



BUD'S BITS

Proactive Animal Avoidance

We have all read the statistics, “Around 200 people each year die in collisions involving animals”. The animal most likely to kill a vehicle occupant is a deer, you would think the common driver would be more aware during dusk through dawn hours, and through their mating season.

More disturbing than the collisions *with* animals, is that it is estimated that just as many people die while trying to AVOID hitting an animal.

What a disturbing statistic—and an avoidable one. These drivers reacted to a danger, rather than being proactive, and having a specific plan for any creature that may get in front of their vehicle. A hierarchy should be established for how to handle different sized animals: from the small, wild animals that would not even cause damage to the vehicle, to pets, to larger animals that could cause serious harm, to the scariest of all possibilities...a person in front of their car.

An simple method once shared with me by a colleague, Vince Paniak, is to train a novice driver to remember the “Below the Bumper Rule”. Simply put, if the animal is below the bumper, the driver should do what they can to avoid the animal. But if there is not the time or space to stay in control of the vehicle, then....”thump, thump”. I know it sounds cold-hearted, and that I am at risk of being picketed by PETA, but when training my students, I follow this statement up with two separate newspaper articles. One in which a mom, in avoiding a dog, loses control of her vehicle and winds up in a golf course water trap. Her two children, in the back seat, drown. The second also involves a dog, a mom, loss of control, and a 10-foot deep creek. In this one, the driver’s husband, and all four of her children died. In each of these articles, the driver and the dog survived.

I like to pose a question to my students. “You are coming around a curve on a country road, there is a baby deer in your lane less than one second ahead of you...imagine Bambi, with the cute spots and big, brown eyes. On the right is a large oak tree, to the left is an oncoming car...which of the three do you hit?”

I train our students to make an educated decision, rather than an emotional decision when sharing the roadway with an animal. Driving should be a proactive, planned process. When we have no plan, we do what comes naturally... ironically, it may not be what is for the best. No driver would want to live with a such a preventable death on their conscience.

Driving a Bit Safer and Smarter....

Charles “Bud” Chauncy
First Class Driving School
avp@thedsaa.org