

## Making Progress

This article is from Wirral Group's Guy Lightfoot.

You've passed the IAM advanced driving test and rightly feel you've made the grade; you're a considerate and safe driver with good observational skills, a cut above the average motorist. You don't exceed the speed limit. Excellent!

Dear reader, allow me to make a sweeping generalisation that is likely to provoke you (indeed, that's the idea!): a common trait of many "advanced" drivers is that they don't make sufficient progress when they could.

There, I've said it!

"Making progress" is code for taking advantage of the prevailing speed limit, when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

It is vital that we hold our speed in check in urban areas with a high hazard density – town centres, residential streets, near schools etc and, in these situations, 30mph is often far too fast for safety; I'm preaching to the converted here, I know.

However, having left the town behind and passed the "national" sign, how many of us consider dropping down a cog and overtaking that car in front – the one that is now doing a heady 42mph instead of 60? Few.

We sit behind them (with a 2-second gap of course) and might even mutter "get a move on" under our breath, but the idea of actually considering an overtake doesn't enter our head. Well, I would argue that it should, even if we decide to decline.

More often than not, we would assess the situation and decide to stay put, for numerous reasons (we haven't got a complete view; there's a junction on the right; there is a horse rider ahead etc). However, occasionally the opportunity for a safe and appropriate overtake is presented and as an advanced driver, we should have the skill and confidence to overtake professionally.

Where we have a completely open view from our following position, a 1-stage "momentum" overtake is usually the smoothest option; having checked behind and taken a flexible gear we simultaneously accelerate and, because we already have the view, we pull out, pass the vehicle and return to the left as one fluid manoeuvre. That's often not possible so a 3-stage overtake is appropriate:

- Stage 1: check behind, move up to the overtaking position (1.5 seconds behind the car in front), take a flexible gear and without closing on the car in front, indicate and pull out for a view. If our new view does not allow us to overtake we return to the left and drop back to a 2-second following position. The crucial point is that the act of coming out for a view does not commit us to overtaking. I find this the most difficult aspect of a 3-stage; there is a natural desire to minimise the time on the "wrong" side of the road by speeding up but if we do that, we will have committed ourselves and can't pull back in.
- Stage 2: if the view does allow us to overtake safely then accelerate (keeping within the speed limit) and pass the vehicle.
- Stage 3: once comfortably past the vehicle (we can see them in our mirror and are at least 1.5 seconds in front of them) smoothly return to the left.

Overtaking is not the only example of making progress; with no traffic in front, our speed should be dictated by the speed limit and what we see. On a typical country road with bends and straight sections our speed should be constantly changing in response to the limit point rather than just bowling along at a steady 47mph (too fast in the bends, unnecessarily slow on the straights).

Yes, we should balance the desire to make safe and legal progress with vehicle sympathy, smoothness and economy. Not comfortable bedfellows so, as with many aspects of life, it is a compromise!

If you identify with some of these points then perhaps consider a free confidential assessment drive – available to existing members as well as non-IAM drivers – to benchmark your driving skills.