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SPEED

There are three factors that make traffic crashes the leading cause of accidental death and of time lost from work. Using alcohol and failing to use seatbelts are two. The third is speed.

Speed multiplies every physical force involved in the crash. Hazards such as mechanical difficulties or the unsafe operation of a vehicle may be manageable when we are traveling at moderate speeds, but they become life-threatening at high speeds. Every increase in our speed automatically decreases the amount of time and the distance that we have available to react to danger. And speed increases the force of any impact, making damage and injuries much more serious.

In spite of what you might see in television or movies, you are not likely to be able to climb out of a wreck unharmed.

Even at lower speeds, every 10 miles per hour increase in speed worsens the severity of a crash. And when you get to higher speeds, your chances of dying in a crash double with every 10 miles per hour that you are going over 50 miles per hour. Ask yourself whether you are actually gaining anything by increasing your speed. Consider this, for example. If you travel 20 miles, the time you will save for that 20-mile trip by going 65 miles per hour instead of 55 miles per hour amounts to only 3-1/2 minutes.

Keep in mind that, at high speed, you come up on a hazard situation so fast that by the time you spot the problem it may be too late to avoid it. If you are like most people, and it takes you 1/2 to 3/4 of a second to react to what you see, then at 60 miles per hour you travel three or four vehicle lengths before you do anything after you notice a problem. Even at 30 miles per hour, you travel one or two vehicle lengths. And higher speeds increase the distance your vehicle will travel once you apply the brakes.

Fines you might have to pay for speeding are actually pretty insignificant compared to the penalties you might have in damage and injury, and your auto insurance premiums.

So: Observe speed limits, and reduce your speed where weather or road or traffic conditions call for it. A responsible attitude toward vehicle safety includes respect for what speed can do.