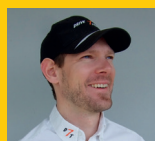




# THE GREAT ESCAPE

Building on last issue's driver coaching article introducing the basics of defensive driving, we now introduce 'escape routes' and regular 'shortcuts' you can add into your time behind the wheel...



## DRIVING FORCE

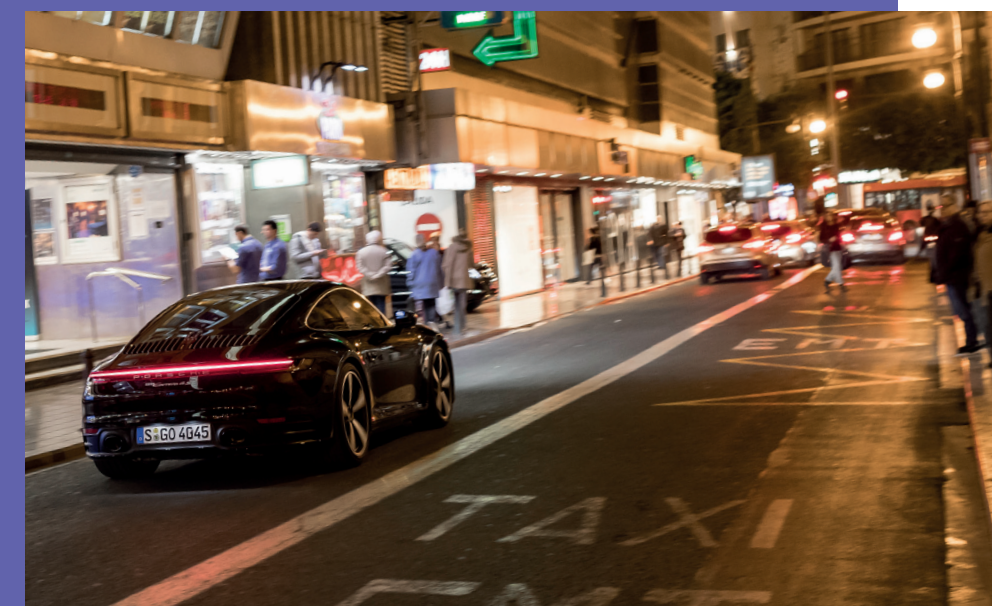
Neil Furber is *GT Porsche's* resident driving expert. With a background as a mechanical engineer in Formula One, he brings a unique technical insight to driver coaching. Splitting his time between the French Alps and the UK, Neil coaches drivers through his brand, Drive 7Tenths ([drive7tenths.com](http://drive7tenths.com)) and is also a Porsche Driving Consultant at Porsche Experience Centre Silverstone. Have a question about driving? Email him at [enquiries@drive7tenths.com](mailto:enquiries@drive7tenths.com).

## AVOIDING CHECK-MATE

When you think about it, some of driving is very similar to playing chess. This is a useful analogy — you can think several moves ahead for all potential scenarios which may play out. Just like in chess, you don't want to get trapped into a potentially dangerous position.

A good example would be the following high-risk situation: picture yourself stopped at the back of a queue of traffic on a high-speed road. You're waiting, stationary, for a set of traffic lights at a junction ahead. Your side of the road has two lanes and a speed limit of 60 or 70mph. The closing speed of a vehicle coming up from behind could be as high as this. If that vehicle is heavy, even at a lower approaching speed, the momentum and energy involved can be monumental. Consider an articulated lorry, fully laden travelling at 50mph. As you look in your centre mirror and spot this behemoth bearing down on you, imagine the horror of seeing the driver looking down at their phone. Worse still, imagine them asleep at the wheel!

You're the last in a queue of five cars with an equivalent line of traffic in the adjacent lane. You're sandwiched between them and a side barrier. What will you do? When the beast hits, it'll



plough through all these cars like a pet dog running through a house of cards. We're talking about a life-and-death situation here. Check-mate, indeed.

If it's come to this, there isn't much you can do. You may be lucky and have just enough width between the queues of traffic to hit the gas and head for safety. A scrape down the side of your car or losing a wing-mirror is a small price to pay. Sadly, the others are still in the wrong place at the wrong time. Better to have had a proactive

plan. You can develop this by reading the situation well before you become a sitting duck. As an experienced driver, usual traffic movements are not unknown to you. Maintaining space around your car whilst at speed is a good start and provides a good view of the road ahead. If you've formed the habit to look far into the distance on a regular basis as part of systematic scanning of the situation ahead, the junction and traffic lights are easy to spot well in advance.

## PLAN A OR PLAN B?

Once you've identified the junction, you'll know the change in speed required. Get the timing right and you may not need to stop fully after all. Here's an example of how you can ask yourself questions to form a plan to deal with the situation:

- **Junction spotted, but what's the traffic density? Will any queue ahead be gone by the time I get there?**
- **Mirror check. Who's at the rear? Are they close? Are there any high-risk vehicles (lorries, large vans or high-speed cars) closing in from behind?**
- **Maintain speed and aim to slow nearer the junction? Or should I ease off straight away and reduce speed gradually?**

### ● How would these options interact with traffic around me and the timing of the lights sequence?

This is another example of the Visual Link Cascade I've mentioned in previous articles in this series. Good vision and observation allow you to anticipate likely developments, forming links between what you see and cascading through questions. The process helps to make decisions for proactive changes in speed or position. Don't forget, you can have a backup option if you need it: plan B.

For this scenario, I prefer to ease off early, giving more time to watch how things will play out. A high-risk vehicle – the lorry described earlier – can close up the gap without frustration if the timing is right. As the vehicle does so, there's still plenty

of time and distance to confirm the driver is fully engaged. If they start to slow and reduce the rate at which they approach, the potential risks are much reduced. If phoning or sleeping, at least there's time for you to take other measures before potential impact.

If the road behind is clear for some distance during approach, your best protection comes from slowing your car early and maintaining a modest speed with lots of space in front. If the lights go green, you can close up the gap and join other traffic. If it doesn't, you can continue slowing, closing the gap gradually, but maintaining space — a huge gap in front can't upset anybody. Once others start building a 'shield' behind, you can continue to reduce your space by trundling forwards. The aim: keep your car rolling with your space and options matched to risk.





## ESCAPE ROUTES

In the scenario we've just outlined, your primary escape route is the plentiful space ahead in both lanes. In less enclosed scenarios with lower speed differentials, a good car length or two between you and the stationary vehicle in front may be enough. Keeping an attractive verge or layby to the side as a pre-prepared escape route can make all the difference should something untoward develop.

You may have heard the expression 'tyres and tarmac'. It's a mental picture to help remember space when in stationary traffic. If you can see all of the car in front, including the rear tyres and a strip of asphalt between them and your car, you should have enough space. This equates to at least one car length of free air. The gap protects against vehicle roll-back and provides a pedestrian space to cross the road and a 'safe haven' for cyclists. Moreover, if something unpleasant develops – an attempted carjacking being one of the worst we can think of – you've got space to accelerate and steer around the car ahead in one swift movement. Use your escape route! Under certain circumstances, you may feel that mounting a kerb and dinging an alloy wheel is a small price to pay. By contrast, if you've only a couple of feet between you and the car in front, you're boxed in. We're back to check-mate!

## TAKE THE SHORTCUT

Thankfully, most situations aren't as serious as the lorry incident described here. Nevertheless, the open road is a fluid environment, and I'm sure you wish to protect yourself and your Porsche, no matter where you go. On your usual journeys, you'll experience plenty of recurrent situations. Using the Visual Link Cascade (observation, anticipation and plan forming) regularly will help you to plan and develop shortcuts and good habits, as well as dealing with events out of the ordinary. Here's a couple of shortcuts you may wish to borrow or adapt:

### ● Negotiating multi-lane roundabouts

The most important thing is to avoid the 'pinch'. If there's a vehicle alongside, don't sit between them and the inner edge of the roundabout. They could cut in and force a side impact with your Porsche. Long vehicles will do this because they have to — avoid being meat in the sandwich! If you're going straight ahead at a roundabout on a multi-lane road, a vehicle to your outside and slightly ahead may cut right across your nose for a later exit. I've avoided that one a few times by expecting the worst and staggering with them.

### ● Slip roads and service stations

On multi-lane roads with slip road entries and exits, traffic isn't always easy to spot early on. As you pass an 'off' ramp, usually, there will

be an 'on' ramp straight after. When you have a couple of lanes travelling in your direction, a well-planned lateral move away from the slip roads can make things easier for all involved. Sometimes, there's plenty of distance for vehicles to get up to suitable joining speed, but at other times, these are very short, leaving insufficient space for heavy vehicles to get up to speed.

Start a series of mirror checks, then check over your shoulder as you pass the 'off' ramp. You can decide if moving out is worthwhile or likely to cause greater trouble for faster vehicles in the other lane. When it's completely clear behind (and you can spot joining traffic), moving out early helps everyone. When there's a car behind starting to overtake and joining traffic is not easily visible, you may choose a different approach. Rather than move, Plan B may be to reduce your speed ready to slot in behind the overtaking driver before the 'on' ramp presents itself.

These ideas may not be news to you, but it's the specific timing and subtle changes in speed that differentiate a rushed, reactive manoeuvre from a smooth, flowing and event-free series of moves. This is where you may find some improvement. Until next time, keep working on your vision and anticipation and, above all, stay safe.



## SEEING IS BELIEVING

Fire up YouTube and see for yourself what can happen in check-mate, as highlighted by this crash test video from the road safety experts at DEKRA. Simply visit [bit.ly/dekravideo](https://bit.ly/dekravideo) or scan the QR code to open the link on your smartphone. Remember, the road is a dangerous place for you and your Porsche. Think smart and take care.

