

# Truck drivers can't avoid what they can't see is there

*The bigger the truck, the bigger the blind spot—avoid “No Zones” and get home, not medical attention*

**W**hy do motorists appear largely negative toward truckers when truck-driver performance gets better every year?

My family's background is in long-haul trucking and my wife's family tree is full of logging truck drivers (if you'll excuse the pun.) So, we were raised with a great deal of understanding for truckers; the long hours they put in, and the conditions they drove through. We were also forced to listen to hours of country music like Freddie Fender's "Gimme 40 acres and I'll turn this rig around," Red Sovine's "Phantom 309," Johnny Tilman's "Widow Maker," but I digress...suffice it to say we've recovered. Almost.

## **“Knights of the road”**

Anyway, we grew up in the industry, and that's probably why we thought, and still think, the way we do. However, our perception is hardly a common one these days. Why the shift, when just 30 years ago truckers



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were the “knights of the road?”

One answer may lie in the trucks themselves. To keep up with the rising consumer demand for goods, trucks have become larger and more powerful. Yet while the typical rig has grown longer, taller and wider, the typical car has shrunk in response to demands for better fuel efficiency and handling. In the mid-60s, the typical highway semi-trailer designed for the roads of that period was only 35 feet long compared with 45 to 57 feet today. So, when your four-door sedan is following a modern semi-trailer rig down a street or highway, the truck blocks out considerably more of your daylight than it did thirty years ago. It's seemingly more menacing than it

was in the “old days.”

Well, to be honest, the trucker has more to be afraid of than you do. Granted, the numbers seem to illustrate the opposite. Twenty-five people (20 per cent of the total road deaths in Manitoba) were killed in commercial truck crashes in 1995. Of these fatalities, 80 per cent were occupants of other vehicles, 12 per cent were non-occupants (pedestrians), and eight per cent were commercial truck occupants.

## **Trucks have more to fear than cars**

So why should truckers be nervous behind the wheel? Because of another statistic illustrating that over 60 per cent of the fatal collisions were caused by the vehicle drivers. And that's just the fatal statistics. The number of “near misses” caused by vehicle drivers is much higher.

The problem is car drivers simply don't understand how trucks manoeuvre, or don't care. In this case, ignorance isn't bliss; it's risk.

## **Stay safe—remember the No Zones**

You must be aware of the No Zones, areas around trucks where accidents are most likely to occur. Remembering these zones can mean the difference between getting home and getting medical attention.

**Passing.** Don't cut in after passing and then abruptly slow down, forcing the truck driver to compensate with little time or room to spare. Maintain a consistent speed when passing and be sure you can see the cab of the truck in your rear-view before pulling in front.

**Backing up.** Never pass close behind a truck that is preparing to back up or is backing up. Wide trailers completely hide objects that suddenly come between them and the loading area.

**Rear blind spots.** Unlike cars, trucks have deep blind spots directly behind them. Avoid tailgating; the trucker can't see you, and you can't see much from there, either.

**Side blind spots.** Trucks have much

larger blind spots on both sides of their vehicles than passenger vehicles. The truck driver can't see you when you are in these blind spots. If a truck driver needs to change lanes quickly for any reason, you're in trouble.

**Wide turns.** Truck drivers sometimes need to swing wide to the left in order to safely negotiate a right turn. They cannot see cars directly behind or beside them. Cutting in to the curb or shoulder on the right increases the possibility of a crash.

The driver of the car is the one killed four out of every five fatal vehicle-truck collisions. That stat alone should make it easier to remember these safety tips.

That's it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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