

3PointTurn – Episode 8: Safe Holiday Travel

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On this episode, the FLHSMV team talks about the safety issues presented by holiday travel, including tire care, preventative vehicle maintenance, and drowsy driving.

Derek Perez:

Welcome to 3PointTurn, I'm your host Derek Perez. For the final time in our podcast series, I'm joined by Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw, who is a 29-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol and the Public Affairs Officer for Troop H based in Tallahassee. Ready to run this back, Corporal?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Ready as ever.

Derek Perez:

Time to discover, debate, and drive home the points of this topic. Today's topic is safe holiday travel. Whether it's a vacation, which in Europe they call holiday, or a traditional American holiday in summer, winter, or some other time of year, people frequently drive long distances. Any holidays you travel for, Corporal Shaw?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

I travel every Christmas.

Derek Perez:

I also like to see my family at Christmas and New Year's. It's a wonderful time to spend with them. Now to all of you young and new drivers out there, before you leave your driveway there's a couple of things we can give you a heads up on. Our first point today is tire care. Corporal Shaw, how often do you see tire issues pop up with people traveling on the interstate?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

We have major issues with tire pressures on vehicles, everybody's not focused. Now with the new technology of showing your tire pressure on cars, everybody relies on that. But you shouldn't rely on that solely because what if it malfunctions. The thing to do before you go anywhere, make sure you go around your vehicle, check everything on it, even checking your fluids and everything on your vehicle. But your tires are one good thing. Making sure you have adequate tread on your vehicles. So you want to make sure everything is in line. And also your spare tire. A lot of people don't think about the spare. You have to make sure the spare tire is adequate for your travel.

Derek Perez:

Now you mentioned tire inflation and I have to agree. Tires should definitely be properly inflated for road travel. The correct tire pressure for your car can be found in the owner's manual. And as Corporal

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Shaw said, you have to check your tire tread. That's the actual depth of the tread on the individual tire. You have to make sure they're not worn on the outsides because losing traction is not good at any speed. Your tires may spin in place while starting at an intersection and in rainy conditions they can cause you to slide or even fail to stop.

Another one that you might not think about right away is tire rotation. If the tread is wearing down on the outside of your tire, oftentimes they just need to be rotated. It's a simple process that can be completed at the tire shop often for very little money.

Now, as you drive, it's important to also fix your punctures or purchase new tires should your punctures be unrepairable. Tires typically lasts between 60,000 and 70,000 miles and this could take roughly four or five years to run through. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends changing tires after six years, regardless of miles driven. Sometimes tires get punctures and begin losing air requiring a plug or patch. Do you have any advice for motorists, Corporal Shaw, that will help them should they have to patch a flat on the highway?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, the best thing, if you have to patch a flat, knowing what to do, but instead if you possibly can get a tow truck driver out there that knows how to properly do it.

Derek Perez:

You mentioned knowing how to fix a flat is important, but also should you pull off the side of the road? Can you talk about some of the precautions drivers can take so that they can make sure that perhaps they're on solid ground. Make sure that they're seen while taking care of this, whether a tow truck is there or not and some of the preparations they can do for their spare.

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Pull over, make sure it's solid ground. Make sure you apply your emergency brake. Once you apply your emergency brake, at that point get all your tools and kits and everything that you need to change that flat. Make sure the surrounding that you're in is safe. Also to make sure you place it on your hazard lights so the people coming from behind you can see the flashing of your hazards. And hopefully at that point, like we talked in our earliest segment, move over just because it's for law enforcement or emergency vehicles, it's a good advice for you to move over for disabled vehicle.

Derek Perez:

You know, in the United States alone, approximately seven tire punctures occur every second resulting in 220 million flat tires per year. Statistics also show that every driver will experience an average of up to five flat tires in their lifetime. Make sure you're prepared. I am now tired of this. Sorry. I couldn't resist. Yes. That was a bad pun.

When we come back after a quick break, we'll discuss our second point, preventive vehicle maintenance. See you then.

ADVERTISEMENT:

It's late. You're yawning, drifting into other lanes. This is drowsy driving. It caused over 4,200 crashes in Florida last year. The Florida Highway Patrol reminds you to get enough sleep before you drive. When you're tired, stop in a safe place, like a rest area or service plaza to take a break. Drive alert for your

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safety and those around you, especially if you're a commercial driver. Take a break. Don't drive drowsy. Brought to you by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Derek Perez:

Welcome back to 3PointTurn where we're talking about how to be safe while traveling during holidays or for your vacation. Corporal Shaw, in order, do you think you can guess the top five busiest holidays of the year as it pertains to travel?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, Derek, I think I can guess the top three, because those are the busiest times for us and that's Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving.

Derek Perez:

Well, you got those top three correct. Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving. Christmas and New Year's have an average of 93 million people on the road over a 10 to 17 day period. That's followed by Thanksgiving with 44 million travelers, followed by the 4th of July, coming in at number three with 42 million people on the roadways. And those are followed up by Memorial Day and Labor Day with 34 million and 33 million, respectively. Wow. That is a lot of traffic. And that means there's quite a few people who need to hear this second point regarding preventative maintenance for your vehicle.

I've heard that most cars that break down during travel could have avoided that pain with regularly scheduled maintenance. Have you also heard that, Corporal?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Yes, I have Derek. One thing about it, if you keep your vehicle regularly maintained you have a better outcome, especially when traveling. And if you know during those busier times of the year you're going to travel, the best thing, make an appointment and get your vehicle checked out fully before you get on the road.

Derek Perez:

Here's a short list of several things you can do to make sure your vehicle is in working order. Make sure to change your oil regularly. Some companies want you to change your oil every 3000 miles and the general max is 5,000. Oil is extremely important to your car's health, providing layer of protection for your cars moving parts and preventing corrosion of the engine. You can also check battery corrosion. This is an easy one. You can pop your hood and just take a look at it. Corporal Shaw, when you've had many different vehicles in your service to FHP, what are some of the other maintenance things you've done for yours?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, with us, we have a maintenance car which helps you out. So if you get with your service provider and they can provide a maintenance car for your vehicle, that is good thing to think about. But with us, with the type of driving that we do, we have to regularly check our brakes to make sure our brakes are working properly. You don't want to be in a situation when a vehicle stops on a dime in front of you and you can't stop because your brakes are worn down. All you have to do is primarily just listen as you're hitting your brakes to check, to see noises that you may hear and occur. You want to make sure the air

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filter is properly maintained on your vehicle. The reason you want to make sure that is maintained on the vehicle is for the air circulation from the ground, the little things that you pick up as you're traveling the roadway.

So by making sure the maintenance on your vehicle is up to par, that's a good thing. Also with us, with that 3,000 to 5,000 miles you said for or an oil change, if you maintain that on a regular basis, that is absolutely good for your vehicle. It keeps everything fluctuating throughout the engine and that's a good thing for it.

Derek Perez:

Now, hopefully our listeners aren't engaging in the kind of a performance driving that sometimes FHP officers are required to do. But even their average driving can over time lead your car suspension system to get worn down. You should have that checked every 30,000 miles. How does an FHP officer check their vehicle?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, if we have any problems or issues with our highway patrol vehicles, if it's still under the warranty, we take it back to the dealer it came from.

Derek Perez:

The last couple we'll run down is checking your coolant. It's an easy fix. Coolant keeps your engine from running hot and also affects your AC system. You can top it off yourself with a funnel and a bottle from your local convenience store or department store.

Now, sometimes your engine can seem like it lacks punch whenever you hit the gas pedal. Do you hear a misfire or popping sound when you try to go? It could be a spark plug which helps the engine's combustion. These can also be fixed yourself for the cost of approximately \$15 to \$30 per spark plug. But if you ever feel like you're in over your head on some basic maintenance, you can always call your mechanic. Often they can do a trip check for you just before you head off on a long road trip. It's better to pay a nominal cost for an inspection than to get caught by surprise broken down on the side of a highway while in transit.

Corporal Shaw, how many times have you seen a simple lack of maintenance turn into a large problem on the interstate?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

It happens quite often. All it is, is just making sure you keep up on the maintenance of your vehicle. It's easy to leave your home, walk around your car, make sure everything is inflated, everything is working properly. You can get in your vehicle. Use your turn signals. You can see if everything is working before you drive off. We have it so much on the interstate, having to make sure the people are taken care of because they didn't do the simple thing as change their oil, out of oil, didn't check their tires. Now they have a flat and they have a flat spare.

Derek Perez:

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Some statistics, according to AAA, 65% of drivers never had their car battery tested prior to their vehicle failing to start. 60% did not check tire air pressure at least once a month. 35% have skipped or delayed maintenance or repair that was recommended by a mechanic. Another 62% of repair shops say half their vehicles are behind on

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maintenance schedules. And 77%, that's over three quarters of repair shops, believe customers could save \$100 or more per visit if they had properly maintained their vehicles in the first place.

Wow. The topic of preventative maintenance certainly applies year round, but it becomes amplified when hitting the road for long stretches, which is why we encourage you to take care of your vehicle and spend a little time before a trip looking it over.

Corporal Shaw and I will be back in a quick second to put a bow on this conversation.

ADVERTISEMENT:

Tires are your vehicles first line of defense on the road, whether driving across town or across Florida, make sure your tires are properly inflated, damage free and have adequate tread depth. No matter how well tires are maintained or how little they're driven, never drive on tires more than six years old. Don't forget the spare. Even tires that aren't driven often can lose air pressure. The Florida Highway Patrol reminds you to stay cool and drive safely this summer. Brought to you by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Derek Perez:

Corporal Shaw, we've discussed a lot about how cars work and whatnot. Let's use this third point to discuss something a little more abstract – drowsy driving. Drowsy driving can be a big deal, especially during holiday travel. We've all probably tried to push it on a long drive before haven't we? What's your record long drive? Mine is 12 and a half hours from Tallahassee to Dallas. I've also driven across the country on some pretty long stretches. How about yourself?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, Derek, I've also driven across the country, but my biggest long stretch was driving from Tallahassee to Chicago to see my daughter, 16 hours straight.

Derek Perez:

Now I will say drowsy driving is not exclusive to holiday travel or to long road trips. It can happen any time. You could be exhausted from working. Students and teens are also particularly susceptible to drowsy driving, especially before school and driving home after. Most especially when they haven't had a good night's rest. Corporal Shaw, what do our new and teen drivers need to know about drowsy driving?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, Derek, you primarily summed it up. The biggest thing for our teen drivers, they need to make sure they get a good night's rest. Like we talked in earlier episodes, to make sure you have a plan. If they know they are going to school, to know the route they're going to take, how they're going to take that route. Also, to have an alternate route just in case something happens, whether there's road closures, traffic crashes, anything that may hinder. But the biggest thing is making sure they've had a good night's sleep.

Derek Perez:

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Always good advice. Now, drowsy driving happens when you're overly fatigued. It slows down your thought process and reaction time. It can affect your judgment and vision. It impairs your senses and abilities, and at its worst it can cause micro sleeping or nodding off to falling completely asleep. Now, Corporal Shaw, I've heard drowsy driving being compared to drunk driving, which as we've already discussed in a previous episode is extremely dangerous driving behavior. Now, what are some tips for people to do to make sure they don't become a victim of drowsy driving?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, Derek, drowsy driving is as equally dangerous as driving under the influence. The biggest thing for everyone, whether you're a teen or an adult, is just making sure you have the proper rest, making sure you're not driving under the influence of alcohol or a prescription drug. Just making sure that you take all precautions necessary.

Derek Perez:

And if you are making the long haul, take a break every 100 miles or two hours. Allow plenty of time to get to your final destination. Use the buddy system if you're able so you can change drivers when needed. And stop at a rest area and stretch your legs or take a nap. Rest areas appear every 40 miles on Florida's interstates. If you're really needing a small boost, then maybe drink some caffeine to increase alertness. Keep in mind, turning up the radio, drinking coffee or rolling down the window may also help you feel alert for a short period of time, but these are not effective ways to maintain alertness to drive safely over the long run.

Avoid driving at times when you would normally be asleep. We really can't stress this one enough. It might seem like a good idea to drive through the night to avoid traffic or to drive when there's supposedly no one on the road. But if you're having difficulty focusing, or you blink frequently or have heavy eyelids, just pull over in a safe place to rest before continuing to drive. It's better to arrive alive than not arrive at all.

Our last piece of advice. If you have been up for 24 hours or more, do not drive. It is just not safe for you to be behind the wheel at all. Get adequate rest before you travel.

Corporal Shaw, do you have any experience with the commercial truckers on the interstates getting tired and how have you handled that?

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Well, with our commercial drivers that we see all over the road, we do stop them, check them out to make sure they're not driving under the influence. Once we've determined that they are tired, we make sure they pull over. We escort them down to the truck stop or make sure they pull off to a safe place and make sure they get adequate rest. The best thing that commercial motor vehicles have now, they have a reading and it shows when they're running out of time and it tells them that they need to stop to take a break. So that's a good thing for the commercial motor vehicles. It doesn't help in the aspects for our young people when they're driving behind the wheel. When they know that they are fatigued, the best thing is to pull over, find your nearest rest area, get off the exit, go to a safe place and get some rest.

Derek Perez:

And if you think you may be on the road with a drowsy driver, give them the space they need while passing. Be prepared for them to suddenly swerve. When in doubt, just give them space.

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Wow. Four episodes, 12 total points. Corporal Shaw, this was fun. Glad you stopped by to talk with me about several important safety topics.

Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw:

Thank you, Derek. I've had a wonderful, marvelous time.

Derek Perez:

To our listeners, we highlighted a lot of things in this episode to prevent breaking down. But if you do, we've covered how to handle those roadside breakdowns in a previous podcast. Don't be afraid to give that a listen, too. Until next time, drive safe, Florida.

FLHSMV:

On the next episode of 3PointTurn, the FLHSMV team breaks down Florida's Share The Road safety campaign, which focuses road usage alongside commercial motor vehicles, motorcycles and bicycles. 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.