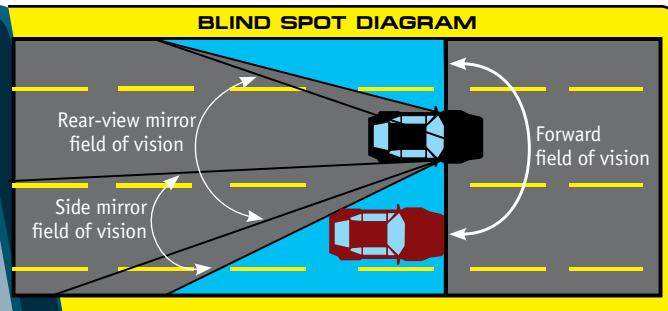


BLIND SPOTS

These are areas you can't see while looking through the windscreen or in your mirrors. Side blind spots are caused by the angle of your mirrors – there's always something they just can't cover (see the blue triangles in the diagram on the right).

You can check your blind spots by turning your head. Of course, this'll cause a blind spot in front, but you can't win them all ...

PARENTAL GUIDANCE Make sure mom isn't hogging someone's blindspot by teaching her this simple rule: if she can't see the other driver's face in his mirror, he can't see her.



ABS BRAKES

Antilock Braking Systems (ABS to friends) prevent wheels from locking while braking. Most of these systems have an Electronic Control Unit (ECU) with one sensor for every wheel, and two or more hydraulic valves in the vehicle brake circuit. When the ECU senses some wheels are rotating significantly slower than others (because you've slammed on the brakes), it reduces the braking force on those wheels by repeatedly locking and releasing them.

This doesn't mean you can dodge through traffic like a ninja, but it does prevent skidding. The downside? On loose surfaces like snow or gravel, ABS brakes increase braking distances.

PARENTAL GUIDANCE If mom's car doesn't have ABS, tell her to buy a new one – it could save her (and your) life. Because the wheels aren't able to lock, she will always be able to steer the car, even if it gets into a skid.

FAST AND FURIOUS

While some studies have shown that ABS reduces the risk of crashing, others found no difference at all. This is thought to be caused by a phenomenon called risk compensation – drivers respond to the safety of ABS by driving more aggressively.



TRAFFIC JAMS

A traffic jam is never fun, especially when the other lanes seem to be going faster than you. But how do you know if they're really ahead, and when should you tell dad to change lanes?

STAY WHERE YOU ARE

- You could be going just as fast as the other lanes on average, but only noticing them when they're faster than you.
- If the road has three or more lanes, you probably won't pick the fastest one anyway.
- Changing lanes causes hundreds of thousands of accidents a year, so it's often safer to stay put.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

- You could be going just as slowly as you think – any driver is more likely to be in the slow lane because there are more cars in that lane.
- If there are three or more lanes, the odds are you're not *in* the fastest one.
- Less time on the road means less chance of an accident, so if it's really faster, go for it.

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

The ability to treat every situation – including your own – as if you were a random observer isn't only important on the road. It could also answer some of biology and cosmology's most interesting questions. To find out how, click to www.anthropic-principle.com/primer.html.

