



ROAD SAFETY COLUMN

# MAKE THE CONNECTION

*Improve your driving with one simple technique: observation links*



**IAN WHITE**  
Former Metropolitan  
Police Class One  
Advanced Driving  
Instructor  
Driver Training Manager  
- Occupational Training  
Institute, Oman

Driving is primarily a visual activity. We do use other senses to feel what the car is doing, hear potential problems and even smell things like overheating brakes and coolant – but the main source of information when driving is our eyes.

But there is so much more involved than simply just looking. We need to take notice of what we see and that’s exactly how observation is defined: the mental power of taking notice.

To take your driving to the next skill level, try and link everything you see with the possibility of something else happening. Observation links, as they are called, can substantially increase your safety whilst driving.

Observation links can give clues as to physical features, such as when you see a single lamp post on its own you should be aware that you may well be approaching a junction; but mainly observation links give clues as to the likely behaviour of other road users.

For instance, if a football has been kicked into

the road in front of you, watch out for the small child following it. If you see one wadi dog at the side of the road, watch out for several others as they mostly move around in packs. The same applies for camels and goats.

As head of driver training at the Occupational Training Institute, I spend a lot of time on the road instructing clients. Recently, while with a client in Bausher Heights, we turned into a side road and I asked the client to comment on the road ahead. He mentioned several things, including that there was mud on the road. But what he failed to mention was that the mud consisted of large lumps of mud on a relatively busy road. In other words, as it wasn’t squashed by other vehicles, it must have been fairly recently deposited on the road.

I asked him to slow down slightly and sure enough, just out of sight round the next bend was a large, heavily laden tipper lorry moving at a walking pace, which effectively made it a stationary obstruction in the road.

With a little imagination, you can make these kind of observation links every time you drive.

At other times you can make even less obvious links. For example, if you are driving in the early morning along a quiet road and you come to a ‘no overtaking’ sign, you might dismiss it as irrelevant as you are not in a hurry and have no intention of overtaking anyone.

But the sign also gives clues as to the nature of the road. Why don’t they want you to overtake? Is it because of poor sight lines on the road or perhaps an awkward bend that tightens? Or does the road suddenly narrow? Whatever the reason, link the ‘no overtaking’ sign with the need for extra caution until you pass the end of the restriction sign. The same link can be made for double solid white lines along the centre of the carriageway.

Alternatively, you may be driving along a main road when you notice passengers standing up in the Mwasalat bus in front of you; meaning you should anticipate that the bus might suddenly stop to drop off passengers.

Practising and developing your own observation links will result in you becoming a safer and smoother driver, as you’ll find that road and traffic situations that used to catch you out, now seem obvious.