IAM
DRIVING ROAD SAFETY

POSITION | SPEED | GEAR | ACCELERATION

INFORMATION

IPSGA

IN OUR PREVIOUS ISSUE, IPSGA FOCUSED ON POSITION. HERE IS THE NEXT PHASE – SPEED

Like all stages of the system, information influences the speed phase. So, for example, depending on the hazard and circumstances you are dealing with, it may be necessary to check what's behind, or to give signals. Generally, the more complex the hazard is, the truer this becomes. Additionally, the speed you are travelling at – or the rate at which you are changing speed – gives information to other road users.

In *Roadcraft*, this phase of the system was known until the mid-1970s as 'brake' rather than 'speed'. That tells us a lot about what this element of the system is usually about. It was changed from brake to speed to take account of the use of acceleration sense – not because of some change in the 1970s that meant there was any more expectation that approaching a hazard would give rise to speeding up (although it does allow for that as well).

A hazard is defined as anything that contains an element of actual or potential danger. This phase of the system is about deciding at what speed to negotiate the hazard – and how and when to achieve that speed. Sounds simple, but complex hazards require a detailed plan.

PLANNING AHEAD

There will be many occasions where the appropriate response to the consideration of speed is that there is no need to do anything. Perhaps the bend is not sharp enough to cause a change in the speed, or you are already driving slowly enough to deal with the car approaching the give way lines in the side road. On other occasions there will be a clear need to slow down. That is the simplest level of the decision made at this stage.

But remember that you will already have decided your position – where you are now, where you want to enter the hazard, and, if you can see through it, where you want to leave it. The same description applies to speed. This is not just the decision of what your entry speed to the hazard is, but also the decision about what it will be at each point along the path you have decided on at the position phase.

CORNER CASE STUDY

Let's consider a right-hand bend, which has a slight left-hand kink leading into it. The bend has bushes obscuring vision off to the right – but allows vision all the way across the left-hand kink, so the entire approach to the right-hand element is visible. It is possible to plan speed through the entire hazard in one go – the left-hand curve becomes part of the approach to the right-hand bend, rather than a separate hazard itself. This means that you are now considering where to decelerate through a more complex scenario, which introduces the option of varying the rate of deceleration. Approaching the overall hazard, the vision loss is into the right-hand curve, and the slowest point will be just before that curve (if appropriate, allowing time for a gear change before turning in).

Assuming that the approach speed is such that acceleration sense is not going to manage the speed loss, it can now be planned with three phases – some firm loss approaching the left-hand kink, a gentler section through the left curve, and some firmer loss again after that. Of course, all sorts of other factors may be relevant in such a scenario – but this gives a schematic idea of how the plan for the speed section can be a complex one, and is about speed along a line, rather than simply at a point.

We've covered where and at what rate to change speed. The other main aspect is to decide how. In normal driving circumstances, this means either braking or using acceleration sense. If you drive down hills, this is where the consideration of whether to run downhill with a lower gear restraining the speed of the vehicle is made (albeit which gear comes in the next phase). It is also where, in wintery conditions, you consider slowing down using the gears rather than the brakes.

Of course, you can also be considering where and how to maintain a constant speed through all or part of a hazard. That should be just as conscious a decision as one about changing speed.

SEQUENCE OF SPEED

It is important to remember the sequence of things, and a reminder here may be useful: the decision is about what speed to travel at along the path already decided on – the path decides what speed is appropriate. Attitudinally, it is important to keep this sequence correct to ensure that safety is maintained – position comes before speed, and the discipline of that mental process is important... 'speed for the conditions, gear for the speed.'

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