

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEFENSIVE DRIVER

Defensive driving does not require a high degree of special training. The characteristics of a defensive driver are the same characteristics that apply to many aspects of our lives. Let's look at the five most important requirements for defensive driving.

- **Knowledge.** Defensive drivers take time to educate themselves about safe driving techniques. They know how to recognize hazards and avoid collisions. They know the traffic laws in their area. This knowledge helps them know how to act correctly and quickly in traffic situations. They also know how to properly maintain their vehicles in a safe operating condition.
- **Alertness.** Defensive drivers are alert, both to traffic conditions and to how their own mental and physical conditions may affect their driving. They pay attention to the traffic situation to the front, sides and rear, glancing in rear- and sideview mirrors many times a minute. They give all their attention to the task of driving.
- **Foresight.** Defensive drivers know that their worst enemy is the unexpected. They never assume the other driver will do the right thing. They anticipate hazards by scanning the road to size up the traffic situation as far ahead as possible. In this way they are able to prepare for hazards rather than simply react to them. They practice long-range foresight by keeping their vehicles well-maintained, by checking them before driving, and by always wearing a safety belt.
- **Judgment.** Good drivers use common sense and knowledge to make decisions wisely and quickly. They maintain control of the behavior, resisting the temptation to make risky maneuvers to get somewhere faster or to outmaneuver other drivers. They pass only when it is safe, and always look for the safest, rather than the speediest, alternatives in any traffic situation. They are courteous, even when other drivers are not.
- **Skill.** Defensive drivers develop the skills necessary to operate a vehicle properly and safely. They know the safe and legal way to make turns, change gears, brake and pass. They can "listen" to their cars for signs of engine trouble, and they can perform simple emergency repairs, such as changing a tire.

You don't have to have lightning fast reflexes or unusual mental and physical abilities to be a defensive driver. Defensive driving is simply a matter of common sense, education and a safe attitude on the road.