

The Delicate Art of Parking

Lots are not exempt from rules of the road

by Lawrence Herzog

THERE'S A LOT GOING ON IN PARKING lots, and a lot that can go wrong. Between pedestrians and shopping carts, tight spaces and other vehicles, drivers are hemmed in by hazards.

Add a busy holiday season and the challenges of winter weather, and parking lots become places brimming with potential for trouble. Though crashes in parking lots don't grab headlines the way high-speed collisions do, they can be dangerous just the same. Provincial traffic authorities don't specifically track collisions in parking lots, but scrapes and bumps happen nearly every day. Their numbers naturally go up when traffic is heavier.

Just about all of them are preventable with a little common sense. Many rules of the road that apply to highways and streets also apply to parking lots. They include yielding to the right of way, driving at a safe speed, obeying traffic control signs, following at a safe distance, making proper turn signals and backing up slowly. That means the normal rules of the road are in effect at parking lot intersections without stop or yield signs. The *2010 Saskatchewan Driver's Handbook* says: "Wherever traffic intersects in a parking lot and there are no yield or stop signs, it must be treated as an uncontrolled intersection."

In other words, drivers must yield to the vehicle on the right. "This rule applies even if you are travelling on what you believe to be the main roadway of the parking lot," the handbook states. Garry Davis, supervisor of driver development and safety services for SGI, believes the misconception about who has the right of way is the number one reason for parking lot collisions. "If more drivers understood that, it would substantially reduce incidents in parking lots," he says.

The best way to make your vehicle movements safer in a parking lot? The handbook recommends backing in when you park, unless it is prohibited. "Backing in is safer for a number of reasons, because you're backing into a space where you know there is



nothing in there," Davis says. "Backing out, you never know what will come along. And if you are leaving a parking space, you are responsible for yielding to everybody – cars, pedestrians, cyclists, you name it."

Not only that, but when you arrive at a mall, you've just driven there and are in the mindset for driving. "Coming out of the store, you might be rushing to get home; you climb in the car and, in that hurried mindset, you back up," he observes.

Backing out, we must worry about not only what is behind us, but also what is coming down the aisle, and watch for the front-end swing against the vehicles on either side. "When you back in, the front-end swing occurs out in the aisle, where there is [less chance of hitting something]," he says. Even better, he says, are drive-through stalls painted at 90 degrees from traffic that allow you to drive through the first space and into the second. That way the front of your vehicle faces into the aisle, and you enter and exit the stall going forward, eliminating the need to back up altogether.

Once drivers are moving around in the lot, Davis says, most travel too quickly and are too eager to get the spot closest to the door. "You need to move at a speed that, no matter what happens, you can stop," he says. "And what's the difference of a few

steps more to be safer?"

There might not be a posted speed limit, but parking lots are designed for low speed. With limited sight lines, anything faster than 10 to 15 kilometres per hour can be dangerous and, in the event of a collision, even fatal for a pedestrian. Once you're on foot, avoid walking out from between parked cars, and try to walk down the aisle against the traffic flow.

Indoor or covered parking facilities, especially those with low clearances and tight spaces, present additional challenges. Manoeuvring can be tricky, and surfaces can be icy or slick from vehicle fluids and tracked-in snow or precipitation; lowering your speed is the key, Davis says. ▣

top tips for safe parking

- Remember that vehicles on the right ALWAYS have the right of way.
- Slow down so that you can stop quickly no matter what happens.
- Back in instead of backing out.
- Choose stalls that are drive-through whenever possible.
- Pay close attention to your mirrors whenever you are moving in reverse. □