# ` Racing Incidents

Tom King 1/24/2025

* Maintain control of the vehicle
* Don’t hit anything
* Never run out of fuel

These are the important principles in car racing and especially in the sport of Open Road Challenges.

An Open Road Challenge is a timed event in which each entry (a car plus driver and, optionally, a navigator) tries to hit an exact time at the finish as determined by the chosen Target Speed and the given distance of the course. There are a few catches: the target speeds are generally pretty high (e.g., 160 mph), the road is usually a sinuous high desert public highway closed for the event by the police, and there are radar traps to enforce both upper and lower speed limits.

Public roads and high speeds lead to more “incidents” than on a track. An “incident” is anything that threatens your control of the vehicle. It would be a blown tire, an animal darting across the road, driver error, and many other unfortunate events.

A racing friend of mine from Jamaica once told me, “Tings dey happen.”

In the two decades I competed in Open Road Challenges, we averaged one fatality a year, including three friends of mine in races that I was in. I also competed in other events, actual racing events on race tracks and in the mountains of Mexico and even special stage rallies in places like Finland and South Africa. But Open Road Challenges were the most consistently dangerous.

Here's an exercise I recommend prior to the start: hold your hands as if holding a steering wheel in the 9 o’clock and 3 o’clock position. Take a deep breath and let it out. Then wiggle your fingers.

As you leave the starting line, you slowly move the car into the right lane to set up for the first left-hand bend 0.4 miles away. You guide the car gently into the apex of the turn, shifting into 6th gear at 144 mph, still accelerating and drifting the car from the apex back out to the right lane. Then you smoothly bring the car back to the center of the road as you head down the 3-mile straightaway, getting up to and over your 160-mph target speed. At that point, it’s time to do the exercise you practiced: deep breath, exhale, wiggle your fingers.

Why? Because the car’s always talking to you, and if you have a death grip on the wheel, you’re not listening.

And it’s important to listen carefully because you’re carrying a huge amount of energy at those speeds. Even though you stay in the center of the road on the straights (giving you the most margin of error), incidents can occur unexpectedly.

It helps to have thought through your action plan in case of an incident. For example, blown tire means clutch in immediately, ease off the throttle and NOTHING ELSE! Keep the car on the road, don’t you DARE touch the brakes! Or, another example, an animal: jackrabbit or smaller, don’t do anything; a larger animal, ease out of the throttle, don’t make any sudden movements, no steering inputs, no braking. This takes discipline, so that’s why it’s important to plan for these incidents ahead of time. We don’t want any jerks out here.

The desert is unforgiving. It may look smooth, but it’s rough enough to launch your car into the air. And it really hurts to crash.

<https://youtu.be/9G17KXiRsBM?feature=shared>











