

What Do I Do I



Ralph Seekins

Not surprisingly, following all the news lately, I've had a lot of "what if" questions regarding safe handling of vehicles lately. As a result, it seems appropriate to cover a couple of the most asked questions. Although I was pretty sure how to answer, I did some rather intense research to validate what I have been taught over the years. Here's a summary of what some of the experts say.

What do I do if my accelerator sticks? There are a number of reasons a vehicle may accelerate all by itself or why it won't decelerate when you take your foot off the accelerator pedal. Some of the most recent high profile examples appear to be tied to floor mats jamming the pedal, design or material problems in the accelerator pedal assembly, or problems in the electronic engine control software. But no matter why it happens, if it happens to you, you are in big trouble - fast.

Quick action is called for. First, tap the pedal with your foot to see if some foreign object, i.e., soda bottle, a winter boot or something else, is jamming or holding it down. If that's not the

case, step heavily on the brake with both feet at the same time to see if that will cause the accelerator to disengage. If the problem persists, quickly slip the transmission into neutral and carefully work your way off the roadway to a full stop. **DO NOT TURN THE KEY OFF UNTIL YOU ARE SAFELY STOPPED.** The engine may rev loudly but if it is turned off, you will lose power steering and power brakes making steering and braking more difficult and, if you turn the key too far, the steering wheel may lock - which will instantaneously make matters a whole lot worse. Once stopped, if possible, avoid driving the vehicle yourself. Call for a tow truck.

What if a tire blows out while I'm driving? A tire blowout is one of the scariest things a driver can ever experience. Some tire safety experts tell us that up to 75% of blowouts are directly related to low tire inflation which causes the tire to over-flex which then causes it to overheat which in turn causes the tire casing to rupture. Other causes include, puncture, hitting a pothole or curb, the tire wearing out or tire failure due to a malfunction. When a tire blows out, it's important to know that you will more than likely survive by following proper procedures. The first instinct for most drivers is to slam on the brakes and steer away from the way the car is pulling. Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! **DO NOT QUICKLY**

DECELERATE! DO NOT HIT THE BRAKES! Stabilize the vehicle. Steer straight down the road with both hands firmly on the steering wheel. Slowly let off the accelerator and let the vehicle slow down without braking. Then head for a safe exit off the pavement. The tire is already ruined. It may ruin the wheel by running it on the pavement until you find a safe exit. But, better to ruin a wheel than to end up injured or worse. Don't pull off the road onto the dirt or gravel shoulder until you are traveling less than 20 miles per hour. Then slowly brake to a stop.

After replacing the tire, it's a good idea to either check for or have a qualified mechanic check for any damage to brake lines or other mechanical parts that may have been caused by the blown out tire or by operating the vehicle after the blowout.

Here's hoping you never experience either of these frightening events. However, it's good for us drivers to periodically review how to handle emergency driving situations. As anyone who has experienced an emergency situation, there's no such thing as being over-prepared.

Ralph Seekins has more than 40 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 32 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury.