

Experienced Drivers Often Fail to Be Alert

By OLIVE DICKASON

One of the disadvantages of becoming expert about anything is that we're apt to become careless about it. This is only too evident in our accident records: Most accidents occur under good travelling conditions and with an experienced driver behind the wheel. By all means relax behind the wheel, but at the same time stay alert.

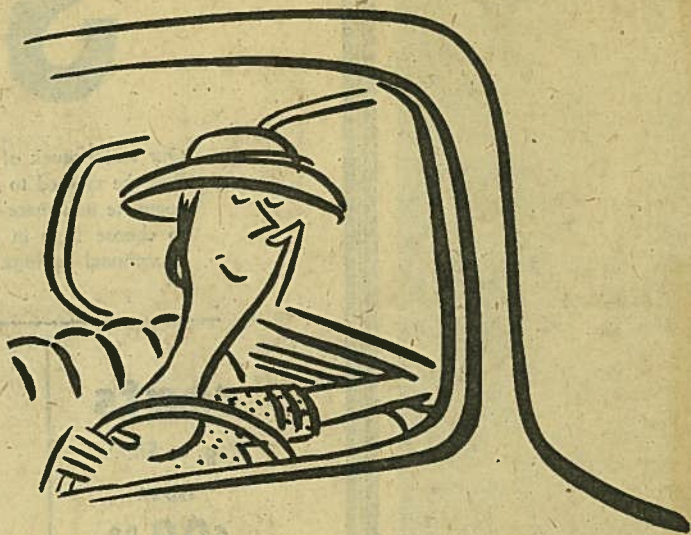
Consider night driving. How many are aware that it is more than three times as dangerous as daytime driving and act accordingly? Speed should go down with the sun, and driving should only be done with good eyes and good lights.

Even with excellent headlights, there will be times when you won't be able to see clearly for more than 100 feet. A car with good brakes travelling at 40 miles an hour cannot be stopped in less than 128 feet. On this basis, 35 miles an hour is the top speed for safety. Travelling too fast is known

as "overdriving the headlights."

The improved sealed beam headlamp is now standard equipment on new cars. Its low beams illuminate the highway as much as 80 feet further than the former type. They provide a high zone of intense light at the right edge of the road without blinding approaching drivers. But even with this safety feature, the human element is always with us.

Lights assume great importance in fogs and mists. The important thing here is to direct the headlight beams downward. Never use parking lights, as it is just as important for the others to see you as it is for you to see where you are going. If the upper beam is used, the fog will reflect the light right back in the driver's eyes. There isn't much that can be done about a heavy fog, beyond checking that headlights and tail-lights are working properly and slowing down to a crawl, if necessary. Some drivers use their horns like



fog horns by giving them a toot every now and then.

Always remember when moving along in a car to think in terms of the distance being covered. Crowded summer highways, for instance, increase the hazard of rear-end collisions. A good rule of thumb is to stay at least one car length behind for each 10 miles of speed. Thousands of tests have shown that it takes easily one second from the time the driver sees the car stopping ahead until she applies her own brakes. During this short space of seeing, realizing and shifting from accelerator to brake, we keep right on travelling without slowing up a bit. That means there should always be a minimum of one second's reaction distance from the vehicle ahead.

By the same token, when stopping in heavy traffic, al-

ways do so 10 feet behind the vehicle in front. This space might be a valuable life-saving cushion.

A study of accident causes shows clearly that drivers plagued with back-seat drivers have far more accidents than those carrying quiet passengers.

In conclusion, drivers should remember that pedestrians are victims in more than 50 per cent of all traffic fatalities. Blame can often be attached to the pedestrian, who frequently has never driven a car and does not understand the driver's problems. Most pedestrians killed have never had a driver's license. But this fact does not absolve the driver: it is up to her to recognize these human failings and to drive accordingly. She is the one who controls the instrument of death.