

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

FLHSMV:

You're listening to 3PointTurn, a driver safety podcast, presented by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. In promotion of a safer Florida, FLHSMV offers this educational series as a supplemental resource to the Florida driver license handbook. For more information on the topics presented in this podcast, please visit FLHSMV.gov.

On this episode, the FLHSM team talks about how to arrive alive with focus on the dangers of speeding, passing and parking.

Derek Perez:

Welcome to 3PointTurn. I'm your host, Derek Perez. I'm joined again by Captain Peter Bergstresser, a 24-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol and FHP's Chief of Public Affairs. This is our third episode together, Captain Bergstresser.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah, and this is going to be a great topic.

Derek Perez:

It's certainly a series of topics that gets everyone's attention. We're going to discover, debate and drive home three important safety topics, starting with speeding, specifically speed limits. Captain, what are your thoughts on speeding?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Speeding's a big, big, big topic with the Florida Highway Patrol. We typically do speed enforcement on interstates. We also do speed enforcement out there on a county and state roads and sometimes on local roads, but mainly on the interstates. Speed is a big, big contributor... and I'll say it again... big, big contributor to traffic crashes and most importantly, fatal traffic crashes. So it's something that young drivers need to really, really think about. And I know, like we talked about earlier in some of the podcasts here, they might have a really nice car. They might have a fast car. But it's very easy to speed when the car has a V8 engine in it, and it's a fast sports car. So, really, it's near and dear to my heart that folks realize that speeding... It might be fun to go down the road in a blaze, but there's other people in the world, and if you hit one of them going 90 or 100 miles an hour, you can just tragically change their life and then your life forever.

Derek Perez:

For those of you listening at home, I just want to remind you, it's a limit. Speed limits are designed to keep motorists safe, not to trigger tickets. The highest possible speed, the limit, is to allow traffic to move at a fast rate, but at a safe rate. The faster you go, the slower your reaction time to something that could appear out of the blue. So please follow posted speed limits. They're for your safety and for the safety of your fellow motorists.

Now, sometimes, you get onto the highway, and you're rolling in a big pack of vehicles, and everyone seems to be pushing that limit. What do you have to say about that, Captain?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

Well, what happens is... And nobody likes somebody poking along the interstate, especially in the left lane, but that's a whole other topic there. But, generally, on the interstate, when you're going down the road, if you're in the flow of traffic, as they call it, that's fine. Okay, you're rolling along, but you have to be cognizant of your speed. You're still responsible for your individual car and yourself when you go down that road. So for some reason, this is something that I see, or I've seen it quite a bit with people when I stop them for speeding, they'll say, "Well, I was just going with the flow of traffic," or "Why did I get stopped? There was somebody right next to me going the same rate. I was just going with the flow of traffic."

At the end of the day, it's your responsibility to obey the speed limit, and just because these other folks around you, in an anonymous group, just going on the road, that doesn't give you an exemption from going the speed limit. And just to touch on it as well, the speed limit's there to keep people safe. And so, it's not just because we're out there just trying to get tickets and numbers. We don't do that. We're out there to try to enhance public safety, keep people safe, because we want you to get home safely, and we want people that are around you to get home safely.

Derek Perez:

Well said, sir, well said. Can I ask you a question now? When does the combination of factors, including speeding, verge into the territory known as "reckless driving?"

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, what happens is you have two or more moving violations, and a good example of it, and this usually proceeds, or it's just what happens just before crash, you'll have somebody going 90-plus miles an hour down the road on the interstate. They're weaving through traffic, so they're improperly changing lanes, passing on the right. They're coming up on folks ahead of them. They're tailgating them. So that's another crime in itself. And then, sometimes they pass on curves or what have you. But all that can lead up, right before a crash happens, because they might be a great driver. They might be, let's say, a NASCAR driver. They can zip through and have no problems.

The problem is you have other drivers that are young drivers, like some of our audience, and then some of our elder elderly audience that stay in the right lane, and they can't compensate for this person zipping up behind them. They don't keep an eye out for them. And then, there's a certain bit of speed and distance. So if they're going ninety, a hundred miles down the road, the driver up ahead that's, say, elderly gets over into the left lane or the right lane, if the guy's passing on the wrong side, and they don't see it, because when they look in their mirror, everything's fine. But next thing you know, here's this car at a hundred miles an hour, smacking into him. And that's where it rises to a reckless driving, because you have a couple of things they were doing. It wasn't just speed. They weren't in the left lane, just going a hundred. They were doing all kinds of things before that, that add multiple moving violations to it.

Derek Perez:

Reckless driving can be charged for any person who drives any vehicle in willful or wanton disregard for the safety of persons or property is guilty of reckless driving. And it sounds like everything you just described adds right up to that.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah. And on its face, it's exactly that.

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

Derek Perez:

Excellent. Well, the last point I'd like to talk about in speeding is that speeding can easily be magnified at slower speeds. I mean, dangerous driving isn't just driving at fast speeds on the interstate, but anywhere. Doing 45 miles per hour in a 15 mile-per-hour school zone could end up with a real tragedy on our hands.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah. And that's absolutely correct. And unfortunately, I've seen that on the flip side, usually my times on the interstate, which is... But when I have to go into county roads or smaller local roads, that's what happens. People are in a rush. They're trying to get to school or work, and they go into a school zone, even though you should always be aware of the flashing lights around you. And next thing you know, they're zipping through it. Even if they're... Let's say they're not zipping through. let's just say, they're going the normal speed. Let's say the speed on that road is 45, but, at that time, it's a school zone. The school zone's flashing. It says 15. Even though the normal speed for that road is 45 or 35, whatever it is, at that moment, when they're going through there with the flashing lights and the school zone activity, you have all these children, that's where you have a tragedy that takes place. And then, they're kind of confused as well, because they're like, "Well, I wasn't really speeding." But, more or less, yeah, they were speeding for the conditions around that roadway at the time.

Derek Perez:

And something for the young drivers at home to think about is that, as you're moving in your car, your brain and body are moving at that same speed. Think about your body suspended in air, moving at 70 miles per hour when a crash occurs. Let's say you crash into a tree. Think about the impact and the way your body would jolt to a stop. It's not just for the parts that you see, but the parts on the inside. Being inside a car may protect you a little, but the physics is the same. Driving can be dangerous on its own, and speeding only enhances that danger.

It goes back to a point we mentioned a previous podcast, that your awareness and your patients, as well as treating other motorists and pedestrians how you would want to be treated, will go a long way towards promoting the public safety. It's just selfish behavior, when you don't think about how you're driving could impact another, even the possibility of taking their life, Captain.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah, and that's why... And I know some folks have seen it around Florida here, but we have a license plate there on the front of state trooper vehicles, it's called "Arrive Alive," and that's what that touches on is that you need to be cognizant. You don't need to speed. You need to be aware of your surroundings and take your time and be patient.

Derek Perez:

Good news there. On that note, let's take a break, and we'll jump right back into it with a look at how to safely pass another vehicle on the road.

ADVERTISEMENT:

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

The Florida Highway Patrol reminds you when backing out of your driveway, check all mirrors, your blind spots, and back out slowly, look twice and save a life. Brought to you by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Derek Perez:

Part Two of this discussion, Captain Peter Bergstresser, centers on a time when people often speed, and that's when they're passing another vehicle. So what's the proper way to pass?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, there's many ways to look at it when you're passing another vehicle. And for me, on the interstate, that's where I've usually been out there working the road. And out on the interstate, the left lane is a passing lane. The right lane is a travel lane. So whenever you're passing, when you come up behind somebody, and you're in the left lane, not the right lane, you can flash your lights at them. At that point, they should get over. This is a key point where.. and we've seen this happen or I've seen it happen... people getting in road rage. Because what'll happen is you'll have somebody that will sit in that left lane, and they're going 70 miles an hour, 65, whatever it is, below the speed limit on the Interstate 70, and they won't get out of the way. So at that point, that can be pretty frustrating, but you have to be patient. They may not know you're behind them.. But for the young drivers out there, just remember the left lane is the passing lane. The right lane is the travel lane. So don't just sit in that left lane and hold up traffic. You need to get over. If you want to go 65, then get over in that right lane.

Derek Perez:

Some people take it for granted that if you follow the rules, you simply put on your blinker, you move over, pull ahead, put on your blinker and get back in... But I'd like to get a little bit more granular with just the hows, whys and wherefores of passing. Some questions, new drivers, young drivers might want to ask themselves are, "Do you need to pass right now, or are you just in a hurry?" "Are you coming up on an area where there's a good amount of traffic?" Ask yourself if there's a probability that the person in front of you could turn off soon, causing them to slow down suddenly. "Will there be another lane coming up soon where you can pass them without going into the opposite lane?" "Are there side streets where someone could pull out onto the road suddenly and cause a crash?" If you've asked yourself all these questions, then you have put yourself in the place to be ready to make that move. Now, another crucial consideration while passing is road conditions. Captain, have you ever experienced a unfortunate crash where someone was not paying attention to the road conditions?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Some of the roads that we work to our state roads, which are two-lane roads, and a lot of times they're one lane going, let's say, east, one lane going west. And most of the roadway, there's a hash line where it's a dotted line, so you can pass on that part of the road. But a lot of times, you got to be really aware, not just if it's wet weather... I wouldn't recommend anybody to pass somebody in a downpour with low visibility... But if it's just, say, a sunny day, and it's one of these roads that goes... Let's say, a state road goes out in the middle of the country somewhere or whatever, you want to make sure that it's a passing zone. So if it's a double yellow line, you can't pass on that, so you don't want to try to pass.

And we have had cases where... And the FDOT and whatnot, they don't put these markings down just willy nilly. It's usually because that double yellow line is coming into a curve or it's coming into an area

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

where the traffic, so it's not a passing zone in general. So you want to be aware of that, because if you get out there, and you start to pass somebody in a no passing zone, which is a double yellow line, you could have a problem, because, right around the corner, going 50-60 miles an hour, there's a curve. You can't see what's coming around you. Same goes for curves. Same goes for hills. You got to be able to see what's coming at you.

So the conditions, one thing with rain and weather and all that, but it's also, you need to really be aware when you can pass and when you can't pass. And at the end of the day, you want to ask yourself, "Am I in really that big of a hurry to get ahead of this guy, just to get behind another slow person?" So sometimes it's a psychological thing. You just don't want to just rush for nothing.

Derek Perez:

It goes back to our issue of patience and awareness and making sure you're, not just paying attention to weather road conditions, but, as you said, hills, blind curves and, of course, watching what the Department of Transportation has put down vis-à-vis paint. The center lines display when you can and cannot pass. The double yellow line, as you definitely said, don't pass. And dotted lines, passing is allowed.

Now, we said the left lane is for passing, and right is for slower. But the gist of this conversation is, "Don't speed. Pay attention to fellow traffic. And don't be so impatient to pass someone that you increased danger on the road." Everything comes back to, what was that expression?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Arrive alive.

Derek Perez:

Arrive alive. Good stuff. We're going to press the brakes on this and park this vehicle in just a minute, as we debate our final topic.

ADVERTISEMENT:

On the road, there's a thin line between safety and tragedy. Don't cross it. Give law enforcement, first responders and service professionals, the space to safely do their jobs. When you see flashing lights, move over a lane or slow down 20 miles per hour below the posted speed limit. See lights? Move over, Florida. Brought to you by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and the Florida Highway Patrol.

Derek Perez:

Welcome back. All right. So you've survived navigating a busy interstate. You've passed drivers, and finally have arrived at your destination. In order to turn off your car, you have to park it. Parking can be easy, but it takes practice to master. If you don't practice parallel parking, it will never become easy. Parking can be broken down into several different kinds of parking: parallel parking, straight-in parking, diagonal parking, and back-in parking. Now, the dreaded parallel park is the one that many young drivers have a lot of anxiety with. Can you tell us a little bit about that, Captain?

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, parallel parking, it's a skill. It's like if you've ever had to back of boat trailer or utility trailer, it's a skill. You have to practice it. You can't just do it. I mean, there might be somebody out there who can do it the first time and be great at it, and that's if you're driving a little Morse Mini, that's a tiny car. But if you're driving a regular-size, full-size car, that's something that I recommend you go to a parking lot that's empty, like maybe just an abandoned parking lot or a mall parking lot on a Sunday or something when here's nobody there, with your parent. And then, get there. Maybe set up some cones. Do a mock a parking spot. And then, just practice cutting that corner, and then bringing the vehicle into that parallel park position. But that's not something... And honestly, in Florida, there's a lot of times where you're not going to have to parallel park, unless you live in the city or you move somewhere you have... You live in Seattle or the city or whatnot.

But it is something to practice, but you have to practice it. So I highly recommend going to a parking lot, setting up four cones and make yourself practice that over and over again. And the reason for the cones is that the cones are like other cars, so if you hit that cone, and you knock it over, then there's something wrong. Make it big enough, but make that like the border of another vehicle.

Derek Perez:

Well, that kind of practice is really going to improve your skills and just make it second nature, as opposed to a stress-ridden, anxiety-ridden activity. It's just something that comes naturally with practice.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah. And it's all about setting the vehicle up for the actual turn into the parallel park. You don't set it right, you're not going to land it right.

Derek Perez:

Now, straight-in, diagonal and back-in parking are all fairly straightforward, but I think it's important to remember that when you're backing out, that you have to yield the right of way.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely. And that makes me think about... And, like I said, once again, I worked in Orlando and worked many a crash. And sometimes we go to parking lots, because, we get called. We don't know what's happening with it. And generally, we don't work parking lot crashes, but when we do go to them, just because we get called and we want to make sure we... There might be injuries. What I find with parking lot crashes and everything comes up, it always comes up this way, is that the person that did the backing says to me, "Well, I was backing. They should've seen me. I was backing. They should've seen me. I don't know why they would've kept coming. I was halfway into the parking lot back area," or the lane, if you want to call it that.

But, ultimately, if that vehicle was in reverse, and you're backing it, you're going to be at fault if somebody hits you. Now, I have had cases where both people back at the same time. But in that case, sometimes you're not able to tell who started the backing first. But, ultimately, if that vehicle is in reverse, then you're going to have to be very aware that you might get a ticket or be the one at fault.

Derek Perez:

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

Well, you definitely want to always watch the rear of your vehicle, watch your blind spots and pay attention. Also, knowing your vehicle and how it turns, understanding the length and width of your vehicle and how well it will or won't fit into a parking spot, is crucial to all kinds of parking. Something else I wanted to bring up is ,not to rely fully on your rear view camera. The best camera you can rely on are your own two eyes. I would say that when backing up, putting your arm over the side seat and looking directly behind you is always the best method. Would you agree, sir?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Oh, yeah. I absolutely agree, and I still do it to this day. I have a back-up camera on my patrol car, but there are times where I need to reach back and I need to look back and look at that actual location I'm going to with my own eyes.

Derek Perez:

Another place people get into trouble with parking is actually in the place they're most often parking, a parking lot. Too many people drive too fast through parking lots, and there's a lot of activity in them. People are backing out at the grocery stores, as you've mentioned. Parents trying to unload and load their kids. Don't rush to grab an open spot. Some parking spots may contain a motorcycle or moped, or the neighboring spot may have a parent unloading a child from a car seat. Drivers' heads need to be on a swivel and more prepared to brake suddenly than being concerned with quickly getting in and out of a parking lot.

Practice. Practice makes perfect. Practice empty. Practice crowded. Most learn how to park in empty parking lots, but parking for the first time with cars around can be nerve wracking, put yourself in that position. Make sure you have an experienced driver, a parent, or guardian with you and practice, practice, practice. The increased speed of your car can make it dangerous if you aren't practiced. Put yourself through various scenarios and practice until you get it down.

The last point I'd like to hit about parking is knowing where not to park. Captain, can you enlighten us?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, there's one that sticks out in my mind. I mean, not just you don't want to park by a hydrant or in the front of a building, because that's usually where the fire trucks need to get in, in case there was a fire, heaven forbid. One that stands out to me, and I've seen this happen quite a bit, is folks that just feel they can park in a handicapped parking spot. You have to have it either on the... There's a tag that hangs in the window, and there's also, usually there's actually a handicap tag that will say it. So if you don't have that and you're not handicapped, you should not be parking in the handicap zone. Because what happens is somebody that actually needs that spot and has limited mobility, now has to park way out in the parking lot, because you just wanted to be closer to the store. So that is just not a good thing to do. And as a young driver, you should know it's just something you should just never do.

Derek Perez:

It's a bad practice all the way around.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Bad practice. And it's just rude to your fellow man there.

Derek Perez:

3PointTurn – Episode 3: Arrive Alive

Agreed. The Florida Driver License Handbook also has a list of everywhere it's illegal to park. Learn them. Well, that was another educational episode, Captain. Thank you for your contributions. We've got you for one more episode. Thank you for listening everyone. This is 3PointTurn. And until next time, drive safe, Florida.

FLHSMV:

On the next episode of 3PointTurn, the FLHSMV team evaluates how to handle traffic crashes, why you should always stay at the scene of a crash, and what to do when your vehicle breaks down during transit.

Check out our other episodes from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts. You can also find us at FLHSMV.gov. Follow FLHSMV's social media channels for helpful safety tips, news and information.