

DRIVING AFTER DARK

When Your Eyes Work Overtime

If cats could operate motor vehicles, they might be the safest night drivers. But seeing in the dark isn't easy for humans. Driving safely, a demanding job under the best conditions requires extra vigilance after nightfall.

The Risk are Great

The risks on the highway go up sharply when the sun goes down. But not everyone realizes how much they go up. Two-thirds of all accidents occur at night, even though there are only half as many vehicles on the road.

Likewise, the number of fatalities for every 1,000 miles driven is at least three times greater at night than in the daytime. It adds up to a major concern for professionals who have to be on the road both day and night.

A Combination of Factors

Why is night driving so dangerous? The main reason is the lack of visibility? But there are other factors as well. For one thing, the light conditions change constantly. Your eyes constantly have to adjust to the glare of oncoming headlights. In a few minutes, your eyes may be called on to shift from the roadside glare of populated areas to the nearly total darkness of a rural highway. Worse yet, there are risks brought on by human nature.

Drivers may become fatigued from highway hypnosis or too many hours at the wheel, and some may fall asleep at the wheel. Still others may operate

How to Improve the Odds

There are many things you can do to protect yourself. But the prime strategy must be one of extreme caution. Whatever you do to create a margin of safety in the daytime, it has to be done extra well at night.

Before you get on the road, think about the hazards. Keep your headlights and windshield clean. Have your eyes checked regularly. Even a slight deterioration in vision can spell a big difference at night.

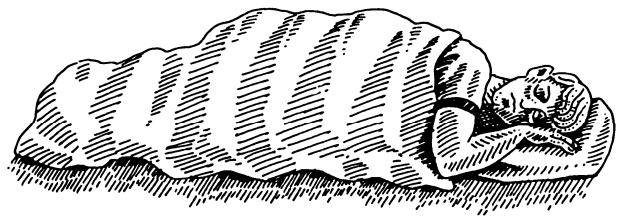
Plan your trips with an awareness of where you'll be

when darkness comes. Note the special hazards, such as construction zones, that will pose unusual problems in the darkness. Know where the rest stops are, so you can make full use of them to stay alert.

Night Driving Strategy

Night driving strategy has its own special rules: Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

- Obey speed limits diligently. If speed kills in the daytime, it's doubly lethal at night. At high speeds, your eyes are quickly overtaxed as they try to sort out the blur of passing lights. They soon lose their ability to spot potential hazards at a distance.
- Keep your instrument lights as low as possible. Avoid turning on your cab lights. Your eyes will have to readjust again for night vision if you do.
- Drive within the limits of what your lights can show. Go slowly enough to allow your headlights to show you any hazard while there is still time to react.
- Widen the gap between your rig and the vehicle ahead. Tailgating is worse at night than it is in the



If you get sleepy, you may need a nap.

daytime. You should allow yourself more stopping room, since it takes longer to react.

Other Pointers

Always turn on your headlights at twilight and keep them on until it is fully light in the morning. Learn to shift your gaze to the right edge of the road, to avoid being blinded by bright headlights, and always be quick to dim your own lights so you won't blind someone else. Then switch your high beams back on as traffic passes.