

## Colonel Safety talks about safe driving on wet roads

# Hydroplaning isn't just for the Water Follies

Summer has begun, and as many of us take to the roads in search of recreation and relaxation, we need to remember that the sudden weather changes brought about by summer storms bring driving hazards we thought we left behind in winter.

### Learn from close calls

Many readers of the Colonel Safety articles have come to appreciate that some of my best work comes from personal experience. Although you may suspect that Colonel Safety has had way too many life-threatening experiences, you can also see that I'm willing to learn from close calls, and share what I've learned with you. One of those close calls recently involved hydroplaning down the road of life.

On a recent drive, I failed to recognize the changing road conditions as I made my way into the leading edge of a thunderstorm. Although it started off with a mild drizzle, the tempo of the rain picked up as I drove into the heart of the storm, until a torrent of water was falling from the heavens. In very short order, water covered the road's surface.

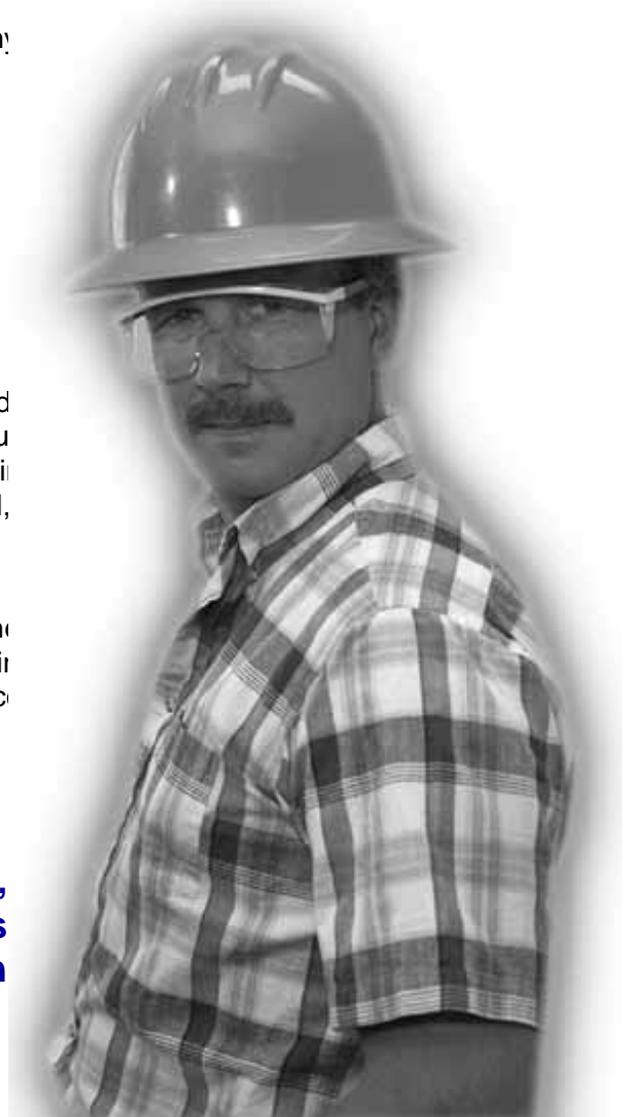
About this time, I discovered that I was no longer the driver of my car. I was now the skipper of a hydroplane boat. I'm sure it was a hydroplane because of the rooster tail of water streaming out of the back end and the failure of the steering wheel to change my direction of travel. As I began skidding back and forth across the road, my enthusiasm for this experience was dampened by both the oncoming traffic and a really big ditch at the road's shoulder. It was at this point that I had the inspiration to apply my brakes.

Boy, was that a bad idea! Even the slightest brake pressure made the experience 10 times less enjoyable. I would have had better luck slowing down my boat by heaving out a sea anchor than by applying brakes. Besides having absolutely no effect in reducing my speed, the brakes caused the car to skid more violently.

I did eventually regain control of the vehicle and limped out of the storm at a greatly reduced pace. Here is what I learned: even in summer, drivers need to have respect for changing road surface conditions in severe weather.

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**Colonel Safety,  
also known as  
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## Hydroplaning isn't just for the Water Follies, cont.

### Hydroplaning

What I experienced was hydroplaning, a condition where water builds up in front of your tires faster than your car's weight can push it away. Once there is a layer of water under your tires, they don't actually touch the road surface, and your car feels like it is gliding or skidding. Even a thin layer of water can cause hydroplaning. Puddles are not required.

If you notice you are hydroplaning in your car, resist the urge to slam on the brakes. Take your foot off the gas pedal and let the car slow down. This allows your tires to reconnect to the pavement gradually. If you are skidding, steer into the skid and look for soft landing points, in the event you have any say-so in the matter.

### Avoid danger

Of greater importance, don't get into the situation in the first place. Make sure your speed is appropriate for the weather conditions and maintain some tread depth on your tires. Wear bars are standard on all tires for more reasons than just selling new tires. If you're driving around on balding tires because of the expense of replacement, you might calculate what death or a serious injury will cost.

### Plan ahead

Time spent cleaning windshields, inspecting wiper blades for wear and looking up current weather reports can make the difference in staying alive. With the unsettled weather we have been experiencing, planning ahead isn't optional for safe driving.

As always, send your driving tips to David P. Nelsen at Colonel Safety, MSIN HS-71, and happy motoring. ♦