the nuts in diagonal pairs and remove. Place together in a hat, pocket or drinking cup so they are not lost.

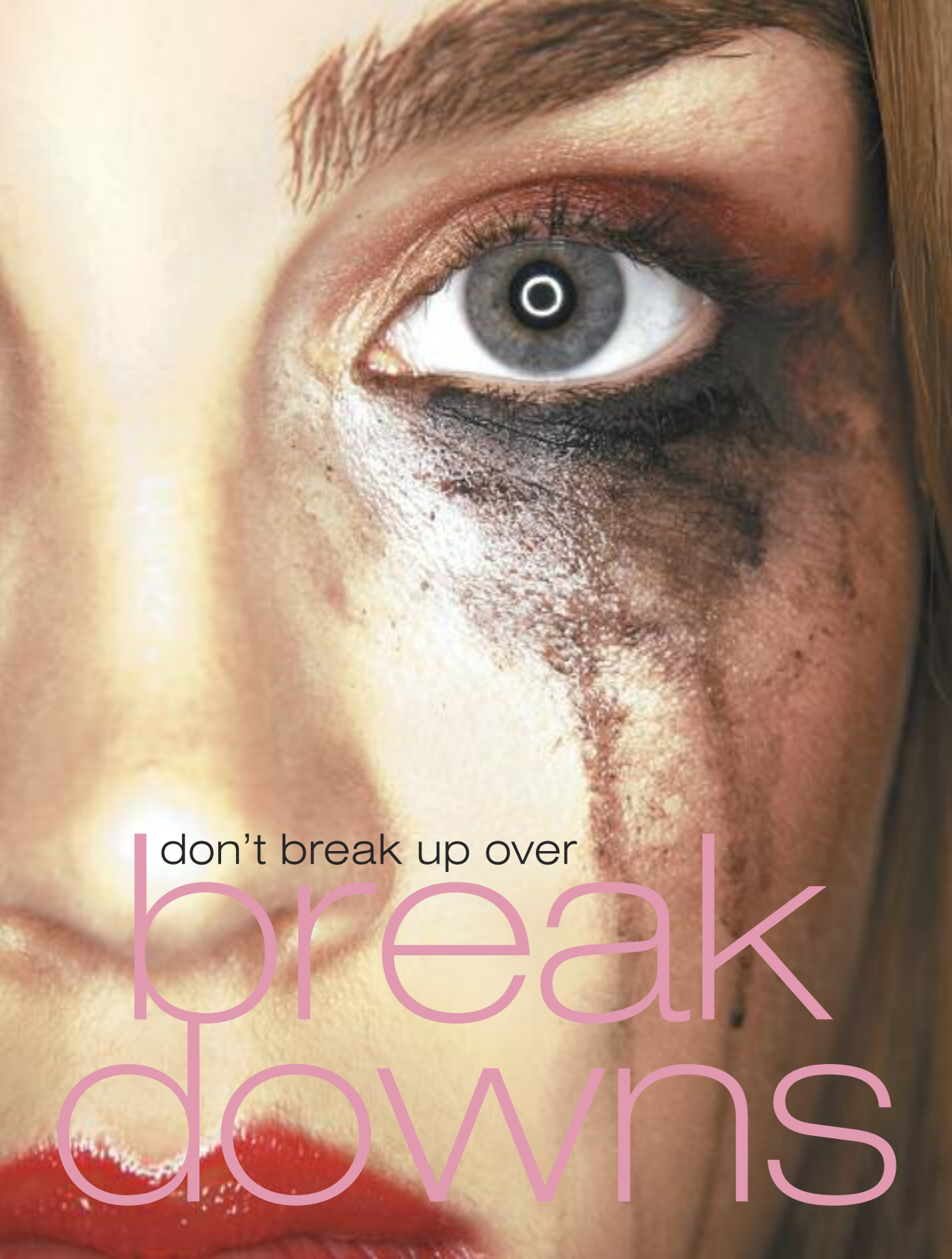
7. Remove the wheel by pulling it towards you. Take care, though, because it will be heavy and dirty. Place the wheel flat under the raised sill of the car as an extra back-up in case the jack should slip.

8. Fit the spare. Ensure it is the correct way round. Fit wheel nuts in diagonal pairs and turn until finger-tight. Using the jack, lower the car until the tyre of the replaced wheel just touches the road. Then, using the wheel brace, lightly tighten the wheel nuts. Remove the punctured wheel from under car. Finish lowering the vehicle and remove the jack. Fully tighten the wheel nuts. Put your tools and damaged wheel in the boot. If the wheel had a plastic cover, refit it.

If the spare is of a 'space saver' type you should not exceed 50mph while fitted, and you should also replace it with a full-size wheel and tyre as soon as possible. The space saver tyre has been designed to simply get you to a repair agent. If the spare is full-size, you can leave it on the car but you should still have the punctured tyre repaired or replaced as soon as possible and the replacement wheel checked to make sure it's tight enough.

Remember: If you still don't feel confident changing a tyre, you can always call for assistance. Or why not bite the bullet and practice at home. We guarantee you'll feel better for it!





don't break up over break downs

- Consider becoming a member of a roadside assistance organisation.
- It is helpful if you pay attention to the area in which you're travelling in case you need to state your location.

Shouldering responsibility - Staying safe on the hard shoulder

Exactly when is it right to stop on the hard shoulder of a motorway?

The Highway Code states 'You MUST NOT stop on the hard shoulder except in an emergency.' And they mean an automotive emergency. In fact it's an offence for which you can be prosecuted! Drivers parked on a hard shoulder are three times more likely to be involved in an accident than when they are travelling at speed on a busy motorway. That should be quite a deterrent.

Remember it's never alright to use the hard shoulder to:-

- Use a mobile phone
- Go to the toilet
- Attend to children
- Check a route or map
- Exercise a pet
- Stretch your legs
- Have a sleep

It may seem incredible, but it happens all the time. Some people's definitions of an emergency are different to others.

That said there are times when it is an emergency and there's no alternative but to pull off the motorway and on to the hard shoulder. In those instances, you should take note of the following advice:

Keep to the far left

Pull over as far to the left-hand side as you can and make sure your wheels are turned to the left too. Turn on your

hazards, especially in poor visibility. Get as near to an emergency phone as possible.

Exit by the left-hand side

Leave the car from the left-hand side to avoid stepping out next to the carriageway and make sure any passengers do the same. Leave animals in the car and ensure that children are kept under control.

Use the emergency telephone

Using the emergency telephone on the hard shoulder is preferable to a mobile. Each one has a number so tell the operator the number of the phone so the breakdown service/emergency services can reach you quicker. Marker posts are located every 100mtrs along the motorway; white arrows on the marker posts indicate the location of the nearest and safest emergency telephones. Be sure to face the carriageway as you walk to the phone and when making the call so you can see any dangers in advance.

If you have reduced mobility or cannot safely leave the vehicle, stay in the vehicle with your seatbelt on and use your mobile to call for assistance.

Wait away from the car

Women often think they're safer staying in their cars than on the hard shoulder where they may feel vulnerable. This is actually a misconception. Avoid sitting in the car when you're waiting for the breakdown service. It's better to wait on the banking away from any other vehicles. You're more at risk in your own car than keeping away from the carriageway. Keep the front passenger door (furthest away from the carriageway) open for safety. If you're approached, you can get back in the car more easily. If this happens, lock the doors, make sure you keep your seatbelt on, and speak to them with the window wound down slightly - but not enough for them to reach into the car.



Highways Agency traffic officers - there to help you



On other roads

Get your vehicle off the road if possible and warn other traffic by using your hazard warning lights, particularly if your vehicle is causing an obstruction.

If you have a reflective jacket, put it on.

If there is a chance that your vehicle may be struck by other traffic, make all your passengers get out of the car and move well away from the traffic. Question whether it is safe for you to fix the car or whether you need professional help.

If it is safe and you have one, put a warning triangle or other permitted warning device on the road at least 45 metres (50 yards) behind your broken down vehicle on the same side of the road. Always take great care when doing this.

- Keep your sidelights on if it is dark or visibility is poor.
- Do not stand (or let anybody else stand) between your vehicle and oncoming traffic.
- At night or in poor visibility do not stand where you will prevent other road users seeing your lights.
- Use your mobile phone, or any other available phone, to call for assistance. Make sure you know where you have broken down.
- If you have used a warning triangle remember to retrieve it, with care, when the breakdown is over.

Your must-haves for car travel

Regular servicing and vehicle checks help avoid breakdowns but it's still best to have breakdown cover. Of course, it might be a while before they can get out to you. If you feel vulnerable, make sure you convey this clearly to your breakdown operator so that they can prioritise your call. Similarly make sure that they know if you have children with you in your vehicle. It's always worthwhile having a roadside emergency kit in your boot, as you may be able to get yourself back on the road quicker than the roadside assistance can get to you. But remember, however, that you should never attempt repairs if you break down on a high speed road.

You should always carry the following essentials:-

- A travel first aid kit
- Some motor oil
- Bottled water
- Pen/paper
- A mobile phone charger (wind up ones should allow enough battery time to get help) and your breakdown information
- A high visibility jacket
- Sugary foods like crisps and chocolates
- In the winter make sure you put together and carry a kit containing warm clothing and de-icer in the car

The best laid plans

- When you plan your journey, think about whether you will be passing through locations during peak traffic times such as rush hour. This will undoubtedly add more stress to your journey.
- Be prepared to encounter delays such as road works, collisions or congestion. Or better still; before you head out, log on to www.highways.gov.uk/trafficengland or other traffic information services.
- Factor comfort breaks into your journey. You are advised to take a short break every two hours to avoid tiredness and loss of concentration.

- If you have young children, think about the best time to travel to minimise the possibility of potential distractions.
- Factor in time to pack the car before your journey; you don't want to be stressed before you start out.

Sending you packing

- If you can, pack your car so that the luggage is evenly distributed.
- Don't leave objects lying around that can fly around if you are forced to brake suddenly. Keep luggage below the level of the seat.
- Make sure you have full visibility through your rear window.
- One final piece of advice is to make sure that the spare wheel is easy to get to. Keeping luggage in holdalls can help with this as suitcases are bulky and difficult to lift easily, particularly if you are travelling alone.



In the winter make sure you put together, and carry, a kit containing warm clothing and de-icer in the car.

Killer Heels

Are your shoes to die for?

More than 11.5 million women drivers in the UK are putting themselves and other drivers at risk by wearing the wrong footwear when behind the wheel (according to research from Sheilas' Wheels).

One in 10 female motorists admit that they have had a car accident or a 'near-miss' because their shoes have slipped off or got stuck between, or under, the foot pedals whilst driving.

The 'Safe Shoes' report shows that a massive 80% of female drivers wear inappropriate footwear when in control of a car - choosing style over safety.

A third of all female drivers confess to wearing flip-flops, while 18% claim that they have worn no shoes at all when driving, which experts say can be extremely hazardous.

In fact, just under half (47%) of women drivers said they chose what shoes to wear when getting ready in the morning based on what went best with their outfit rather than being safest for driving in.

17% of female drivers keep a spare pair of 'driving shoes' in the car to change into, but nearly a quarter admit they can't be bothered to change their shoes when behind the wheel even if they know they are not the safest for driving.

The Driving Standards Agency issues the following advice: "Wear sensible clothing for driving, especially on a long journey. Suitable shoes are particularly important. Driving barefoot is also a bit of a no-no as you don't have the same braking force with bare feet as you do with shoes."

The right footwear can make all the difference to your driving safety. Put the dressy shoes to one side - it could save your life!



driving at work

People who drive high annual mileages for work are up to 50% more likely to crash than private motorists.

Source: Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

If you have a hire car through work, allow extra time to familiarise yourself with the vehicle and do your 'POWDER' check.

If your company employs more than five people there should be a published driving policy and risk assessment for staff. This should cover all the hazards faced by company drivers, the level of risk and details of the procedures for minimising the chances of accidents happening.

The overall health and safety policy should also contain some instructions for drivers on how to stay safe and minimise the risks you may face. There may even be training or specific guidance for regular drivers. Ask your employer for a copy.

You should also make sure that your employer:

- Conducts risk assessments.
- Maintains and inspects the vehicle.
- Provides a realistic schedule of journey times.
- Consults with you about health and safety.

Other safety issues will be left up to you and it is taken for granted that you will obey all the usual traffic rules and the Highway Code.

Fitness and health

This is another key area, especially for those driving large annual mileages on business. You must think carefully about your own fitness to drive a vehicle and how you can protect yourself from any potential health risks.

Your employer should provide some advice about posture, seating and headrest positions as well as details on general driving comfort. Long periods of driving can cause back problems so you should always take regular breaks.

Fatigue and tiredness can be extremely dangerous and you should never continue driving if you feel drowsy. Try to plan regular breaks every two hours.

You should also have regular eye tests to make sure your vision is good enough to drive on the roads. If you are taking any form of medication, make sure that it will not impair your driving or cause drowsiness.

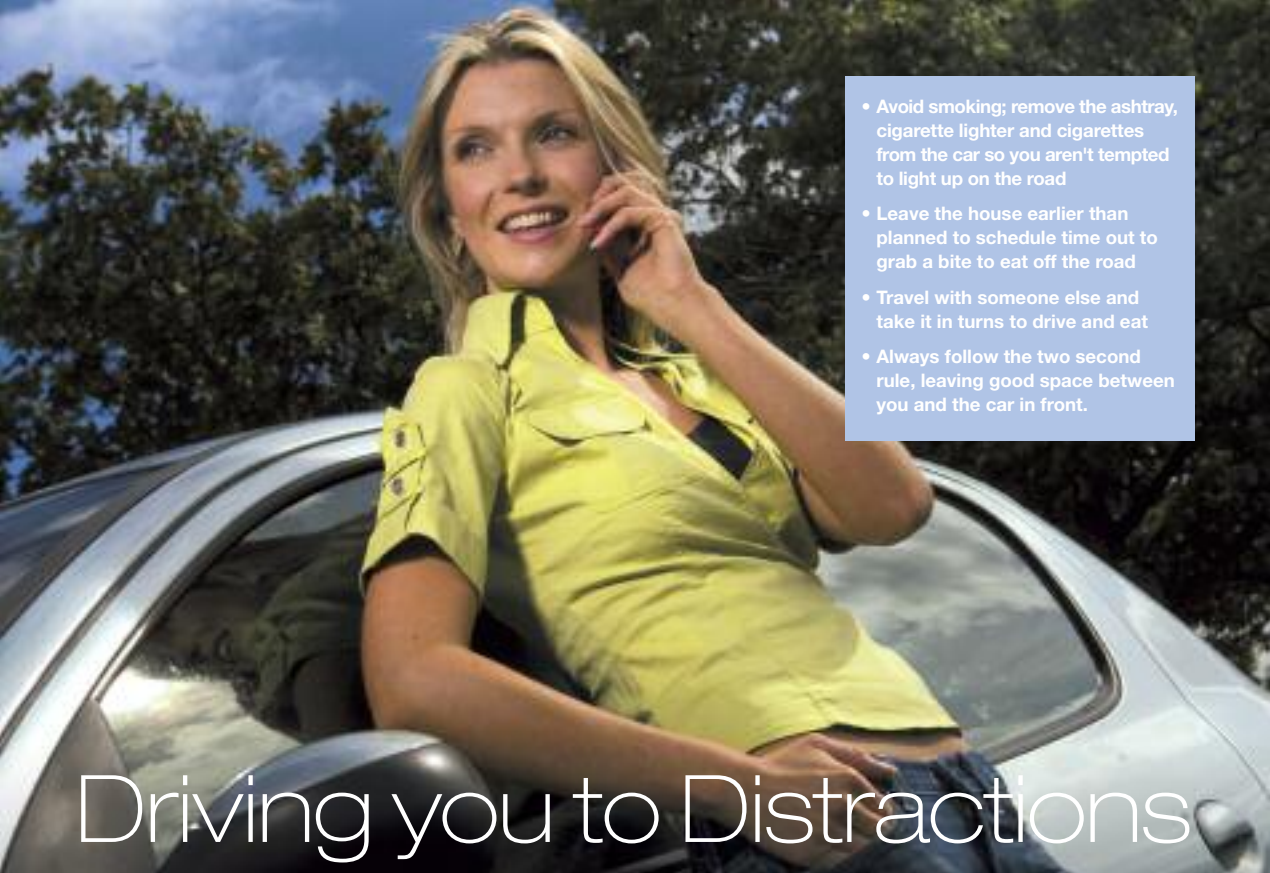
Remember: It's now illegal to smoke in a shared company vehicle.

Accidents

If you are unfortunate enough to be involved in an accident you should always follow the correct rules for reporting it. As well as the usual formalities your company may require you to follow a certain procedure.

Mobile Phones

It is now illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving and your employer can also be found liable if you are caught during working hours.



- Avoid smoking; remove the ashtray, cigarette lighter and cigarettes from the car so you aren't tempted to light up on the road
- Leave the house earlier than planned to schedule time out to grab a bite to eat off the road
- Travel with someone else and take it in turns to drive and eat
- Always follow the two second rule, leaving good space between you and the car in front.

Driving you to Distractions

Driving distractions are increasingly described as contributory factors in road accidents. You must always be in proper control of your vehicle - it is an offence not to be, the police prosecute for all sorts of distractions, including hand-held and hands-free mobile phones.

Mobile phone use

Anything that can distract a driver means the driver does not have proper control of the vehicle, which is an offence and a 'law breaker'. Since 1 December 2003, it has been illegal to drive while using a hand-held mobile phone. If you are caught using a mobile phone while driving you face a minimum of a £60 fine and three points on your licence. However, there can be fines of up to £1000 for offenders if the matter goes to court. The penalties are stiffer for the drivers of buses, coaches, vans and lorries, who face a possible maximum £2500 fine.

- Drivers should exercise caution while using a hands-free kit as it's still a distraction from driving.
- Driving with the phone balanced between shoulder and ear doesn't count as hands-free!

- Texting while driving is not permitted, neither is emailing or using a Blackberry
- You shouldn't answer incoming calls while driving, unless your phone is on auto answer, however it is always best to switch off before you drive off to avoid temptation. Hands free kits don't reduce the distraction of a phone call, and the police do prosecute if they see associated bad driving.
- The ban also applies even while stopped at traffic lights or in a traffic jam.

Don't fuel up behind the wheel

New research shows that drivers are nearly twice as likely to crash if a pedestrian walks in front of their car when they are snacking at the wheel.

Researchers at Brunel University created a nine-minute urban drive on the simulator. At designated points, shortly after the

drivers were told to eat or drink, a pedestrian walked in front of the car, and drivers' reactions were measured, they crashed 17 times while snacking compared to just nine when no food or drink was being consumed.

The researchers said the results show that while drivers may appear able to cope while eating during normal driving, problems come when they are confronted with a sudden increase in the demand for their attention.

"The results of the present study lend weight to the argument that eating or drinking at the wheel can have detrimental effects on driving safety. Since drivers do not necessarily perceive the risk, they choose not to modify their eating behaviour, and rather rely on adapting their driving. Thus snacking at the wheel appears to have little effect on 'normal' driving which may reinforce the driver's risk perceptions" say the researchers in their report.

"Our results suggest that eating and drinking at the wheel is best confined to the service area."

Source: 'Crash dieting: The effects of eating and drinking on driving performance' (2007)

Drinks can be a big disruption. If they spill, they are likely to cause a loss of focus as you attempt to stop further spillage and assess the damage. Coffee is perhaps the worst offender. An unexpected bump in the road is liable to be a recipe for disaster for any drink without a lid. The prospect of arriving with unsightly stains or a scald means many drivers spend too much time trying to recover the situation.

We have the technology

45% of drivers have lost concentration while performing tasks such as adjusting the stereo, heating or satellite navigation system; 20% admit to being so distracted by in-car gadgets that they have veered out of their lane. We know it's hard, but try to confine these activities to when you stop.

Source: Survey carried out by Privilege Insurance

Where there's smoke

Many accidents are caused by motorists having a sneaky cigarette whilst driving. In-car smoking is banned in Brazil. Germany is also looking to impose a smoking ban whilst driving. Imagine dropping a cigarette while driving and you'll see the huge potential for an accident while you scabble around trying

to pick the cigarette up! Recent Spanish research indicates that smokers are twice as likely to be involved in a serious road accident as non-smokers.

What diverts you?

- Reading maps/directions whilst driving.
- Rubber-necking, i.e. looking at other accidents rather than concentrating on driving.
- Chatting with passengers.
- Other drivers and road rage.
- Thoughts of work or personal life.

Research has shown that 83% of drivers think about something other than their driving when behind the wheel (such as home life or work).

Source: Survey carried out by the road safety organisation BRAKE

Kids driving you to distraction?

Driving kids can damage your health - it's official! Forget sipping a cappuccino, tuning the radio, or smoking a cigarette: the most distracting thing you can do in the car is transport children.

Children have been voted the biggest in-car distraction - beating hand-held phones and using satellite-navigation in a recent poll conducted by LV Insurance (Liverpool Victoria). They were named the major reason for loss of concentration when driving, effectively putting drivers at greater risk of having an accident.

Here are a few tried and tested tips to help keep your children amused and reduce your risk of being distracted:

- Carry travel games, books or toys to entertain children
- Encourage them to play peaceful games such as I-spy or spot particular cars
- Plan your route so you don't end up lost and fighting with the map
- If you've got sat-nav, programme your route before you set off
- Load CDs and programme your favourite radio stations before you leave
- Take regular breaks to refresh yourself, and to allow the kids to let off steam

Giving road rage a wide berth

- Avoid tailgating.
- Keep left unless overtaking.
- Don't make aggressive hand and/or facial gestures.
- Don't be tempted to use your horn at aggressive drivers. This only serves to draw their attention to you; even a polite beep can be misconstrued.
- Avoid making eye contact with aggressive drivers and be sure to leave them lots of room.
- Do not attempt to match their speed. This may only anger them further.
- If you feel intimidated, pull into an area where there are other people around and if necessary contact the Police.



How to chill out heated situations

- Limit stress whilst driving - plan ahead and leave plenty of time to get to your destination. If things don't go to plan, as the saying goes, better late than never.
- Make sure to be polite, even if other drivers are not, in order to steer clear of arguments.
- If another driver offends you, take a deep breath and let them pass.

Better to be safe

- Avoid putting your handbag, laptop or other personal belongings on the front passenger seat.
- Keep all your doors locked.
- Don't pull up too close to the car in front. Leave space enough for you to pull away if necessary.



Speed kills

So here's a reminder of the limits and a brief run-down of the penalties for exceeding them.

20mph Speed Limit

Mostly used in urban areas, such as residential roads (particularly narrow ones), town centres and around schools and nurseries. The reasons are obvious - where there's a high concentration of pedestrians, and those likely to run out in front of you, it makes sense to keep the limits slower to avoid collisions and accidents. Usually the 20mph will come under a 'zone' which will combine other traffic calming measures like speed humps with the lower limits.

30mph Speed Limit

Also seen in urban areas and villages, there will only be a sign at the beginning of a 30mph zone and not throughout. This is because roads under this limit are easily identifiable by using a simple system of streetlights. All you need to remember is this:-

The 30mph speed limit applies to all traffic on all roads with regular street lighting unless road signs show that a different speed limit applies. If the road is unlit then there will be repeated 30mph signs along or beside the road for the duration of the limit area.

40mph and 50mph

Introduced to be used in non-built up areas where a higher speed is considered to be safe and appropriate. The beginning of the speed limit must be clearly signed and repeater signs must be placed at regular intervals along the length of road that the limit applies to.

National Speed Limit

When you enter an area that is signed by a diagonal black stripe on a white background, you are driving under national speed limit restrictions. For most vehicles this will mean 60mph on single carriageway roads and 70mph on dual carriageway roads. It is also 70mph on the motorway network unless otherwise indicated.

Temporary Restrictions

Temporary speed restrictions are often put in place to encourage safer driving during road repairs with the intention of making the area safe for road users. When on motorways and faster roads they are usually enforced by very visible warning signs and speed cameras.

However, always remember the speed limits shown are the maximum speed permitted. You should always drive at a speed suitable for the road and traffic condition, taking into account adverse weather conditions.



The Penalties

The penalty points system operates on a sliding scale to reflect the gravity of an offence and if a driver accumulates 12 or more points within a 3 year period, it is highly likely that he/she will be disqualified. This is for a minimum of 6 months but can be longer if the driver has been disqualified previously.

The Facts

For drink-related violations of the law, the driver will be disqualified immediately for a year, regardless of whether they had accumulated any points on their licence up to the date of the offence or not. This disqualification can be far longer if the driver has already been found guilty of a similar offence previously.

In addition to the points system, drivers face fines and more serious driving offences can also result in imprisonment.

The court also has the power to impose disqualification for a set period before a driver has accumulated 12 penalty points on their licence, if it thinks the offence on its own merits disqualification.

- Causing death by dangerous driving - **3 to 11 points**, if not immediately disqualified. You could receive a prison sentence of up to 15 years.
- Dangerous driving - **3 to 11 points**, if not immediately disqualified. You could receive a prison sentence of up to 15 years.
- Causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink or drugs - **3 to 11 points**, if not immediately disqualified.
- Careless or inconsiderate driving - **3 to 9 points**
- Failing to stop after an accident or failure to report an accident - **5 to 10 points**
- Driving whilst disqualified - **6 points**
- Driving without insurance - **6 to 8 points**
- Speeding - **3 to 6 points** (3 is the fixed penalty)
- Traffic light offences - **3 points**

(All correct at time of print: September 2007)

Remember new drivers who accumulate just six or more points within two years of passing their test will have their licence revoked and they will then have to apply for another provisional licence and pass both a theory and practical test again. Is it really worth it?



So you fancy Advanced Driver Training?

What is ADT? To start with, advanced driving is not the same as high-speed police response driving (although advanced driving does follow the police system of car control). It does not involve learning how to drive through red lights, or how to drive fast! What it does teach is to observe and plan your driving, anticipate situations and generally become a more skilful driver.

An advanced driving course can help you in the following ways:

- Learning possible life-saving skills
- Less wear and tear on your car
- Lower fuel bills
- Added confidence behind the wheel
- Lower insurance premiums with some companies
- Help you plan - reduces the stress of driving



There are a lot of places offering Advanced Driving courses and tests. The best place to start would be to consider your driving needs and requirements. You should be able to find all the information you need by logging on to the Advanced Driving UK website (www.advanced-driving.co.uk).

Should you need any further encouragement to sign up, here's some advice from a successful recruit, Claire Allender:

"In 1998 I had a bad fall, which cost me some of the use of my legs and my full driving licence. There's nothing like losing some of your abilities to spur you to make maximum use of what you have still got! Months later, licence partly restored, I had an "introductory lesson" with an ADI (Advanced Driving Instructor) in an automatic with hand controls - he saw no reason why I shouldn't take some further driver training. Within weeks I had joined the local group of the I.A.M. (Institute of Advanced Motorist), a very friendly, very committed and very aware bunch of people, in my neck-of-the-woods at least. What did they 'teach' me? Next to nothing!! Strategically placed comments on what I was doing, (and not doing), was all it took to get me thinking about my driving. Much of Advanced Driving is just SO obvious, when you think seriously about it: break old (bad) habits, establish some new ones and driving is much more enjoyable. I have since taken it further, and in 2003 passed the RoADA (RoSPA Advanced Drivers and Riders Association) test at Gold Standard. My personal catchphrase? "How do you avoid accidents? By not being there when they happen. Seeing a situation about to develop, and having the time to 'not be there', is both very safe and very, very satisfying. Spend a bit of time and have a bit of determination and your driving can become something you are justifiably proud of: and boy, what a sense of achievement it can give!"

Source: Care on The Road (RoADA Advanced Driving Group's newsletter)

green is the new black

If you're planning on buying a new car, remember that more fuel-efficient cars cause less pollution and will save you money on both fuel and tax - so choose a car with the lowest CO₂ emission levels where possible. In general, small cars and cars with smaller engines produce less CO₂. There can also be a big difference in emissions of cars in the same market category, so make sure you compare before making your purchase.

Where to find CO₂ emissions information?

You can find information about a car's CO₂ emissions from the following sources:

The environmental label which should be displayed on all new cars in showrooms.

This grades each car from A (the cleanest) to G (the most polluting).

The Vehicle Certification Agency (www.vcacarfueldata.org.uk) which has a database of cars with their fuel economy and CO₂ emissions data.

In car adverts - manufacturers are obliged to publish CO₂ emission information by law.

Fuel for the future

Diesel

Diesel cars emit less CO₂ than their petrol equivalents, but they produce more 'air quality' emissions, such as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulates, which pollute towns and cities, and affect our health. If you are considering buying a diesel car, choose one with a diesel particulate filter (DPF), as this will reduce particulate matter emissions. These filters are available for many different car models, although you may have to request one as an optional extra.

Hybrid Vehicles

Hybrid cars have a conventional engine in addition to an electrical motor and battery which is recharged while you drive. Current models run on petrol and electricity, although diesel/electric hybrid models are expected soon. Hybrid cars are already available from several manufacturers and are proving increasingly popular.

Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicles produce no exhaust emissions and are exempt from road tax. You recharge them by plugging them into the mains via a normal mains socket. Most have a range of about 40-50 miles and a top speed of about 50mph, so are best suited to urban driving. However, new designs are being developed that have a far greater range. Even if an electric vehicle is not a practical option for your main car, it may be worth considering as a second car. If you really need it!

The Toyota hybrid Prius



The Smart Car



Biodiesel

Produced from plants, or less commonly from waste cooking oil, biodiesel is a diesel substitute that reduces overall CO₂ emissions. The government has said that by 2010 all diesel sold in the UK will contain 5 per cent biodiesel. All diesel cars can run on B5 (a blend of 5 per cent biodiesel and 95 per cent conventional diesel). Using blends of more than 5 per cent biodiesel invalidates most cars' warranties so check with your manufacturer before trying it. You should not use untreated plant oil as this could damage your engine. Find your nearest biodiesel supplier at www.est.org.uk/refuelingmap or call the Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre on 0800 512 012.

Bioethanol

Produced by fermenting plant material, bioethanol is a petrol substitute that, when used, reduces overall CO₂ emissions. All petrol cars can run on E5 (a ready mixed blend of 5 per cent bioethanol and 95 per cent petrol). You should only use blends of more than five per cent if your car has been specifically designed to run on ethanol. Although not yet widely available in the UK, bioethanol is likely to become more popular in the next few years. By 2010, all petrol sold in the UK will contain five per cent bioethanol.

Give the car the day off

One of the best ways to reduce your CO₂ emissions is to leave the car at home and use an alternate means of transport. We know there are times when the car is absolutely vital, but there may be another, easier or more cost-effective way to complete your journey that also benefits the environment.

For information on congestion, roadworks and minimising journey times.

Traffic England at www.highways.gov.uk

Traffic Scotland at www.trafficscotland.org

Traffic Wales at www.traffic-wales.com

If you want to find out more about alternative means of transport, you could visit:

www.travelline.org.uk/index.htm

For accurate, up to date and impartial information on planning your journey by the quickest public transport mode. You can also access this information by telephone on 0870 608 2 608.

www.chooseanotherway.com

For practical advice on using alternative transport options in Scotland including buses, trains, cycling and walking.

www.transportdirect.info

For information on planning your journey.

Some green hints and tips

Pump up to cut down

Under inflated tyres create more resistance when your car is moving, which means your engine has to work harder, so more fuel is used and more CO₂ emissions are produced. Simply check and adjust your tyre pressures regularly and also before long journeys.

Less clutter in your car means less CO₂

Clutter in your boot is extra weight your engine has to lug around. By removing it, you could reduce your engine's workload. This will burn less fuel and cut your CO₂ emissions.

Driving at an appropriate speed reduces CO₂

Staying at or within the speed limit increases driver safety. It also reduces CO₂ emissions and saves money on your petrol costs. At 70mph you could be using up to 9% more fuel than at 60mph and up to 15% more fuel than at 50mph.

Less stopping and starting means less CO₂

Every time you stop then start again in a traffic queue, the engine uses more fuel and therefore produces more CO₂. Keep an eye on the traffic ahead and slow down early by gently lifting your foot off the accelerator while keeping the car in gear. In this way, the traffic may have started moving again by the time you approach the vehicle in front, so you can then change gear and be on your way.

Over revving accelerates emissions

Revving up like a Formula 1 car in pole position only wastes fuel and increases engine wear.

Using your gears wisely by changing up a gear a little earlier can also reduce revs. If you drive a diesel car try changing up a gear when the rev counter reaches 2000rpm. For a petrol car change up at 2500rpm.

Idling is wasting fuel

When the engine is idling you're wasting fuel and adding to CO₂ emissions. If you're likely to be at a standstill for more than three minutes, simply switch off the engine.

Source: www.dft.gov.uk/Act10nCO2

How good are you?

Answer this simple quiz to find out how good your driving really is.

Q1: At which engine revs should you change up a gear to maximise fuel efficiency?

- a: The redline on the rev counter.
- b: Under 1000 rpm.
- c: 2500 rpm for petrol cars, or 2000 rpm for diesel cars.

Q2: What can you do every time you drive that will always reduce your fuel consumption?

- a: Anticipate road conditions and drive smoothly, avoid sharp acceleration and heavy braking.
- b: Drive as slowly as you possibly can.
- c: Choose a route that avoids hills.

Q3: Which of these significantly increases your car's fuel consumption?

- a: Listening to the radio.
- b: Turning up the car's cabin heating system.
- c: Using the air conditioning system.

Q4: What can you do after you start your engine to be more fuel efficient?

- a: Wait with the engine idling so it has a chance to warm up.
- b: Avoid switching on electrical systems like lights or the radio to save power.
- c: Drive away immediately.

Q5: Which simple action dramatically reduces drag and boosts your car's fuel efficiency?

- a: Cleaning and waxing your car thoroughly.
- b: Removing your roof rack or roof box.
- c: Lowering the suspension.

Q6: What should you try to avoid if you want to reduce your car's fuel costs?

- a: Short journeys.
- b: Rainy days.
- c: Motorways.

Q7: Which, typically, is the most efficient speed you can travel at?

- a: 55 - 65 mph.
- b: 65 - 70 mph.
- c: 40 mph.

Q8: What can you do before a journey to make your trip more fuel efficient?

- a: Plan to take slower, scenic routes.
- b: Plan the journey to avoid congestion, road works and getting lost.
- c: Plan to leave as early in the morning as possible.

Q9: What should you check regularly to ensure better fuel economy?

- a: Your rear-view mirror.
- b: Your car's oil level.
- c: Your tyre pressures.

Q10: What can you do in a traffic jam to help your fuel economy?

- a: Get frustrated and shout.
- b: Switch the engine off.
- c: Listen out for traffic announcements on the radio.

Answers: Q1 - a, Q2 - a, Q3 - b, Q4 - c, Q5 - c, Q6 - a, Q7 - b, Q8 - a, Q9 - c, Q10 - c

Hands
up if
you're
a good
driver!



Quiz supplied by Energy Saving Trust

Life's a journey



How often have you heard that expression? Make sure that every trip you make, whether it be across country or across town, is as safe as possible. Ensure that your life journey is as long as it possibly can be.

We hope this magazine has given you something to make you begin every journey with a smile. As our journey comes to an end, here's something else to make you smile. Despite the long-held view that women hold inferior driving skills than men, official figures now show that it's actually men who are worse drivers - result!

But the only surefire way of making sure that mechanics and service departments treat you as a deserved equal is to learn just a little more about your vehicle. The cars of women who know the ins and outs of their engine are statistically safer. You'll also have the pleasure of knowing

that it's less likely to break down when you least want it to, and your service bills will reduce. That's what you call a double whammy.

In reading Hi we hope we have inspired you to get to know your car even better and that you are now fully prepared for life's more predictable journeys.


Julie Smith.

 **HIGHWAYS**
AGENCY
www.highways.gov.uk

Safe driving at roadworks



During 2010 six workers were killed and 29 seriously injured in the course of their work on Highways Agency roads.

For the safety of all road users and roadworkers, when you are approaching roadworks:

- Keep within the speed limit - it is there for your safety.
- Get into the correct lane in good time - don't keep switching.
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks.
- Be alert for works' traffic leaving or entering roadworks.
- Keep a safe distance - there could be queues in front.
- Observe all signs - they are there to help you.

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.