

RULES OF THE ROAD IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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SYNOPSIS

In practice there is one underlying principle that is commonly accepted by all good drivers. This is that a driver should remain in his own traffic lane and maintain a reasonably uniform speed, only changing direction and speed when he can do so without interference with other traffic.

In discussing the application of this principle to the various situations encountered in traffic movements Dr Dickinson points out that in many respects existing traffic regulations are not only at variance with common practices but introduce elements of uncertainty and danger. Analysis of the rules in vogue for passing vehicles on four lane roads, for right-of-way at light controlled intersections, boulevard crossings, and for left hand turns, leads to the suggestion that a single regulation based on the foregoing principle, would leave no shadow of a right for two vehicles to be in the same place at the same time; which is not the case with most existing regulations.

A careful analysis of the practices of the vast majority of drivers in the various situations which involve the rights and convenience of users of the highway leads to the definite conclusion that one underlying principle is generally accepted by good drivers as a basis for all these practices.

Theory as represented by existing traffic regulations based partly on experience in the days of horse-drawn vehicles, and partly on purely academic considerations, is in many respects at variance with common practices and we believe the conflict between theory and practice is responsible for much of the accident toll.

The basic principle which appears in all these common practices is that *a driver should remain in his own traffic lane and maintain a reasonably uniform speed, only changing his speed or departing from his traffic lane when he can do so without interference with other traffic in his or other traffic lanes*.

Two situations only appear to show complete consistency between regulations and practice as based on the above concept. These are (1) meeting and passing other vehicles, and (2) stopping at light controlled intersections. In both cases the requirements are definite. The driver must remain in his own traffic lane or his own portion of the highway. There is no conflict of rights. No two users of the highway may attempt to be *in the same place at the same time*. These two situations are

remarkably free from accidents considering the great number of occasions which occur

Applying the principle stated above to other traffic situations entirely different conditions are found

In the overtaking and passing of vehicles on four-lane highways, for instance, arises one of the most serious discrepancies between theory and practice. The principle of *lane traffic* would call for each vehicle to remain in one traffic lane except as a change could be made without interference with other traffic. Regulations, however, commonly require that a driver must remain in the right-hand lane or must vacate the left lane if another driver wishes to overtake him. Despite the regulation drivers recognize the logical practice of overtaking on either side on highways having four or more traffic lanes, and do so freely.

The laws should be changed in this respect to correspond with good practice.

At intersections not controlled by lights there is necessarily conflict of interests since one driver always must yield to another. The application of the logical principle here would require that the driver who must yield right of way should *not interfere at all with the other driver*. In place of this simple requirement the most widely used code provides that the driver approaching on the right shall have right of way but that after the driver on the left has "entered the intersection" he shall then have right of way. Could a more confusing or dangerous provision be found than this? It encourages beating the other driver to the intersection and transfers the right to cross to the left-hand driver as soon as he enters the intersection.

This ambiguity is only somewhat more serious than the general provision which gives the driver on the *right* the right of way at intersections. The reason for this instead of the reverse provision has never been clear but only a little study shows conclusively that in this situation the driver on the *left* should have the right of way. If this were the case a driver approaching could not enter the intersection until the crossroad on the *left* was clear but having entered he would have right of way to cross because the driver on the *right* of the intersection would be halted.

Thus the logical rule for any uncontrolled intersection, not a boulevard crossing, would be as follows: *Driver on the left has right of way. Driver on the right may not enter the intersection in such manner as to interfere with his right to cross at a normal speed.* In case of severe competition, driver entering the intersection must signal for right of way and wait until his signal is recognized and the approaching car slows down to permit his crossing.

Where turns are to be made at an intersection there is again a conflict of interests. Right-hand turns are not difficult since if made from the right-hand lane they generally do not interfere with other traffic either at controlled or uncontrolled intersections.

As for left-hand turns application of the *lane traffic* principle requires that a left turn be made only when this can be done without interference with other traffic. This is the practice of most good drivers despite such regulations as give to the driver making a left-hand turn right of way over approaching vehicles which *have not entered the intersection*. Scarcely any driver has the temerity to make use of this provision but occasionally one takes a chance on the other fellow's brakes and may or may not get away with it.

For left-hand turns the logical rule is that *the turn shall be made only when this can be done without interfering with other traffic*. In case of extreme congestion the turn shall be made only after signaling to the approaching driver for right of way and being assured that the signal is recognized and acted upon.

There has been much discussion of the left-turn problem, particularly of the "rotary" turn. This latter is perhaps the safest form of turn as it gives complete protection to the turning vehicle but it requires more time than the simpler turn except when there is serious congestion.

At boulevard or "stop" intersections the logical rule would require that the crossing should not be made until this can be done without interference with traffic in *either* direction on the main road. Confusion exists as to what is meant by the "stop" sign at these crossings. In many cases the sign is interpreted to mean simply that the driver must come to a complete stop after which only the usual rules apply, and as noted above this leaves much to be desired. This sign should mean that the crossing *must be made only when it can be done without interferring at all with through traffic in either direction*. In case of great congestion the usual requirement should hold—crossing to be made only after the driver has signalled for right of way and had *his signal recognized*.

When a driver wishes to "weave" from one traffic lane to another, there is no common provision except the unregulated practice to determine how this should be done, but in most cases the obvious demands of safety prevent the driver from neglecting the general rule that he *must not interfere with traffic in the other lane*.

These few cases cited seem sufficient to show that one simple logical practice is generally accepted by all good drivers in all situations in traffic. This one regulation is *A driver must not depart from his own traffic lane or slow up within it unless he can do so without interferring with other traffic*.

In case of congestion where no opportunity can be found to make the necessary maneuver the driver must make a suitable signal and see that this signal is recognized by the other parties involved before making the move.

This simple regulation applies with equal force and logic to all the common maneuvers on the highway in conjunction with the proper

conventions at crossings It is simple and far more readily understood than most of the various regulations which it would replace, and in particular it has the virtue that in no case is there any ambiguity as to who is in the right Like the safe and simple rule for meeting other cars it leaves no *shadow of a right for two vehicles to be in the same place at the same time*

So long as ambiguous regulations afford any right for two occupants of the highway to attempt to be in the same place at the same time there will be too many collisions and there will be no clear cut means of telling who is responsible for them