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Highway Breakdowns

Today's passenger vehicles are the most technically advanced and longest-lasting machines ever produced. Their reliability is unsurpassed.

Still, even the most finely tuned vehicle can break down. And breakdowns on the highway are nerve wracking, scary and dangerous. If one occurs, your first consideration should be safety for yourself and any passengers.

Keep Your Head

When steam is spewing from under the hood or you hear the bang of a blowout, it's easy to panic. But remember that it's important to evaluate the situation and then calmly react to it. Don't worry about being late. Safety must take precedence over your schedule or whatever other concerns you may have. Stay calm and think about the immediate problem, which is getting off the road.

Get Off the Road

At the first sign of car trouble, gently and smoothly take your foot off the accelerator. Do not brake hard or suddenly. Carefully work your vehicle toward the breakdown lane or the side of the road. If you are on an interstate, try to reach an exit. Signal your intentions to drivers behind you. If it is necessary to change lanes, watch your mirrors and the traffic around you closely.

On the Shoulder

Once on the shoulder, put the transmission in park, set the emergency brake, turn off the engine and turn on the emergency flashers. If it is dark, turn on the interior dome light. Pop the hood release and exit from the passenger side.

Raise the hood, and tie a handkerchief to the radio antenna or hang it out a window. These signal to other drivers, police officers, or tow truck drivers that your vehicle is in trouble. Get the triangle safety reflectors from your trunk and set them up along the edge of the road behind your vehicle.

Now you can carefully try to determine the exact nature of your problem and begin to take action.

Stay with the Vehicle

If the problem cannot be quickly, easily and safely fixed, get back in the vehicle and wait for help with the doors locked. If you have a cell phone, call for help.

If You Can't Pull off the Road

If your vehicle loses power and is inoperable, switch on the emergency flashers. Do not risk personal injury by attempting to push your vehicle to a safe location.

If you cannot get your vehicle to the shoulder and are concerned it may be struck from behind, do not stay in your vehicle. Proceed carefully and watch for oncoming traffic, especially at night or in bad weather when visibility is limited.

-- Kenneth Krause

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