

13 The Car Myths Book

The plain truth about driving misconceptions.



By John Powell, Driving Expert

Shell  **helps**



About the Author

Racing driver, and chief instructor at the Mosport Racing School, John Powell is a devoted crusader for better driving. He teaches an advanced driving course at Blainville, Quebec, where he tests all his methods to separate fact from myth. As consultant to both the Federal and Ontario Provincial Governments, as well as to Shell, he is constantly updating his knowledge and passing it on to his students.

"Myths have arisen because cars have improved so much while driving skills haven't kept pace." -John Powell

The car of today is bumperto-bumper technology. Power steering, automatic transmissions, and new braking systems. As well, there are more small cars on the road than ever before. All of which means we, as drivers, cannot depend on the driving techniques we relied on in the days of the old road cruisers.

Old driving habits die hard

The car-driver relationship has changed. Because modern cars respond differently we must



'unlearn' some of our old beliefs about driving. Recently the people at Shell gave me the opportunity to put some common driving myths to the test.



We met at Blainville, Quebec, at the Transport Canada Motor Vehicle Test Centre. The demonstration was a success, and Shell encouraged me to research different kinds of driving myths. Some of these may save you money, and could save your life.

Join the revolution

The explosion of these myths may cause quite a noise among motorists. But then, sometimes it takes a big noise to alert people's attention to a new way of thinking.



Definition of a myth:

"Purely fictitious narrative, person, thing, or idea."

Rate your attitude

For every myth you always thought was true, you score 5 demerit points. That's bad. For each one you knew was a myth, you break even. That's good. Be honest. Add it all up and rate yourself on the back cover.

Myth: "I should switch to my high beams when I'm approaching a hill."

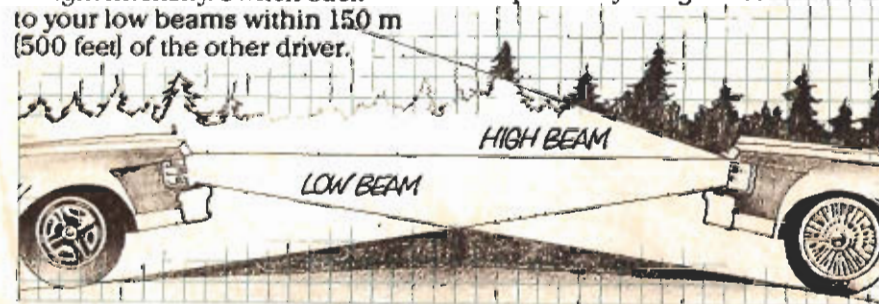
On a hill, your lights are your only means of communication. So use them conversationally. That is, listen with your lights. Ascending, drop them to see the other driver's lights more clearly, then as you crest, you do the talking with your high beams. This allows the other driver a chance to detect a change in light intensity. Switch back to your low beams within 150 m (500 feet) of the other driver.

Myth: "Fast reflexes can get me out of potential accident situations."

Don't overrate your reflexes or rely on your ability to 'feel' how your car will respond. Your ability to anticipate is much more crucial. Look not just at the car ahead of you, but down the block to where a potential accident may be forming.

Myth: "Sunglasses cut down on the glare of oncoming headlights at night."

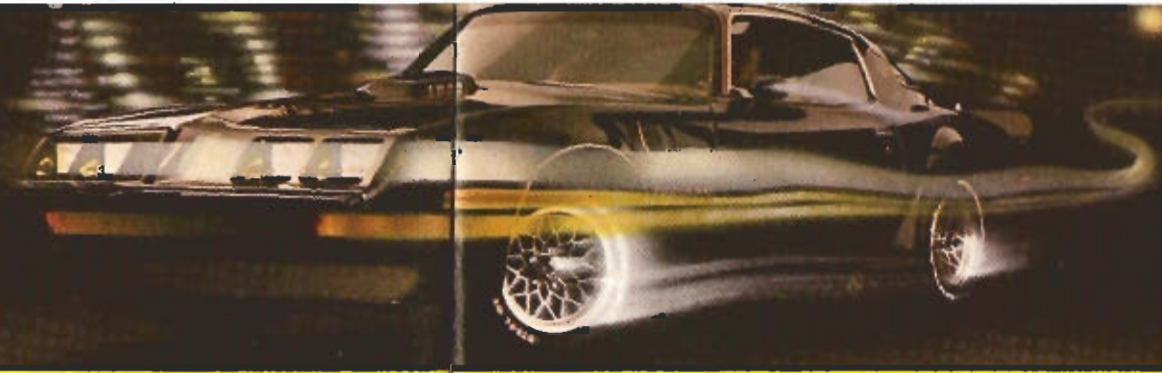
Sunglasses cut down on 25-30% of the light entering your eye. Daylight allows for this, but your night vision is dangerously impaired by sunglasses.



Out of control

"Driving myths are still being taught. Check this yourself. Ask a driving 'expert' what to do when your car starts to skid."

-John Powell



Basic myth manoeuvres

Myths: *If my car spins:*

- (A) "There's nothing I can do."
 (B) "I should take both feet off the pedals and turn into the skid."



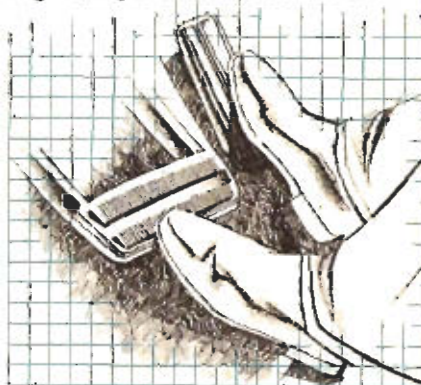
The correct thing to do in a manual is de-clutch and in an automatic shift to neutral. Then steer in the direction the car was travelling. If you've done this too late, and the car continues to spin, lock all four wheels, by jamming the brakes, and the car will continue in a straight line.

Don't take your foot off the gas, and simultaneously steer in the direction of the skid. If you do, this will lock the rear wheels momentarily and the car will continue the sliding action. This causes the rear of the car to swing faster and faster until you are spinning out of control.

Braking Habits

Myth: "Left-foot braking helps me to stop more quickly."

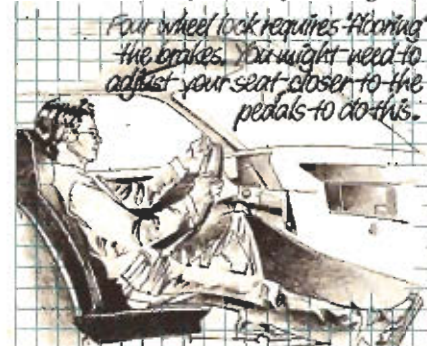
For many reasons, left-foot braking is a dangerous habit. Even the slightest pressure on the brakes causes them to heat up, and at high temperatures, brakes lose



much of their stopping capability. Don't feel that you're better prepared for a quick stop with your foot riding the brake. While your foot may be there, the braking power might not be. With the brakes partially engaged you are actually forcing the car to drive against the brakes, thus wasting fuel. Not to mention the false tail-light signals you're giving the driver behind you.

Myth: "By jamming my foot on the brakes, all 4 wheels will lock."

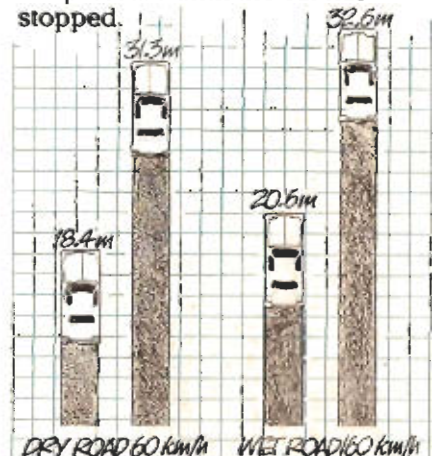
Not necessarily. To really jam the brakes effectively, you need a lot of leg power. If you are sitting too far back from the pedals, you might



not have enough "leg" to hit the brake hard enough. Test yourself and make sure you can stop quickly if you have to.

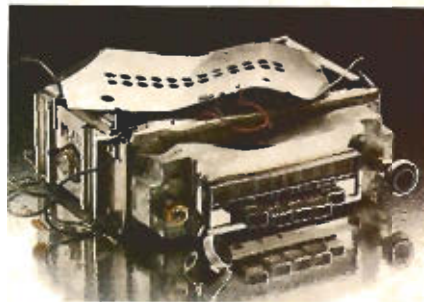
Myth: "Pumping the brakes is the quickest way to stop in an emergency."

When you pump the brakes you lose braking action each time you take your foot off the brake pedal. The most efficient way to stop is to de-clutch in a manual, and in an automatic, shift into neutral, and hit the brake pedal hard. Maintain the pressure until the car has stopped.



Myth: "Music keeps me alert."

Driving when you're tired is dangerous, and using music to keep you alert is doubly so. Slow tunes can relax you too much, and fast music may make you drive more aggressively. It's much safer to pull over and 'wake up' there.



Some myths disguise themselves as helpful hints, but actually cost you money



Myth: "I should feel as comfortable in my car seat as I do in my favourite chair."

A good car seat should press firmly into the small of your back and prevent you from slouching or sliding. It 'contains' you in an upright posture and properly restricts your body movement. Your mental alertness is a direct result of how you are seated. You're better off leaving the comforts of your living room in your living room.

Myth: "Driving with the rear window of my station wagon or hatch-back open helps ventilation."

This actually has the opposite effect, sucking the car's exhaust fumes inside.

Myth: "Locking doors helps prevent them from springing open in an accident."

The locking mechanism does not prevent the doors from opening in a collision. As a matter of fact, in an accident, locked doors could hinder people from getting you out of the car. I'm not suggesting that

you never lock up. Locked doors offer protection from intruders, so use common sense. Lock the doors when you are alone and travelling in unfamiliar territory.

Myth: "Shoulder belts can be worn under the arm and are just as safe and more comfortable."

In the event of a collision, your body is hurled forward with incredible force. When the shoulder belt is not used properly it will not hold you in the seat, and internal injury may occur if the belt falls below your rib cage, instead of your chest. Wear the shoulder belt properly for maximum protection.



Myth: "Fill your tank to the brim."

When your tank is full at \$9.33, and you keep it going for an even \$10.00, that 67¢ is costing you more than you think. An over-fed tank will leak due to heat expansion, or spill over from the stop-and-go movement of the car.

Myth: "You can tell if a tire is under-inflated just by looking at it"

Looking is not enough, especially with radials, which always look soft. An under-inflated tire fights the car's momentum, and an over-inflated one wears improperly. Check your tire pressure weekly with an accurate gauge and keep it at the recommended level.

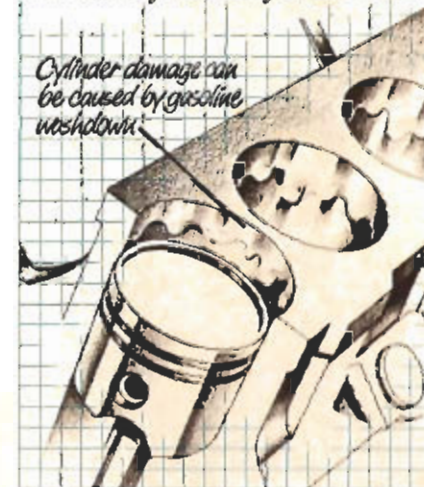
Myth: "You should warm your engine up for a while before driving off on a cold day."

Yes, and no. The engine actually warms up most efficiently driving at moderate speeds. So idle no more than 30 seconds to 2 minutes (depending on how cold it is)

and drive off slowly. Idling any longer wastes fuel.

Myth: "Revving your engine before shutting it off helps to circulate the oil."

When you rev the engine you introduce a fresh charge of gasoline and air into the engine. When the motor stops, the gasoline mixture now introduced washes the oil away from the cylinder walls. Upon starting the car, there is no oil protection and the piston rings wear heavily on the cylinder walls.



How did you do?

0-15 demerits: Congratulations! You are a modern thinker. Besides being an aware and enlightened motorist, you help to make the roads a safe place.

20-40 demerits: Give yourself a pat on the back for doing well. Your score shows that you are alerted to most common driving myths but

still suffer from a few old wives' tales.

45-65 demerits: I hope you're going to update your driving skills. That would make this book very worthwhile.

70-85 demerits: Join the revolution, quickly.

The truth about quality

Use top quality products to help keep your car in top condition. Your Shell Dealer has a wide variety of automotive products backed by the Shell brand name.



Shell gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of Transport Canada, and John Powell for their kind assistance in the preparation of this booklet.

More help from Shell

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