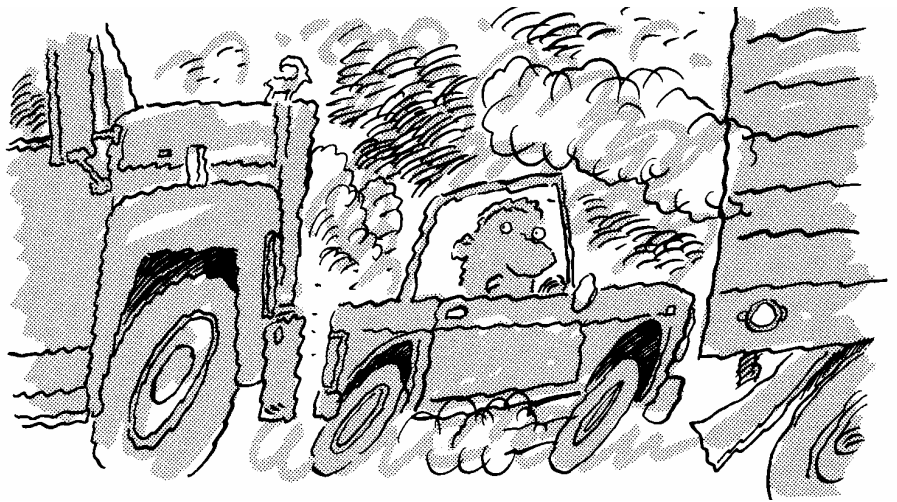


Never Argue With a Big Truck

It was late on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and Tom was still two hours from his destination. He was cranky and tired, and the transport truck in front of him was hogging the passing lane on the steep incline. Tom flashed his lights several times and honked his horn angrily. The inside lane was blocked by a truck, too. Tom stayed in the passing lane at 20 miles per hour and stewed. Things changed dramatically on the downgrade. A third truck came up behind him quickly, and the three 18-wheelers kept him wedged between them as they careened down the mountain at 70 miles per hour. His small Buick was never more than ten feet from disaster. The episode taught Tom a new respect for big trucks and their drivers.



While most drivers are courteous professionals, trucks are potent dangers and should be handled with respect and caution. According to the National Institute for Highway Safety, about 5,000 people die annually in crashes involving large trucks. In collisions between large trucks and cars, 98 percent of people killed were in the car. Here are some tips for managing your encounters with these behemoths:

Avoid Their Blind Spots

Because they sit so high, drivers may appear to have total vision of the road. Instead, they have more blind spots than ordinary drivers. They are called “No Zones” because cars should avoid them. A big rig’s blind spots are:

- immediately in front, sometimes as much as 20 feet if the truck has a long hood
 - on either side of the cab. The right side blind spot is especially dangerous, because trucks like to swing into the right lanes to avoid troubles in the road ahead
 - up to 200 feet in the rear
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- Remember: If you can’t see the driver of a truck in his side mirror, he cannot see you, either. To be seen, pull ahead or drop back.
 - Don’t cruise beside a truck for a long time, because if the driver needs to change lanes quickly, he might not know you’re there.
 - Keep your lights on in bad weather. It helps truck drivers see you amidst the spray.
 - Pass with care
 - On two lane roads, blink your lights to let a driver know you want to pass, whether it’s day or night. If he blinks back, you can pass him safely. If he doesn’t blink back, he is telling you it’s not safe to pass. Wait and try again later.
 - If a truck driver behind you blinks his lights, he wants to pass. Blink back and give him the time and room he needs.
 - If a truck approaches quickly on a steep downhill grade, pull to the right and let him pass. He may have lost his braking power.

- When you pass a truck, wait until you are at least far enough ahead to see its headlights in your rearview mirror before you move back into the lane.
- Stay as far away as possible when encountering a truck on the highway to reduce the wind blast.

Proper Spacing

Even on dry pavement, trucks need twice as much stopping distance as cars.

- Cooperate with truckers by allowing plenty of safety cushion for the truck. In heavy traffic leave room for a truck to change lanes.
- Give trucks enough room to turn, especially on the right side for both left and right turns.
- Do not tailgate a truck (or any other vehicle). If he stops suddenly, you could find yourself wrapped around his rear axle. Tailgating also blocks your view of the road ahead. Rule of thumb: Stay 4-5 seconds behind a truck.
- When you are following a truck, position your vehicle at the side of the lane so you can be seen in the truck's mirrors.
- Another hazard of following a truck too closely is a tire blowout and flying debris.
- Be careful when you are behind a truck that has just entered the highway; it takes longer for a truck to pick up speed.
- In wet weather use more caution.
- If a trucker tailgates you or makes you angry, signal and get out of the way. Don't retaliate. It's a losing battle. Try to get some identification (safely) and report the incident.