



Institute of Advanced Motorists

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Fact Sheet 22/001

CLASSIC CARS

Classic cars and historic vehicles were not designed for the traffic conditions we are likely to experience on today's roads, so drivers have to compensate accordingly.

At the same time, old vehicles are frequently the centre of attention wherever they travel: this gives drivers of such vehicles an opportunity to set an example by safe, considerate and courteous driving as well as meaning that drivers around them may be distracted.

Classic car drivers should know the limitations of their vehicles. Safety features we take for granted today (airbags, ABS etc) are not there to assist if the worst comes to the worst. The steering column is often a metal pole pointing directly at your chest. And the driving style will have to be quite different if somebody is used to modern vehicles with low profile radial tyres and anti-lock disc brakes. Historic cars and motorcycles are sometimes able to travel at similar speeds to modern traffic, but lack the same levels of braking, adhesion and handling. So it's good advice to polish up your driving if you have a classic – to prevent a crash happening in the first place.

How can advanced driving techniques help the classic car driver?

The advanced driving coaching provided by organisations such as the IAM includes:

- An emphasis on looking further ahead
- Techniques for interpreting what you see, so that you can plan your driving
- Techniques for spotting hazards – and even predicting ones you can't yet directly see
- A consistent, systematic approach to handling hazards

As well as the reduced risk of incident, such planning ahead delivers a smoother drive which reduces wear and tear on your pride and joy!

In addition to polishing up your driving skills, what else can you do to protect yourself and your car?

Before setting off, the vehicle needs a check, especially if the car is returning to the road after any lengthy "lay-down".

The braking system was not designed for today's traffic conditions, and so deserves special attention to make sure it's in the best possible condition. Brake fluid should be drained and replaced at least once every three years and more frequently if the storage conditions are damp.

Classic cars need a bit more routine maintenance than modern cars. Bear in mind:

- Fluid levels and operation of lights (where fitted) should be checked prior to each journey.
- Tyre condition and pressures should be checked prior to each journey.

- Tyres do not last indefinitely, even in storage, and especially when exposed to outside conditions. Pneumatic tyres should be replaced if there are signs that the walls are damaged or that they have become inflexible. Tyres should be replaced, whether they are worn or not, after a number years in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations or other appropriate guidelines.

We take rear view mirrors for granted. But many old cars were fitted with no more than a single small interior mirror and many motorcycles have none. Cars and motorcycles should be fitted with external mirrors, preferably on both sides, but certainly on the side where overtaking traffic will pass. Get into the habit of checking over the shoulder in blind spots – especially in slower vehicles.

For details of IAM advanced driving programmes, visit www.iam.org.uk/eshop/membershipshop, which provides details of the IAM Skill for Life complete advanced driving programme, and also the quicker, but less comprehensive, DriveCheck option. Many national classic car clubs and registers are affiliated to the IAM and may be able to offer their members discounts on the normal cost of the Skill for Life programme.

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