



Here comes the sun, but beware!

Driving in the summer can pose unexpected challenges, but with foresight and preparation you can enjoy your summer driving, safely and in comfort.

Personal Safety advice

Glaring mistakes

Glare from the sun causes many accidents, particularly under clear skies at dawn or dusk.

- Keep a clean and unscratched pair of sunglasses handy.
- Avoid lenses which darken in strong sunlight – the windscreen filters out UV light so the glasses will change only slowly.
- Clean the windscreen regularly, inside and out, to remove smears, which will catch sunlight and impair vision.
- Renewing worn or damaged wiper blades is essential to help improve vision.

Not to be sneezed at

Hay fever is particularly bad in the summer and if you sneeze travelling at 70 mph you lose your vision for as much as 100 metres.

- Only take medication which doesn't cause drowsiness.
- Get someone else to drive if you are having a particularly bad hay fever day.
- Research cabin pollen filters for your make of car.
- Keep tissues close to hand.
- 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.
- Vacuum car mats and carpets regularly during summer to eradicate dust.

Fatigue

Fresh air, exercise or turning up the radio may help for a short time but are not as effective as:

- Taking a 20 minute break on journeys over 3 hours. On longer journeys, take a break every two hours or so.
- Frequent short stops (of at least 20 minutes) are better than one long stop.
- Avoid heavy meals and alcohol before driving.
- Counter sleepiness by taking a short nap (up to 15 minutes) or drink two cups of strong coffee.
- Remember that it's illegal and dangerous to stop on the motorway hard shoulder, except in an emergency. Should it be essential to stop, get out of the car on the barrier side and make yourself comfortable the other side of the barrier.

Taking stock

Particularly in the event of a breakdown, emergency supplies such as bottles of water and snacks are essential. Torches are also handy and make sure mobile phones are fully charged. Car documentation and driving licence are often useful, and mandatory in most countries.

Summer Fuel Economy

Roof Boxes are a great way to accommodate all that extra holiday luggage and help to reduce drag. Alternatively, load luggage on a roof rack as low as possible and wrap tightly in plastic sheeting. If you are staying in one place for your holiday take the roof rack or box off when you get there – you'll save fuel on day trips.

Open windows cause extra drag. Try using air vents as an alternative, particularly on motorways.

Summer breakdowns

Punctures

Tyres are adversely affected by high temperatures, aggravating any existing damage to the rubber. Both under and over inflation produce friction and additional pressure which can prove too much for weak spots, causing punctures and blow-outs.

- Check tyre condition and pressures, adjusting for extra loads if appropriate.
- Check caravan or trailer tyres for cracking and renew any damaged tyres immediately.

Drowned or lost key fobs

It's easy to lose your car keys in sand on the beach or take the remote control for a swim and then find that car doors won't open. Salt in seawater can ruin electric circuits and render transponder keys useless. Most cars will have an alternative method of entry if the remote key fails – check the handbook, but it's better to keep keys safe and dry in the first place.

Overheating

High temperatures can aggravate cooling system problems. Low coolant level, leaking hoses and broken electric cooling fans can all result in overheating and expensive damage. If the fan's broken it will soon become apparent when you meet slow moving traffic and the engine temperature soars.

- Check the coolant reservoir level regularly, particularly before commencing a long journey.
- Look out for wet or white staining on coolant hoses, which will indicate a leak.
- Check the fan by running the car to normal temperature and allowing the engine to idle for five to 10 minutes – the cooling fan should cut in automatically.

Air conditioning

Open windows immediately you get in the car and start off, this will lower the interior temperature, then close windows and start air conditioning. Once the car interior has cooled sufficiently, turn air conditioning down or off. Don't start the air conditioning if doors or windows are open. It is recommended that your air conditioning should be checked and possibly regassed every 2 years. Also, regular use of the air conditioning helps prevent gas leaks from washers and seals.

Tyre pressures

Tyre pressures are imperative to fuel saving. Increase pressures, in accordance with manufacturers handbook, if carrying extra passengers or heavy luggage. Reduce pressure if hot weather increases the tyre pressures.

Windscreen shades

Windscreen shades can really help reduce heat build up in parked cars, and opening up the car as soon as you get back to it will help to cool the interior.

Loose chippings

Surface dressing, laying tar covered with loose chippings, helps preserve roads and improve skid resistance, but can cause cracked headlamp glasses, windscreens, and damaged paintwork. Keep your distance and drive within posted speed limits to reduce the risk of damage.

Tractors

Tractor drivers often have sound-proofed cabs or wear ear protectors, so they may not hear approaching cars. Tractors don't have to be fitted with brake or indicator lights unless used at night, so in daylight be prepared for them to stop or turn without warning.

Our country road code

- Keep plenty of distance behind a tractor, in case it stops suddenly. Remember the two-second rule: remain 2 seconds braking time behind any vehicle.
- A tractor may be longer than it appears, there may be a loader on the front. Make sure you have plenty of room to get past before overtaking.
- Rural roads can be very winding. Use the line of hedges, trees or telegraph poles as a guide to help see which direction the road takes well ahead.
- Slow down if you come across a spillage, a bale of straw hit at speed will cause considerable damage to your car.
- Be aware that vulnerable road users including cyclists and horses are more likely to use these roads, and give them plenty of space when you do come across them.
- Don't park in a gateway or passing place, they are farmers' field access points.
- Drive carefully after rain, dry mud can turn roads into a skidpan after a downpour.

Driving across the water

Check that you have correct documentation for yourself and your vehicle before commencing journeys abroad, and what requirements and protocol you need to follow. This varies according to the country, but it is wise to check basic laws regarding speed limits, parking and associated penalties. On the spot fines are no fun.

Driving in France, Belgium or Netherlands?

According to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office there have been a series of robberies and express kidnappings on or around the motorways connecting Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Ghent, Dunkirk and the Channel ports, particularly towards the southern end of the route. In the early hours they have been flagging down vehicles, seeming to seek assistance, or kidnapping single drivers outside petrol stations or 24-hour stores. Be vigilant and aware.

Insure a trouble free journey

Don't wait for a breakdown before considering recovery service membership, particularly in a foreign country. It's generally cheaper and easier to get cover in advance. Additional insurance when travelling abroad can save a great deal both financially and in terms of stress.