

# Taking the High Road

10 tips to help put courtesy back into driving *by Suzanne Décarie*

**A**CCORDING TO THE 2006 *ROAD Safety Monitor*, a public opinion survey done by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, Canadians see a lot of aggressive driving on the road and not much courtesy. In fact, 88 per cent believe there is more aggressive driving today than five years ago. Too many drivers become bullies the moment they get behind the wheel. They speed, run red lights, tailgate, weave in and out of traffic, and change lanes without signalling. They also get annoyed by other road users, honking and flying into a rage. But if courtesy can be just as contagious as road rage, there is hope.

After all, it doesn't take much to be polite. Just by observing the *Saskatchewan Driver's Handbook: A Guide to Safe Driving*, you're almost there. Here are some of the

dos and don'ts that form the basis of courteous driving:

**1. Keep your cool at all times.**

It's hardly worth it to get all worked up by accelerating then braking needlessly, or planting your car on the rear bumper of the one ahead of you. When the road is blocked, it's blocked! Give pedestrians the time they need to cross safely; display some gallantry to the driver ahead of you by allowing him or her time to park.

**2. Keep your distance.**

Estimate the distance between you and the vehicle in front by



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counting how long it takes you to reach a static object along the road after the car in front has passed it. "If you are closer than three seconds, drop back," states the handbook.

### 3. Go with the flow.

When you find yourself behind a slow-moving vehicle and the driver appears unsure, don't make him more nervous by tailgating, thinking he'll speed up. Instead, let him go at his own pace until you have an opportunity to safely pass.

### 4. When it's time to stop, really stop.

At a red light or obligatory stop, you must come to a full stop. The same applies to a yellow light: the handbook recommends that, unless you have already entered the intersection or you are so close that it would be impossible to stop without creating a hazard, you stop. You must also always yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and cyclists when making a turn at an intersection.

### 5. Be respectful of pedestrians.

According to law, the moment a pedestrian

steps into a crossing, you must bring your vehicle to a complete stop and let them cross. According to Saskatchewan Government Insurance's 2007 *Casualty Collisions* report, there were 301 pedestrians injured and 15 killed in traffic collisions in 2007. Close to 40 per cent of the pedestrians were hit while trying to cross at an intersection, mainly in urban areas. Pedestrians are vulnerable and deserve our attention. Also, allow school safety patrollers to do their jobs; slow down when you see them.

### 6. Share the road.

Do your part to share the road safely with cyclists and motorcyclists. Check your blind spot before moving your vehicle and, when parked on a street, check your side-view mirror before opening your door. Pass cyclists only when you have enough room to go around them, using the left lane if necessary.

### 7. Be courteous when parking.

Why double-park and impede traffic? Leave your vehicle where it is legal to do so. Never park in spots reserved for drivers with reduced mobility.

### 8. Pass carefully – and with class.

Always make your intention to pass known by signalling. Avoid acting impulsively, slaloming or passing several vehicles at a time. On the highway, after you've passed a car, return to your lane so that you do not monopolize the passing lane. When someone wants to pass you, yield the right-of-way. Section 3.13 of the handbook states: "When being passed by another vehicle, stay to the right of your lane and do NOT speed up until the passing vehicle is back in the normal driving lane."

### 9. Avoid distractions.

Approximately 80 per cent of collisions occur during a moment of inattention. So it makes sense to keep your eyes on the road and mind on driving at all times. Driving is not the time to eat or drink, look for that file or make a phone call.

### 10. Keep your vehicle in tip-top shape.

For safety's sake and out of respect for the environment, make sure your car is always in good condition. For example, check that tires are properly inflated and the exhaust system is in good working order. ■

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