Woman at the Wheel

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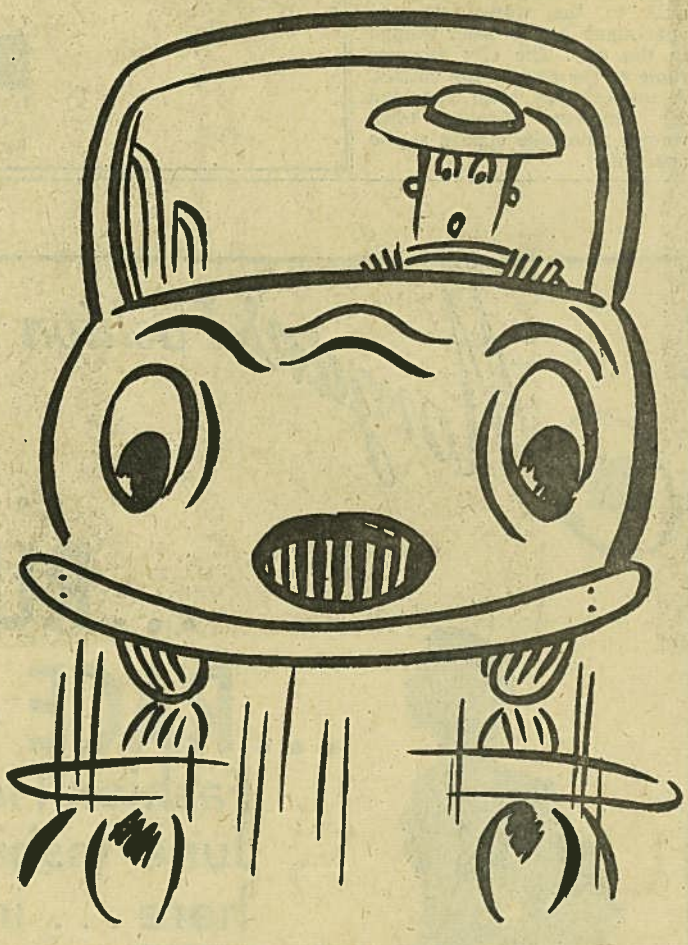
Bad Judgment Causes Most Mishaps

By OLIVE DICKASON

Most traffic accidents are due to errors in judgment.

Have you ever heard a driver say: "It happened so suddenly that I didn't have time to act?" The good driver keeps out of trouble by watching conditions ahead so that unexpected situations do not develop and find him unprepared.

While statistics show that women drivers become involved in far fewer accidents than their male counterparts, there is some basis in fact for the popular picture of a woman throwing up her hands and crying: "What will I do now?" However, she can console herself with the thought that women drivers are seldom involved in fatal accidents.



The most important thing for her to remember is that speed is the principal cause of fatal accidents.

When a tire blows out, do not apply the brakes nor throw out the clutch (but do take your foot off the accelerator); wait until the car has lost almost all of its momentum. A front tire blowout may cause you to lose control of the steering wheel unless you are holding it firmly. In the case of a rear tire blowout, a sudden application of the brakes at high speed may cause the car to turn over. Concentrate on keeping control of the car. When it has slowed somewhat try a pumping brake action.

When the right wheels strike a soft shoulder, a fast moving car is likely to swerve and turn over. The driver should hold the steering wheel tightly, remove her foot from the accelerator, and allow the engine to reduce speed to a safe point before either applying brakes, throwing out the clutch, or attempting to steer back onto the hard surface.

Going too fast around a curve is an invitation to centrifugal force to push the car off the road. Here again, the driver's first thought is to apply the brakes. This is dangerous and makes the car more difficult to control. The brakes should be used before reaching the curve. Centrifugal force varies with the weight and speed of the car, the radius of the curve, and the degree of banking of the road.

Skids develop from driving too fast for prevailing conditions. In summer, roads are likely to be most slippery at the very beginning of a rain. The first sprinkle wets the oil and dust on the road and forms a tricky slick surface. Then the downpour washes most of the slick away and the road is actually safer.

One way to test both brakes and road is to apply the brakes while travelling at 10 miles an hour. If your car tends to slide at this speed, be extremely careful at higher speeds.

Just what to do in a skid depends on your driving experience. However, there are some suggestions that apply generally: Don't brake or throw out the clutch. It's better to stall the engine than to aggravate the skid. Take your foot off the gas. To pull out, turn the steering wheel in the same direction that the rear of the car is sliding—which, fortunately is the usual instinctive reaction.

Swerving suddenly or jamming on brakes at high speed may cause skidding even on dry roads. A slight swerve or a sharp turn even at a reasonable speed on wet, oily or icy pavements or roads covered with soggy leaves may result in a disastrous skid. A review of skidding accidents shows that in about 80 per cent of the cases, the tires were worn smooth or nearly smooth, or that skidding resulted from unequal braking traction caused by the use of both new and "bald" tires on the car.

A repeat warning: Be careful how you use your brakes. Unwisely handled, they can easily transform an emergency situation, even a comparatively minor one, into a disaster.