

DRIVING ADVISORY: WHAT IS AN ESCAPE ROUTE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Are you ready to escape? When you're driving you should be planning all the time what to do and where to go if things go wrong around you, or vehicles make unexpected moves.

Escape routes are central to defensive driving: they allow you to anticipate danger, stay calm, and respond rather than simply reacting.



The Three Golden Rules



1 Never assume anything

Don't take for granted that things will stay as they are. Other drivers are always likely to change speed and direction, and hazards can appear without warning.



2 Expect the unexpected

Mentally run through possible scenarios around you. What if this car pulls out of the junction? What if that pedestrian steps into the road? What if this lorry swerves into my lane? And so on...



3 Plan ahead

Once you've gathered information and imagined what could go wrong, you prepare. That includes always keeping an escape route, or action, in mind.



How to plan and maintain escape routes



Stay alert

You can't plan if you haven't mapped out what's going on. Scan ahead, behind, and to both sides of you, and use mirrors frequently. Identify hazards, such as vehicles

moving in erratic ways, or pedestrians who are not paying attention.



Maintain safe space

By creating a safe zone around you, you buy yourself time to make a crucial decision or move. This doesn't mean just two or three seconds from the vehicle in front, but also

avoiding being boxed in on multi-lane roads.

For example, being in a middle lane on a multi-lane road often gives options both left and right, and when lanes merge into one, slow for a gap to create a zone around you on all sides, so you don't get squeezed.

Also, avoid sitting in blind spots of other vehicles, and try not to linger where you might be hemmed in.



Create options

Always look for open lanes, hard shoulders, junctions and exits that you could use if events require you to escape.

Match your speed to potential actions too: if you're concerned about another driver, ensure you've slowed enough to make the escape move safely.



In an emergency

Sometimes even the best anticipation and escape route planning ends up with you needing to take emergency action. Here's what to do if that occurs:

- Stay calm. Panic makes decisions worse.
- Signal and communicate. Use indicators, lights, or horn if needed to make your intentions clearer to other drivers.
- Reduce speed safely if needed, but act positively and decisively. Even if you can't escape sideways, slowing gives you more time to avoid an impact or make the collision less severe.
- Choose the least worst option. If an event has happened and there's no avoiding it, it's better to accept some potential damage and risk rather than hoping for a miracle: it might be better to mount a verge (as long as there's no risk to pedestrians or others) rather than trying to stop before hitting a vehicle, for example.

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