

Are you a good driver?

It's all very well that you've got the latest safety features on your car to prevent an accident, but they're no use if you don't play by the rules

You may be a safe driver, but in a country with the fourth highest car accident rate in the world, the numbers prove that it's not enough to know how to handle your car, you also need to be alert for reckless drivers. According to government statistics, there were 3424 fatal crashes, and 4181 deaths on our roads between January and April last year.

Although speeding, driving under the influence and not wearing a seatbelt are listed as the three biggest killers, bad driving habits are a real danger on the road.

'Talking on a cellphone, racing through an amber traffic light or behaviour that results in a lack of concentration while driving are the most common causes of accidents,' says Moira Winslow, chairman of Drive Alive.

Julia Nelson, operational risk manager for the Hollard Motor Division, adds that according to the insurance company's claims statistics, 60 percent of collisions are caused by two factors: failure to check the blind spot and insufficient following distance.

Here are five bad driving habits that people don't take seriously enough:

◆ **Speeding** Speed is a factor in 75 percent of accidents on our roads. The severity of a crash increases with speed and it also shortens the time you have to react.

◆ **Adequate following distance** Seventy-nine percent of drivers do not adhere to the recommended following distance of two seconds behind. This distance should be doubled in bad conditions.

◆ **Cellphone chatter** Although using a hands-free while driving is still legal, your full attention is not on the road.

◆ **Not indicating** Drivers often do not realise the importance of warning others of their intended actions.

Courses are springing up all around the country to instruct motorists how to be safer and more controlled while driving.

Mark Allison, chief instructor at the Joburg-based 4 Rings Driving Academy says, 'A big problem with South African drivers is bad manners, and a lack of respect for others on the road.'

Mark's tips:

- ◆ Drive within the speed limit.
- ◆ Take more notice of road markings.
- ◆ Look ahead. Always be alert to what's going on a few cars in front of you.
- ◆ Keep your cool on the road and don't be tempted into 'road rage'.

An advanced driving course teaches you to look further than the car in front of you and anticipate what is happening

ahead. It raises confidence levels by helping you get to know your car and its features better. The course also teaches high-speed driving techniques, reaction to emergency situations and demonstrates the use of latest vehicle technologies.

Two women who attended the 4 Rings driving course had this to say:

◆ Charlene Meyer from Cape Town (driving 13 years): 'I am now capable of using my car correctly in all situations.'

◆ Papama Mtwisha, from Joburg (driving three years): 'The course equips you to handle those driving emergencies that the standard K53 driver licence test does not cover.'

For more information on advanced and high-performance driving courses with 4 Rings, contact (011) 466-4662 or visit www.4rings.co.za. For more safety tips, visit www.arrivealive.co.za.

✓ **WIN** 4 Rings Driving Academy is giving away two High Performance Driving Courses worth R1 650 each (one in Joburg and one in Cape Town) in February. Send your details (one entry per e-mail) with 'Drive' in the subject line, to femina@assocmags.co.za. Entries close 31 January 2006.

