

Road Safety Factsheet

July 2021

RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to stay within the Limit

Many car drivers unintentionally exceed the speed limit, often without realising it. Modern cars are so powerful and comfortable they give drivers little sensation of their speed. It is too easy to creep above the limit, and in particular, many drivers believe it is difficult to drive a modern car at no more than 30 mph on a road with a 30 mph limit. Drivers are responsible for the speeds at which they choose to drive, but there are some simple and practical things drivers who find it difficult to stay with speed limits can do to help themselves.

1. Check your speedometer regularly, especially when leaving high speed roads
2. Know the limits – look for signs, especially at junctions
3. Assume lamp posts mean 30 mph, until signs say otherwise, but remember it could be 20 mph
4. Remember, speed limits are a maximum, not a target
5. 20's plenty when kids are about – and may even be too fast
6. Try no higher than 3rd gear in a 30 mph limit
7. Recognise what makes you speed - keeping up with traffic, overtaking or being tailgated
8. Concentrate – distracted drivers speed
9. Slow down when entering villages
10. Give yourself time – there's no need to speed and you won't get there quicker

**Even a small amount above the limit makes a big difference.
Refresh your skills on a refresher driver training course.**

Road Safety factsheet: RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to Staying within the Limit

Drivers who travel at higher speeds have less time to identify and react to what is happening around them. It takes them longer to stop. And if there is a crash, it is more severe, causing greater injury to the occupants and any pedestrian or rider they hit.

In 2019*, inappropriate speed contributed to 24% of collisions in which there was a fatality, 13% of those resulting in a serious injury and 12% of all injury collisions. In 2019, 215 people were killed in collisions involving someone exceeding the speed limit and a further 133 people died when someone was travelling too fast for the conditions¹.

Approximately two-thirds of all crashes in which people are killed or injured happen on roads with a speed limit of 30 mph or less. At 35 mph a driver is twice as likely to kill someone as they are at 30 mph.

At 30 mph, vehicles travel 44 feet (about 3 car lengths) **every second**.

Even in good conditions, the difference in stopping distance between 30 mph and 35 mph is an extra 21 feet, more than 2 car lengths.

For pedestrians struck by cars, the risk of being killed increases slowly until impact speeds of around 30 mph, but above this speed, the risk increases rapidly. A pedestrian hit by a car travelling at between 30 mph and 40 mph is 3.5 to 5.5 times more likely to be killed than one struck by a car travelling at less than 30 mph. Elderly pedestrians have a much greater risk of suffering fatal injuries than other age groups².

For car occupants, the risk of being in a collision with another vehicle also increases with speed. The risk is much higher in a side impact than in a frontal impact².

Even a small amount above the limit makes a big difference.

Road Safety factsheet: RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to Staying within the Limit

Check your speedometer regularly, especially when coming off high speed roads

Modern cars are so powerful and comfortable they give drivers little sensation of their speed, so many drivers find themselves exceeding the speed limit without realising it.

This is particularly true when coming onto a lower speed road after driving on a high speed road for a long period. It can often feel like you are moving at a snail's pace when you reduce your speed to 40 mph or 30 mph after coming off a motorway or dual carriageway. In reality, 30 mph and 40 mph are still very substantial speeds and a pedestrian hit at those speeds will be seriously injured, and quite likely killed.

It is misleading to rely on a 'feeling' of speed. The only way to be sure of your speed, and to check you have reduced to an appropriate speed (even if it 'feels' slow) is to check the car's speedometer regularly. Although you should never rely on 'feeling' your speed, you may be able to improve your judgement of it by regularly comparing how fast you think you are driving with what the speedometer says.

Many cars now have speed management devices that allow the driver to set certain speeds and receive a warning when they are being exceeded. If your vehicle has a pre-set speed function, set this so it will warn you if you exceed certain speeds.

Know the limits – look for signs, especially at junctions

You need to know the speed limit of the roads you are using. Far too many drivers who have been caught speeding, complain that they thought the road had a higher speed limit (40 mph instead of 30 mph).

In many cases, the nature of the road does not indicate the speed limit. In urban areas, for example, dual carriageways can have limits of 30 mph, 40 mph, 50 mph, 60 mph or 70 mph.

Speed limit signs tend to be placed at junctions because this is often the point at which the limit changes. However, junctions are also where you need to absorb a wide range of different information and it is easy to miss a speed limit sign when concentrating on one or more other things (e.g., which way am I going? is that driver going to pull out? etc). Therefore, you need to get into the habit of checking for speed limit signs at junctions, and looking for repeater signs after the junction, especially if the nature of the road has changed.

If you are not sure, assume the limit is lower until you see a sign.

Road Safety factsheet: RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to Staying within the Limit

Assume lamp posts mean 30 mph, until signs say otherwise – but remember it could be 20 mph

When driving on built-up roads, assume the limit is 30 mph until you see a sign saying otherwise. But, remember the limit could be lower – 20 mph.

The law does not allow highway authorities to put repeater speed limit signs on 30 mph roads that have street lights. This is because putting repeater signs on all such roads would require hundreds of thousands of extra signs.

Instead the Highway Code advises that street lights usually mean the limit is 30 mph unless there are signs showing otherwise.

Remember, speed limits are a maximum, not a target

Speed limits set the maximum speed for that road. However, there are many circumstances when it is not safe to drive at that speed. Examples of situations where drivers should drive at lower speeds than the limits are:

- Around schools at opening and closing times
- When children are about (especially residential areas, near playgrounds or parks)
- On busy, narrow roads
- Where parked vehicles reduce the width of the road
- On rural roads which are narrow, bendy and hilly and visibility is restricted
- In poor weather or reduced visibility
- On wet, icy or snowy roads
- At roadworks.

20's plenty when kids are about – and may even be too fast

In 2019, 41** children (0-15 years) were killed on the road³.

Children (0-15 years) killed and injured on the road, GB, 2019^{3**}

	Killed	Injured
Pedestrian	22	3,461
Cyclist	9	1,647
Car user	10	3,553
Motorcycle user	0	83
Other	0	108

**These statistics include other road users and cases where road user types are not reported.

Road Safety factsheet: RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to Staying within the Limit

Children's awareness of the dangers of traffic is much lower than that of adults'. Many cannot judge how fast cars are moving nor how far away they are. As we all know, children are more easily distracted and they are likely to do things, such as dashing into the road after a ball, which adults would not dream of doing.

As adults who have been trained and licensed to drive cars in an environment that children also use, it is our responsibility to drive in a way that enables us to cope with mistakes and misjudgements made by children.

One of the most effective ways we can ensure that a child who dashes into the road or who makes a mistake while cycling does not pay for that mistake with their life, is to drive slower when children are, or may be, about.

Try no higher than 3rd gear in a 30 mph limit

It is easier to notice if you are creeping above 30 mph when travelling in 3rd gear, and this can act as a warning to reduce your speed.

Drivers should, of course, choose the appropriate gear for their speed and the road, weather and traffic circumstances, and change gear as those circumstances change. The most appropriate gear to use when driving at 30 mph will depend on your engine size, but in many modern cars it is possible to drive at 30 mph in 3rd gear without making the engine labour.

If you struggle to keep your car within 30 mph when driving in a 30 mph zone, try driving in 3rd gear (or lower when necessary). If you can comfortably travel at 30 mph in 3rd gear without feeling that the engine is laboured, adopt 'no higher than 3rd in 30 mph' as a principle.

Automatic cars normally have several forward gears, so the driver should choose the gear which makes it easiest to keep the vehicle under 30 mph.

Recognise what makes you speed - keeping up with traffic, overtaking or being tailgated

We all have our 'speed triggers' – things that make us more likely to speed up and perhaps exceed the limit unintentionally. This could be feeling pressurised into keeping up with other drivers, or feeling stressed by a driver too close behind. Being tempted to overtake a vehicle in front may also mean exceeding the limit to complete the manoeuvre. Distractions, such as listening to loud music, often result in speeding. It could be something as simple as going downhill.

Learning to recognise your own 'speed triggers' will make it easier to avoid being 'pushed' into speeding. It will also make driving less stressful and more relaxing.

Keeping a safe distance from the vehicle in front will also help to reduce your stress levels when driving. Use the 2-Second Rule: leave at least a two-second gap between you and the vehicle in front. Double this distance on wet roads and increase it even further on icy roads.

Road Safety factsheet: RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to Staying within the Limit

Concentrate – distracted drivers speed

Although it is a familiar everyday task, driving is actually a very complex thing. Trying to do something else (use a mobile phone, light a cigarette, unwrap a sweet) at the same time, is distracting. Listening to music with the volume too high can encourage drivers to speed up. Distracted drivers find it much more difficult to maintain their awareness of what's happening on the road around them, and are more likely to speed. Using a mobile phone while driving is a classic example of this type of distraction.

The law requires drivers to be in proper control of their vehicle at all times, and drivers who, for example, smoke or eat while driving could be prosecuted under this law. There is also a specific law banning the use of hand-held mobile phones, or other communication devices, while driving.

Peer pressure can also be an issue, particularly for younger drivers, as passengers are thought to have a significant impact on the safety of a vehicle driven by a young driver. This can be through passengers distracting the young driver, or passengers encouraging risky behaviours such as exceeding the speed limit. This means that young drivers sometimes drive faster when they are carrying young passengers, which increases their chances of being involved in a collision.

Slow down when entering villages

Villages are in rural areas and normally surrounded by roads with 60 mph limits. But, of course, in the village itself there are pedestrians, cyclists, junctions, slow-moving vehicles.

The speed limit will normally be reduced as you approach a village. It may be reduced gradually from 60 mph to 50 mph or 40 mph as you approach the village and then go down to 30 as you enter the village, or it may go straight down from 60 mph to 30 mph through a village.

Begin to slow down as you see the speed limit sign ahead so that you have already reduced your speed to 30 mph by the time reach the speed limit sign.

It may feel like you are only crawling through the village, especially if you have been driving at 60 mph for while, but at 30 mph you are still covering 44 feet (about three car lengths) every second, and if you hit a pedestrian at that speed, he or she will be severely injured, and possibly killed.

Even if it 'feels' too slow, do not exceed the limit. Check your speedometer regularly.

Give yourself time – there's no need to speed and you won't get there quicker

Exceeding the speed limit makes little difference to your arrival time. The time it takes to complete a journey is determined much more by your average speed during the whole journey, rather than the maximum speed you achieve for part of it. This is especially true in urban areas, where you constantly have to slow down for junctions, traffic lights and other road users. The faster you drive, the sharper you have to brake. This also uses much more fuel and so makes driving more expensive.

Road Safety factsheet: RoSPA's Top Ten Tips to Staying within the Limit

Knowing that you have plenty of time to complete your journey will help you to relax and avoid the temptation to push your speed.

Refresh your skills – take a refresher or advanced driver training course

Most of us take professional lessons when learning to drive, but very few of us take any training after passing the Driving Test. Cars are changing rapidly as technology develops and driving conditions are becoming more difficult.

We all develop our own driving style and bad habits over time, and many of us would fail the Driving Test if we retook it today. We would all benefit from refresher training every few years to review and update our driving skills and attitudes. There are many reasons to take refresher training:

- To enjoy your driving
- To improve your confidence
- To reduce Your crash risk
- To improve your fuel consumption
- To ensure less wear and tear on your vehicle
- To lower your insurance premiums
- To meet people
- To help get a job
- To show you are a good driver

For more information about refresher driver training, see [Get More from Your Driving](#) and [RoSPA Advanced Drivers and Riders](#).

References

¹ Department for Transport (2020) 'Table RAS50001: Contributory factors in reported accidents by severity, Great Britain, 2019'

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras50-contributory-factors#table-ras50001>

Date Accessed: 22/06/2021.

² Department for Transport (2010) 'Road Safety Web Publication No. 16: Relationship between Speed and Risk of Fatal Injury: Pedestrians and Car Occupants

URL: http://nacto.org/docs/usdg/relationship_between_speed_risk_fatal_injury_pedestrians_and_car_occupants_richards.pdf Date Accessed: 11/12/2016.

³ Department for Transport (2020) 'Table RAS30024: Reported casualties by age band, road user type and severity, Great Britain, 2019'

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents#table-ras30024> Date Accessed: 22/06/2021.

***Due to changes in severity reporting across some police forces since 2016, newer statistics are not comparable to earlier years. Therefore, the DfT provides both adjusted and unadjusted casualty figures in their statistical data tables. RoSPA uses adjusted figures as the DfT states that they are recommended for "the analysis of trends over time".**