

Developing your skill at overtaking safely

Key safety points

- Don't overtake where you cannot see far enough ahead to be sure it is safe.
- Avoid causing other vehicles (overtaken, following or oncoming) to alter position or speed.
- Before starting to overtake, always ensure you can move back to the nearside in plenty of time.
- Always be ready to abandon overtaking if a new hazard comes into view.
- Do not overtake in situations where you might come into conflict with other road users.
- When possible, avoid overtaking three abreast to leave yourself a margin of safety.
- Never overtake on the nearside on multi-lane carriageways except in slow-moving queues of traffic where offside queues are moving more slowly.

Overtaking is hazardous because it may bring you into the path of other vehicles. It is a complex manoeuvre in which you need to consider the primary hazard of the vehicle(s) you want to overtake, as well as a number of secondary hazards as the primary hazard moves amongst them. It requires you to negotiate dynamic hazards (moving vehicles) as well as fixed ones (e.g. road layout).

This section describes the general principles of using the system of car control to do this manoeuvre safely. Training will further develop your ability to apply the system to dynamic hazards in practice.

Overtaking is potentially dangerous and you need good judgement if it is to be safe. This comes with experience and practice but even experienced drivers need to be extremely cautious. Always be patient and leave a margin of safety to allow for errors.

Remember that overtaking is your decision and you can reconsider it at any point. If in doubt, hold back.

Passing stationary vehicles

When passing stationary vehicles, use the system to approach and assess the hazard and to pass it with safety. Take account of the position and speed of oncoming traffic, the position and speed of following traffic and the presence of pedestrians or other roadside hazards, especially on the nearside (see Chapter 7). If the situation allows, leave at least a door's width when passing a stationary vehicle.

Overtaking moving vehicles

Overtaking a moving vehicle is more complicated because the situation is changing all the time. You need to consider the speed and acceleration capabilities of your own vehicle, the physical features of the road and the relative speeds of other vehicles. You also need a good sense of where your own and other vehicles are in relation to gaps in the traffic.

How to overtake

A vehicle to be overtaken is a moving hazard, so use the system of car control to deal with it safely. You need to observe and plan carefully, to judge speed and distance accurately, and to be alert to possible secondary hazards. Thoughtless overtaking is dangerous.

The following pages describe two overtaking situations:

- where you are able to overtake immediately (approaching, overtaking and returning to your own side of the road) in one continuous manoeuvre

- where other hazards require you to take up a following position before you can safely overtake.

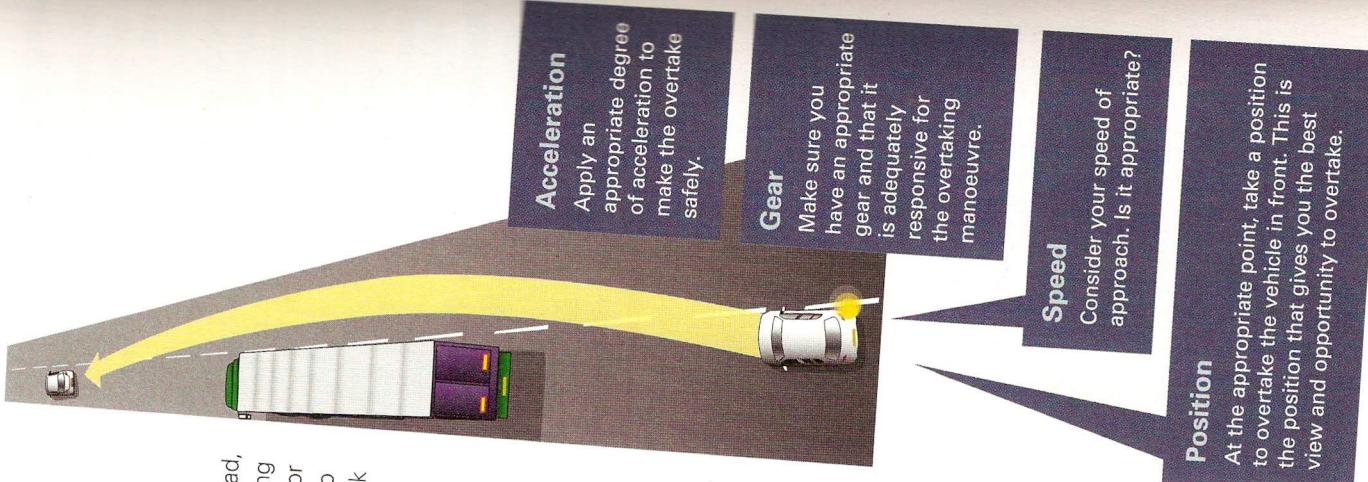
In real life overtaking usually involves multiple hazards. Any overtaking situation can change rapidly and become complicated by further hazards (for example, new oncoming vehicles, or slower vehicles further ahead on your side of the road). In learning to negotiate these complex hazards, you may be required to consider and apply the system more than once in an overtaking manoeuvre. As you gain practice and confidence, you will learn to view the number of hazards as one complex picture, and to use fewer applications.

Although the same general rules apply when overtaking hazards other than a vehicle, always assess the specific circumstances. Speed or the sound of a horn can startle horses. Cyclists, especially children, can be erratic so allow them plenty of room. Give motorcycles plenty of room too; if you are too close, your slip stream could destabilise them.

The following pages offer general advice but overtaking a moving vehicle involves complex, dynamic hazards. You need accurate observation, planning, information processing and judgement, and overtaking technique is best learned under guidance in a moving vehicle.

Where you are able to overtake immediately

Once you have checked that all the other conditions (e.g. clear view ahead, sufficient space, absence of oncoming traffic, safe return gap) are suitable for immediate overtaking, and there is no other factor which prevents you, work through the stages of the system to pass the slower vehicle(s) and return to your own side of the road. Use your mirrors and the appropriate signals throughout.

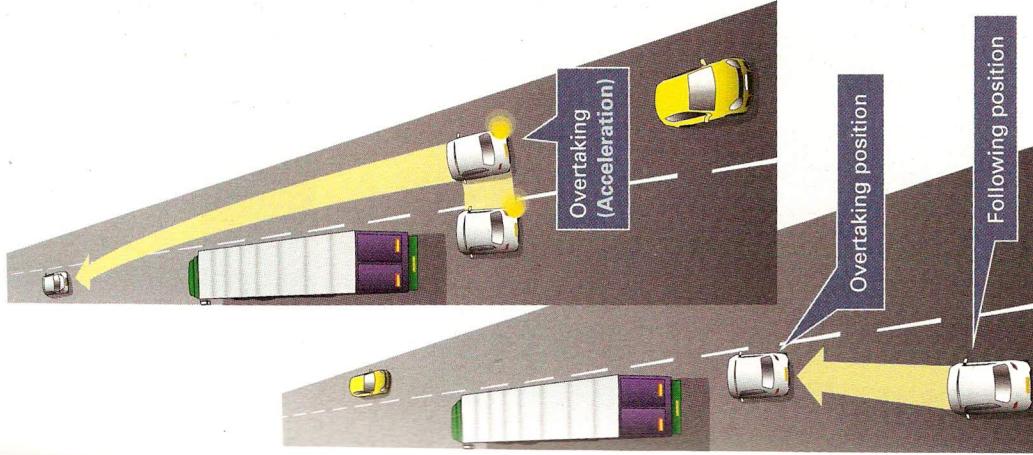


Where other hazards require you to follow before you can safely overtake

Where you are gaining on a vehicle in front but can see it is not possible to overtake immediately, reduce your speed so that you can follow at a safe distance.

Observe and assess the road and traffic conditions ahead for an opportunity to overtake safely and when you see one, move into an overtaking position. Ask yourself the questions below.

- Does the road layout present a hazard?
- What is the speed of the vehicle(s) to be overtaken?
- Is/are the driver(s) ahead likely to overtake?
- Have I taken into account the speed and performance of my own vehicle?
- What is the likely response of the driver and occupants of the vehicle in front?
- What is the speed of oncoming vehicles?
- Is there a possibility of as yet unseen vehicles approaching at high speed?
- What is happening behind? Are any of the following vehicles likely to overtake me?
- What distance do I need to overtake and regain a nearside gap safely?
- What is an appropriate speed to complete the overtake, taking account of the hazards beyond the vehicle I'm overtaking?



Following position

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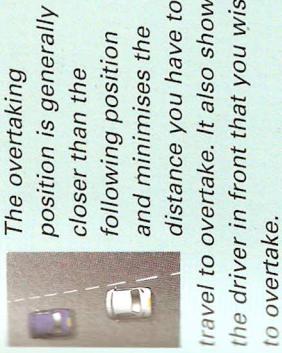
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Your priorities will change as you go through the manoeuvre. Continue to observe, plan and process information so that you can adjust your hazard priorities as the overtake develops. Observe what is happening in the far distance, the middle distance, the immediate foreground and behind; do this repeatedly. Remember that good observation alone is not enough: your safety depends on correctly interpreting what you see. See page 138 for examples of situations where drivers do not correctly interpret what they see.

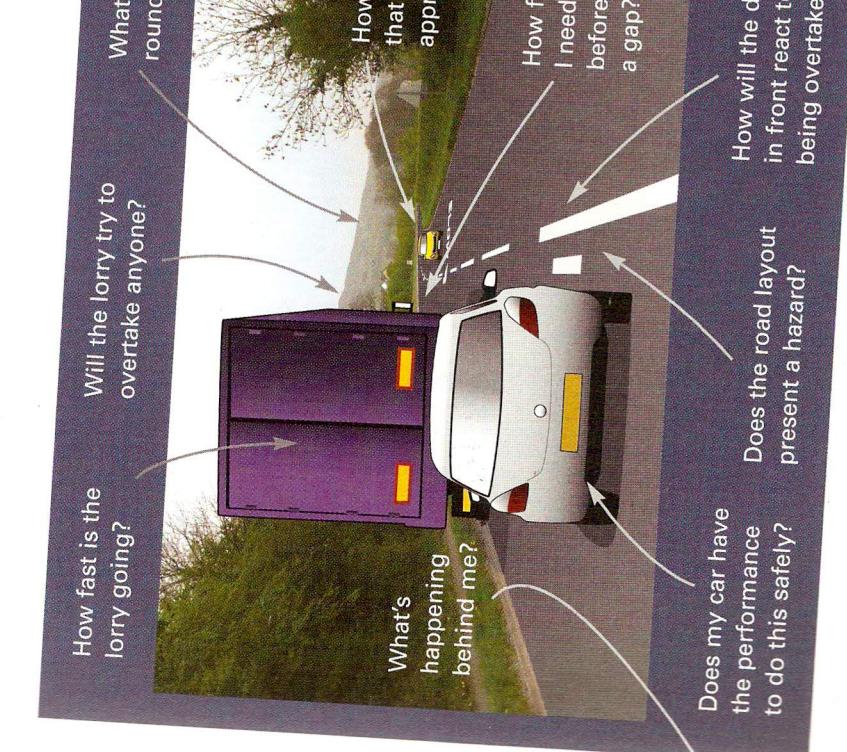
In some cases, you might plan to take the following position but then find as you close up on the vehicle in front that you have a clear view of the road ahead and there are no additional hazards. In this case, you could go straight to the overtaking position.

Overtaking position

Position your vehicle to get the best possible view and opportunity to overtake, with due regard for safety.



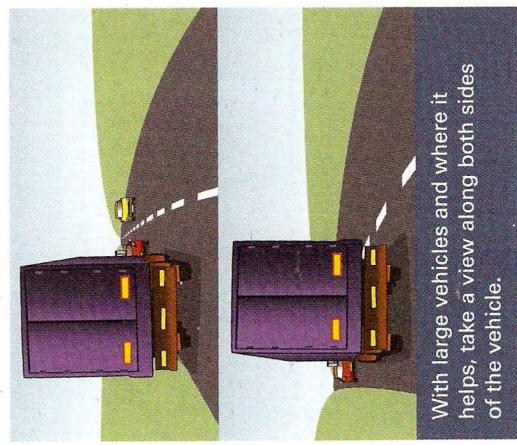
The overtaking position is generally closer than the following position and minimises the distance you have to travel to overtake. It also shows the driver in front that you wish to overtake.



Plan to move into the overtaking position when you see a safe opportunity opening up (for example on the approach to a bend which opens into a straight stretch of road) so that you are ready to move out when it does.

Consider the need to signal. Adjust your speed to that of the vehicle in front. If you are not already in the most responsive gear for your speed, select the gear you will use to accelerate as you overtake.

Watch carefully for any new hazards. If a hazard comes into sight consider dropping back until you have passed it. Remember, if in doubt hold back.



With large vehicles and where it helps, take a view along both sides of the vehicle.

Overtaking

From the overtaking position continue observing until you see an opportunity to overtake.



Position your vehicle so that you have a clear path beyond the vehicle you wish to pass, without accelerating.

From this position:

- if you see the manoeuvre would not be safe, return to the following or overtaking position as appropriate
- if the manoeuvre can be completed safely, accelerate past.

As you accelerate past, reconsider the hazards ahead of the overtaken vehicle. This may include other vehicles you want to overtake, or physical features such as junctions or bends.

Overtaking more than one vehicle or in a line of traffic

If there is more than one vehicle, you may wish to consider a series of overtakes as one manoeuvre. While you may be able to plan these as one manoeuvre, each one should be reappraised separately as the vehicles are approached.

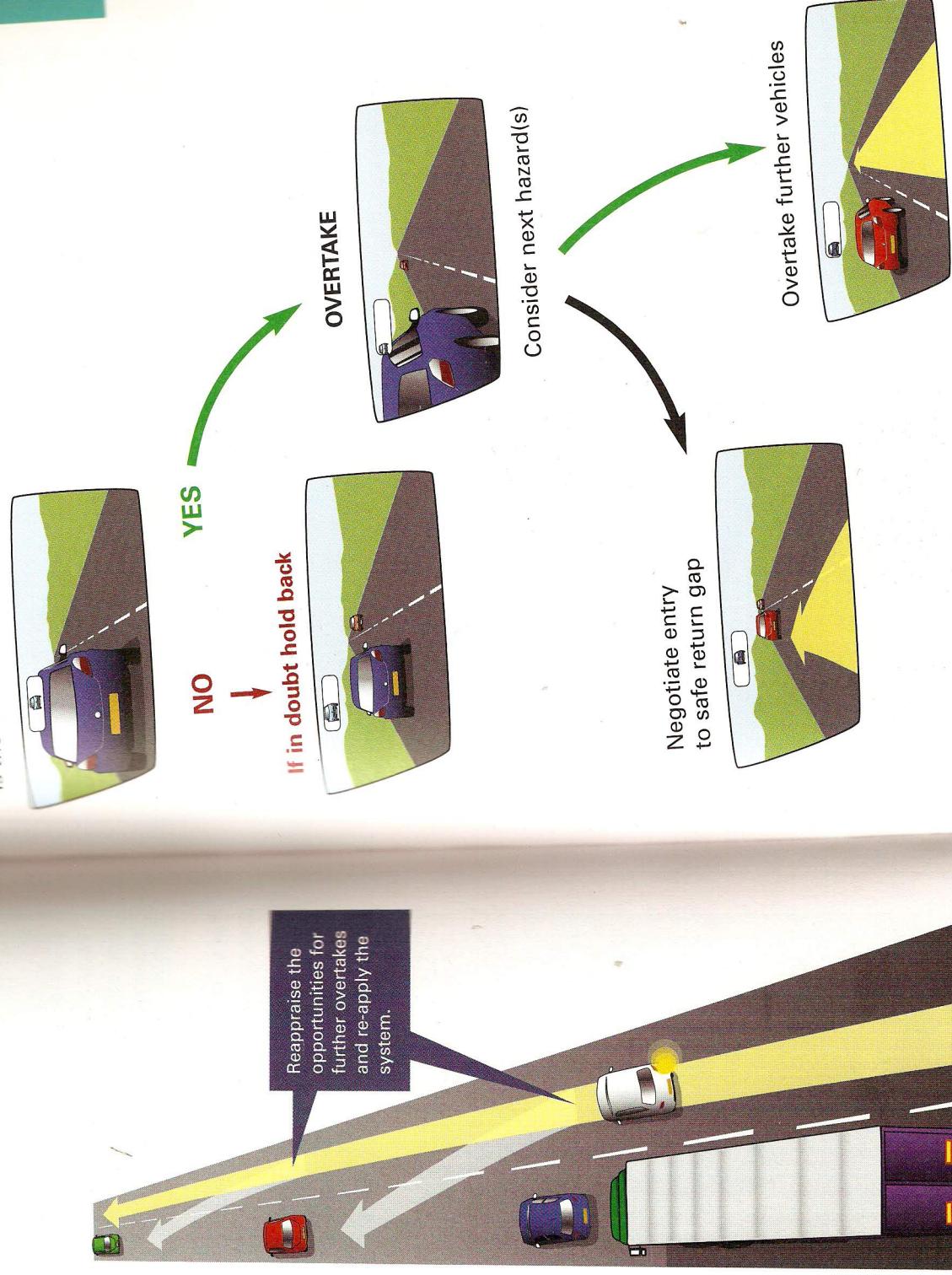
From the point of accelerating past the previous vehicle in the line you should consider whether to continue or to return to a safe position in the line yourself. Each of these decisions is a separate application of the system.

Don't be tempted to increase your speed for each overtake in a line of traffic.

Summary

The flowchart below summarises the principles of overtaking one or more moving hazards.

Is there a safe opportunity to overtake?



Special hazards you must consider before overtaking

We have worked through two methods for overtaking systematically in straightforward conditions. But in practice, there are many hazards to overtaking in most everyday road and traffic situations. The illustrations below show some common overtaking collisions.

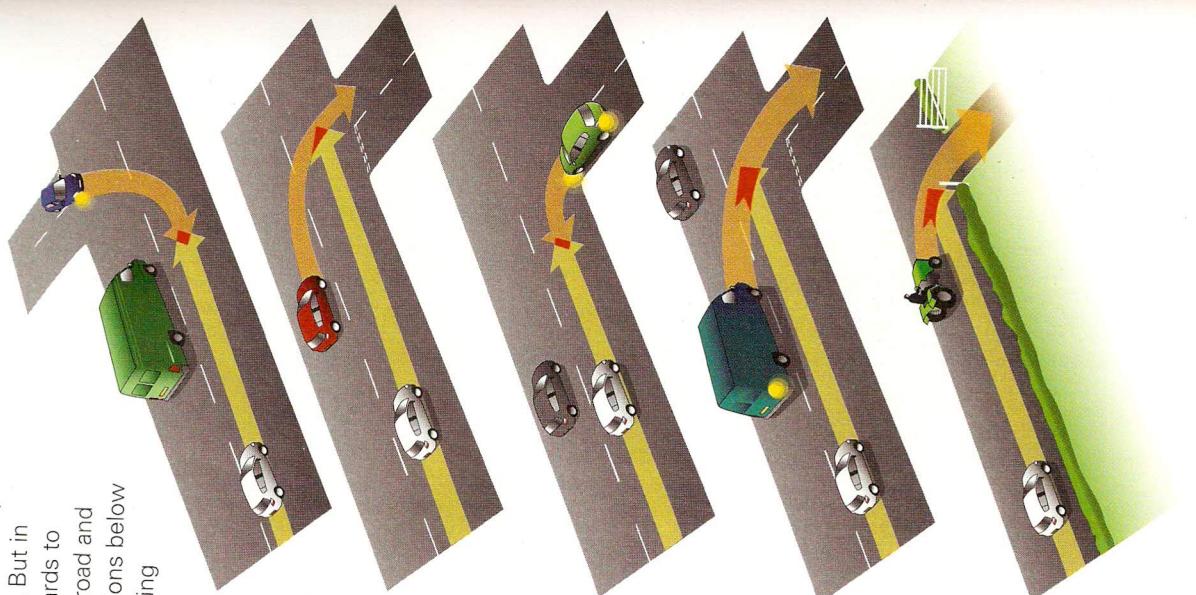
The driver of the white car does not realise that the driver of the blue car can only see the slow-moving van and may pull out onto the main road

The driver of the white car does not anticipate that the red car may turn without warning into the side road

The driver of the white car does not realise the driver of the green car is looking only to his right and may pull out

The driver of the white car thinks the van is indicating to overtake the car ahead, but the van is turning right

The driver of the white car does not anticipate that the tractor may turn without warning into an entrance or gateway



Signal your intention to overtake to the driver in front. Your road position and following distance help you to do this, but take care not to appear aggressive. This can be counterproductive and provoke an aggressive response in the other driver, who might speed up as you try to overtake. If the driver in front appears to be obstructive, consider whether it is worth overtaking at all. If you decide to go ahead, think about how much extra speed and space you need to allow.

If the driver in front has not noticed you, or has a load which obscures the rear view mirrors, consider using your headlights to signal that you are there. Take extra care before overtaking a long vehicle or vehicles with wide or high loads. Assess the road ahead very carefully for any possible dangers. If you can, take views to both sides of the vehicle and make sure you have plenty of space to overtake and return safely to your own side.

The vehicles behind

Assess whether the vehicles behind in front presents.

- Has the driver of the vehicle noticed you?
- Can you predict from earlier behaviour whether the driver's response is likely to be aggressive?
- Does the size or the load of the vehicle prevent the driver from seeing you or prevent you from seeing the road ahead clearly?
- Does the vehicle have left-hand drive (e.g. a foreign lorry)?

The range of hazards you must consider

Before overtaking you must consider the full range of possible hazards that each situation presents:

- the vehicle in front
- the vehicles behind
- pedestrians
- oncoming vehicles not yet in view
- the road layout and conditions
- road surface
- overtaking in a stream of vehicles
- overtaking on a single carriageway
- right-hand bends
- left-hand bends
- overtaking on a dual carriageway.

You will also need to note any relevant road signs before attempting to overtake.

Some of these hazards are discussed in more depth below.

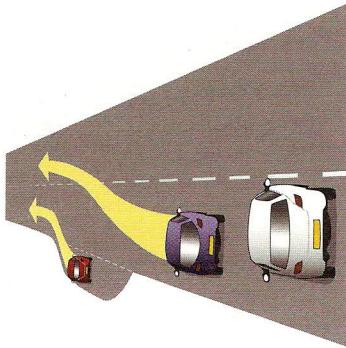
The vehicle in front

Assess what sort of hazard the vehicle in front presents.

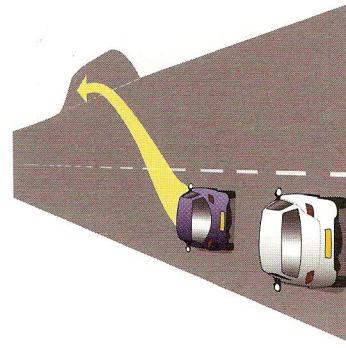
- Assess whether the vehicles behind pose a risk. Note their speed, position and progress, and judge whether any of them may want to overtake you. Look out particularly for motorcycles. Be aware that other following vehicles could overtake the vehicle following you. Decide whether you need to signal. Use your mirrors to monitor the situation behind you, especially before changing your speed or position.

Road layout and conditions

When you plan to overtake, look for possible hazards in the layout of the road ahead. Watch out for nearside obstructions or junctions — including pathways, tracks, entrances, and farm gates. Vehicles, pedestrians, or animals could emerge from these causing the vehicle(s) in front of you to veer towards the centre of the road. Look for right-hand junctions and entrances concealing vehicles or other hazards that could move out into your path.



Look for laybys on both sides of the road and watch out for vehicles pulling out of them. Drivers pulling out of a layby on the other side of the road may not see you because they are watching what is happening behind rather than in front of them.



Assess the width of the road and look out for any features in the road which could obscure your view such as bends, hidden dips, hill crests and hump back bridges. There may be fast-moving vehicles approaching you on the sections of road you cannot see.

Follow the basic rule for overtaking:

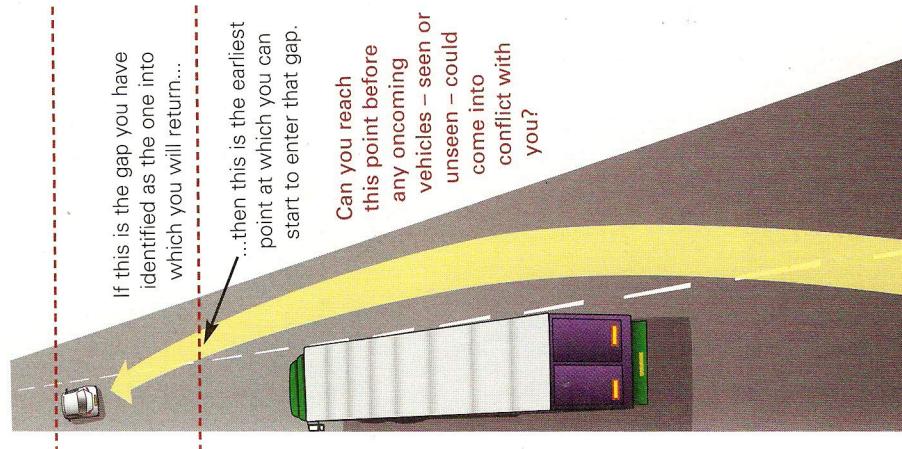
- Identify a gap into which you can return and the point along the road at which you will be able to enter it.

• Judge whether you will be able to reach that point before any oncoming vehicle, seen or unseen, could come into conflict with you.

You should have observed the whole stretch of road necessary to complete the manoeuvre, and know that it does not include any other hazards. Look especially for hazards which might

cause the vehicles you are overtaking to alter their position. Make full use of road signs and road markings, especially those giving instructions or warning you of hazards ahead.

The basic rule for overtaking



Road surface

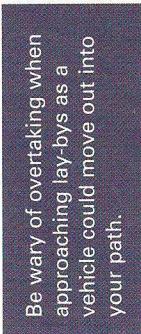
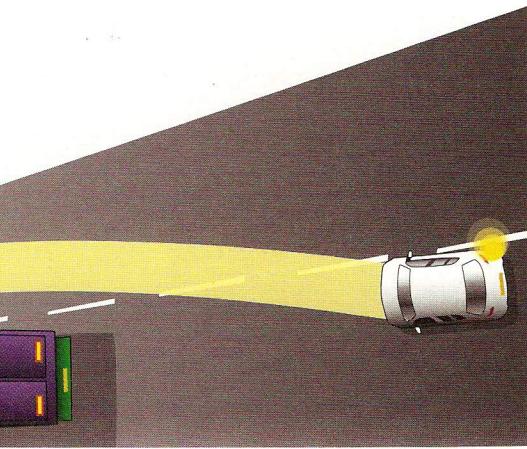
Before you overtake, observe the condition of the road surface and note anything which could throw your vehicle off course or affect your visibility (e.g. loose gravel). Watch out for surface water which could cause a curtain of spray at a critical moment. Be aware that bad weather can affect how your vehicle holds the road and how well you can see the road.

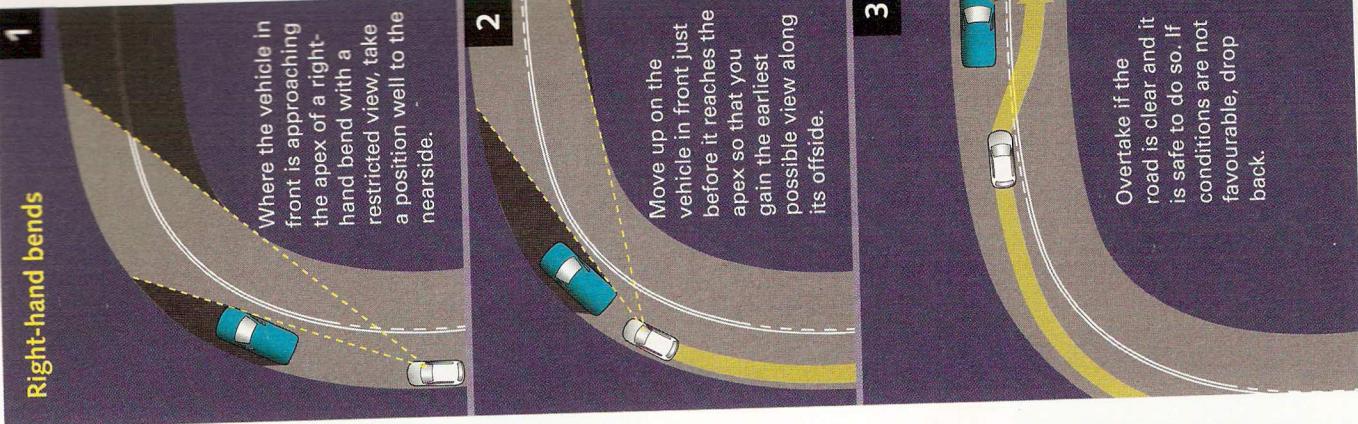
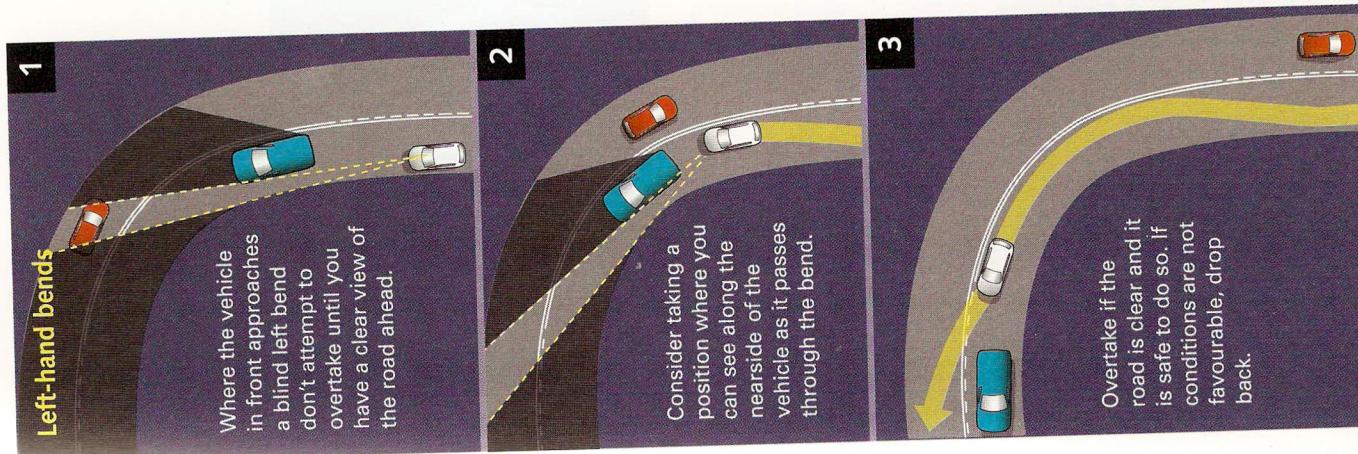
See Chapter 2, *Observation and anticipation*, page 35.

Overtaking in a stream of vehicles is more difficult because it takes more time. You also have to take into account the possible actions of more drivers, both in front and behind. Drivers in front may not be aware that you are there or intend to overtake; drivers behind might try to overtake you. Always signal your intentions clearly to other road users.

Before you overtake, identify a clear gap between the vehicles in front which you can enter safely. Be aware that the gap may get smaller before you arrive, so choose gaps that are large enough to allow for this. Don't overtake if you will have to force your vehicle into a gap.

When planning to overtake in a stream of vehicles, consider moving out onto the other side of the road to give yourself a clearer view of the road ahead. Hold this position if you can see that the road ahead is clear, and if you can identify a clear return gap and have



**Right-hand bends****Overtaking on a single carriageway**

This is perhaps the most hazardous form of overtaking because you put your vehicle in the path of any oncoming vehicles – so plan this manoeuvre with great care. Remember you can always reconsider your decision and hold back.

You need to be able to judge the speed and distance of oncoming vehicles accurately to assess whether you can reach the return gap before they do. Judging the speed of oncoming vehicles can be extremely difficult, especially on long straight roads. The size and type of the oncoming vehicle can give you clues about its possible speed.

As well as looking for vehicles, train yourself to look specifically for motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians before you overtake. Drivers often fail to spot the unexpected.

See Chapter 2, *Observation and anticipation*, page 25, *Looking but not seeing*.

Overtaking on bends

In certain circumstances, it is possible to get a good clear view of the road on the other side of the bend before you enter it and, if you are sure there are no other hazards, to position yourself to overtake before the road straightens out. But overtaking on bends is potentially dangerous and you should always ensure that you have the available view to do this safely.

enough time to reach it. Allow for the possibility that the driver following you might move up into the gap that you have just left, preventing you from returning to it. When you reach the first return gap you may not need to enter it. If it is safe, hold your position while you decide whether you can overtake more vehicles.

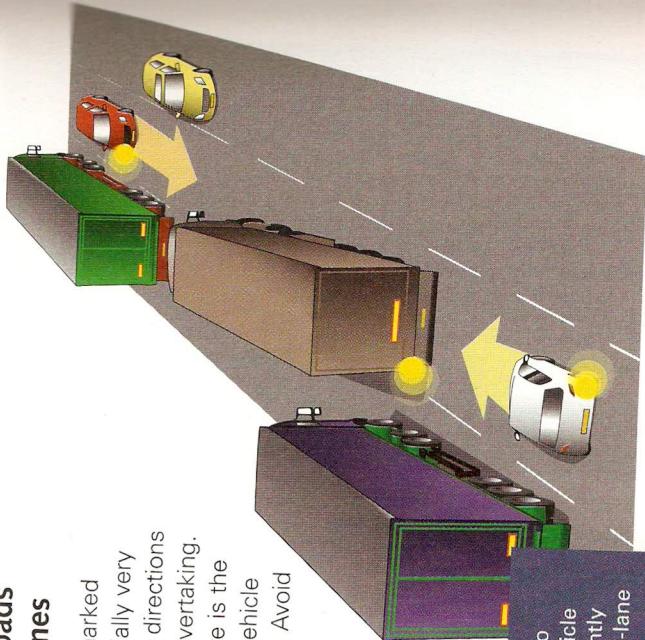
When you plan to overtake clusters of vehicles, you must take extra care to ensure that the other drivers know you are there.

Where a queue has formed because of an obstruction in the road ahead, never try to jump the queue. It annoys other road users and can be dangerous.

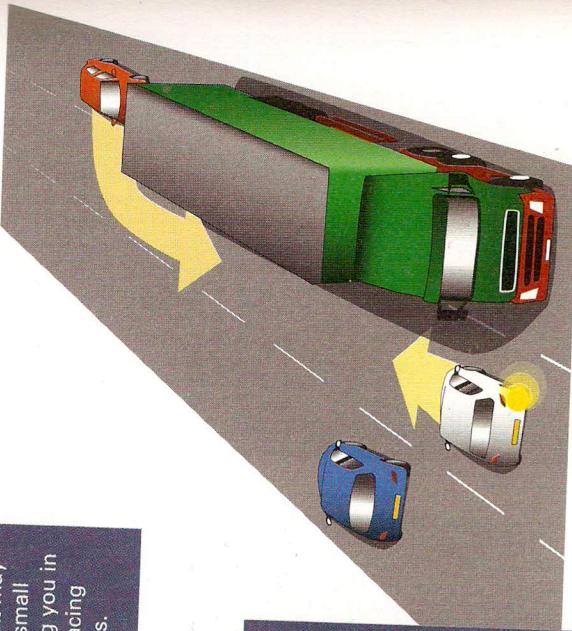


Single carriageway roads marked with three lanes

Single carriageway roads marked with three lanes are potentially very dangerous as traffic in both directions shares the centre lane for overtaking. Never try to overtake if there is the possibility of an oncoming vehicle moving into the centre lane. Avoid overtaking when you would make a third line of moving vehicles unless you are sure it is absolutely safe to do so.



Don't be tempted to follow another vehicle through an apparently safe gap on a three-lane single carriageway. Always identify a safe return gap of your own. The vehicle in front may slip safely into a small return gap leaving you in the middle lane facing oncoming vehicles.



When you are planning to overtake, always look out for the 'lurker' who closes right up unseen behind other vehicles and then sweeps out to overtake. Never assume that the drivers of light vehicles behind an oncoming lorry will stay put. They could well pull out just when you do.

Overtaking on multi-lane carriageways

On multi-lane carriageways it can be more difficult to judge the speed of traffic approaching from behind.

Before overtaking check the intentions of drivers in the nearside lanes. If a vehicle is closing up on the one in front, the driver may pull out without signalling or only signalling after the vehicle starts to move out. Watch the distance between the wheels of the vehicle and the lane markings. If the gap narrows, the vehicle could be moving out. Follow the key principles:

- to leave yourself room for manoeuvre at all times, generally avoid overtaking three abreast. (This may be unavoidable if traffic is dense.)
- only overtake on the nearside if traffic in all lanes is moving in queues.
- take particular care when planning to overtake large vehicles at roundabout exits and on left hand bends.

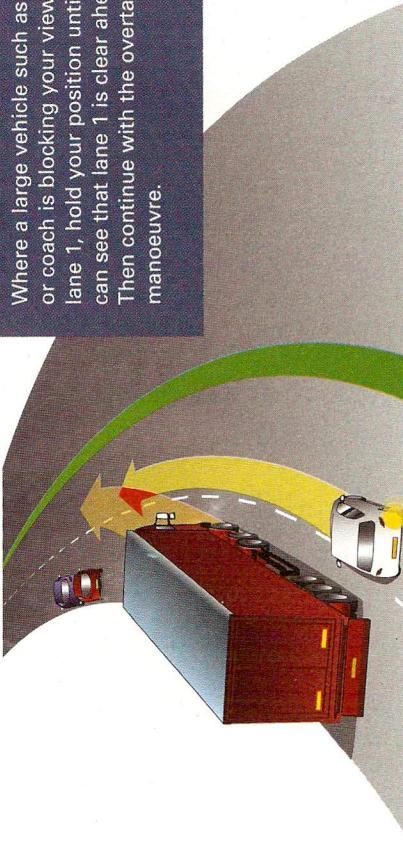
See Chapter 10, *Driving on motorways and other multi-lane carriageways*.

Helping other drivers to overtake

Helping other drivers to overtake eases tensions and contributes to a cooperative driving culture that increases safety. Use your mirrors and be alert to the intentions of drivers behind you. If another driver wants to overtake you, make it easier by leaving enough distance between you and the vehicle in front to give them a safe return gap.

Be aware that other drivers may try to overtake you when you keep to the legal speed limit. This is quite likely when you slow down to enter or as you are about to leave a lower speed limit area.

Where a large vehicle such as a lorry or coach is blocking your view of lane 1, hold your position until you can see that lane 1 is clear ahead. Then continue with the overtaking manoeuvre.



Review

In this chapter we have looked at:

- how to overtake safely
- how to overtake where there are no other hazards
- the three-stage approach to overtaking when other hazards cause you to take up a following position
- the range of hazards to consider before overtaking.

Check your understanding

Why is overtaking potentially hazardous?

What are the seven key safety points for overtaking?

Give an example of a hazard that would make you decide to follow another vehicle before overtaking.

What is the three-stage approach to overtaking and when is it used?

When you move out before overtaking, what should you check?

Why do you need to consider the driver in front before overtaking?

How might road layout and conditions affect overtaking?

When can it be useful to hold a position on the other side of the road?

How can you help others to overtake? Why is this important?

If you have difficulty in answering any of these questions, look back over the relevant part of this chapter to refresh your memory.



Chapter 10 Driving on motorways and multi-lane carriageways

Use this chapter to find out about:

- the special features of motorways
- how to join and leave the motorway
- how to drive safely on the motorway and other fast-moving multi-lane carriageways
- how to deal with specific hazards on motorways and multi-lane carriageways.