How To Adjust Your Side-View Mirrors

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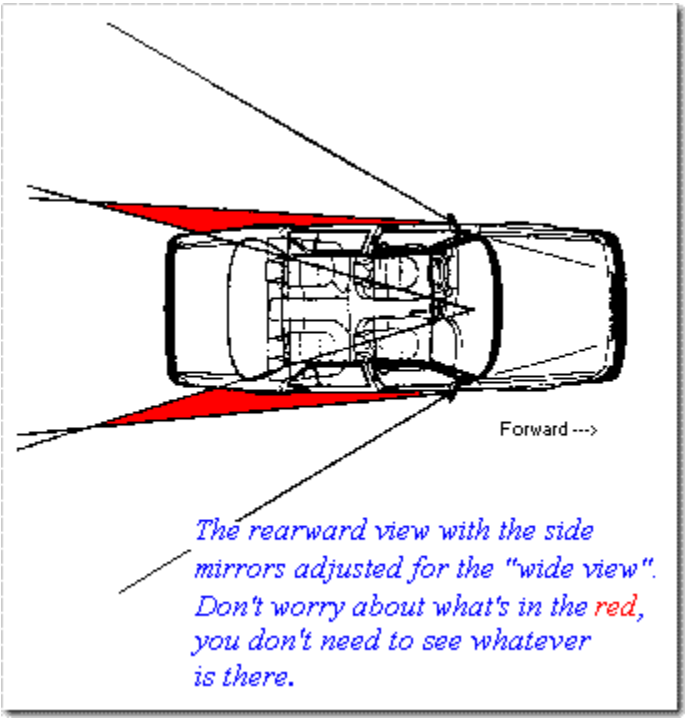
By Steve Carrellas, NMA New Jersey State Chapter Coordinator



The rearward view with the side mirrors adjusted for the "wide view". Don't worry about what's in the red, you don't need to see whatever is there.

When do we rely on our mirrors the most? Probably when we are changing lanes. Our objective is to change position without getting in another driver's way or cutting him/her off.

The positioning for the inside rearview mirror is fairly obvious — you should be able to see out of the rear window. Be sure the day/night switch found on most rearview mirrors is in the day position during daytime operation.

As for the side mirror or mirrors, most people adjust them so they can see the side of the car on the inside edge of the mirror. Consider the view when the side-view mirrors are set up as just described. Essentially, you have created "tunnel vision" to the rear. Your side-view mirrors overlap much of what your inside rearview mirror sees and you've also created blind spots.

What is the solution to tunnel vision and blind spots?

Simply adjust the side-view mirrors just beyond the point where you could see the side of the car on the inside edge of the mirror. With this setup, you almost completely solve the blind spot problem. To adjust the outside mirrors this way, follow these two steps (This of course, is for vehicles with an inside mirror):

- For the driver side mirror, roll up the window and press your head against the glass. Adjust the mirror so that you can just see the edge of the car.

- For the passenger side mirror, place your head in the center of the car (directly behind the inside mirror mount) and adjust the outside mirror so that you can just see the edge of the car. This is necessary even with convex (curved) mirrors where the image is distorted a little.

When you're in your normal driving position, you won't be able to see the sides of the car but will be able to see other vehicles in the adjacent lanes.

For those times where there is a vehicle present in the other lane that isn't visible when checking the mirrors, the other vehicle's position will probably be such that its front is adjacent to your door and you'll spot it in your peripheral vision as you check the side-view mirror.

Most of us have dealt with blind spots by turning our head for a quick check. This isn't generally a problem in terms of missing something ahead; however, there can be a dangerous side effect.

Unless you've worked to control it, your arms will move in the direction your eyes are looking causing the steering wheel to turn.

With well-positioned mirrors, your head won't have to turn as far to check any remaining blind spots.

There are other applications of changing lanes that this setup is useful for as well. For example, when getting on a highway, your ability to judge how to best merge with the traffic flow will be greatly enhanced with the view provided by the "wide-view" side mirror. Likewise, as you pass interchanges on the highway, your ability to monitor traffic entering the highway is enhanced.

And finally, a good guideline for deciding when to move into the passing lane or back into the traveling lane is to make sure that you can see the headlights of the vehicle you want to pull in front of in the rearview mirror. We can all appreciate the value of adequate pull-in space.

Interesting tidbit:

The Indianapolis 500 race was originally envisioned as a test-bed for new ideas. In the first race in 1911, Ray Harroun, a test driver for a now-defunct car company, installed a rectangular mirror mounted in front of and above his head, the first such use of a mirror. He won the race.

Some racers of the day said he cheated because of that. (All the other racers had a mechanic who rode facing backwards. Harroun's use of a mirror saved his car the weight of a mechanic.) It wasn't until the mid-Twenties that rearview mirrors were required on Indy race cars.