

Up To Speed

Stay safe on our Texas roads from a rancher who's been there

62-year-old Gaylon Tidwell has been tooling down the roads of De Kalb for the better part of 50 years. But even though he's always called this town of less than 2,000 his home, he's gotten out enough in the Lone Star State to know you either drive safe or you find trouble.

Riding down those lonely two-way FM roads, for example. "One of the main things you have to do on a two-lane road is be aware," he says. "It comes down to being reactive. It's easy for someone to pull out from nowhere and now you have to avoid a problem. People also like to look off at the country around them. Eyes on the road!"

There are also numerous farms and ranches in Texas off these kinds of roads, which means you have to keep an eye out for farm equipment and slow-moving related vehicles. In addition, it's common for someone to be hauling a large number of items down these roads and that means there's always a chance something may not have been secured. Keep a safe distance behind and be on the lookout for anything on the bed that appears to be shifting too greatly. Better to be safe than trading insurance information.

Finally, if it's a lonely road it may also not be town priority. That means potholes and other problems may be scattered throughout. Watch for those gashes on the pavement or the next one may be in your tire, Tidwell says. "You have to remember that the budgets have gotten tight in some of these towns," he says. "I've seen some holes in the street that they should have gotten to a long time ago."

Size It Up

They, of course, say everything's bigger in Texas and Tidwell says that also applies to the vehicles, cautioning drivers of compact cars to be even more aware of larger vehicles. "Texas probably has the largest percentage of SUVs and pickups of any state in this country, partly due to farming and the ranching," he says. "Drivers of smaller cars getting into accidents with these vehicles can have worse results than normal—even deadly ones."

One incredible part of our state are the number of large cities within it. One moment you're in the small town of Lago Vista and suddenly, Austin. But with it also going in the reverse, it means there are more moments where you have to quickly adjust from fairly predictable city speeds to the inconsistency which can come with a smaller town's varying roads. Also, our expansive state highway system offers opportunities for efficiency but also overindulgence. It's easy to keep that lead foot down, says Tidwell, and that can make for speeding tickets and a higher percentage chance for accidents. "You can easily get caught up in all our stretches of highway and just keep going faster and faster," he says. "I don't know too many places where cruise control comes in more

handy than Texas. Put it on and then you don't have to worry about constantly looking at your speed."

Another way to stay safe is to stay on the road—and coolant can help. With the open spaces and high temperatures which come within our state borders, it's easy to get caught on a rural road with an overheated engine and little recourse. Tidwell reminds that in the North they keep blankets in the trunk for when it freezes, so it's a good idea for us to keep coolant. "You never know what can happen when you put in a lot of miles," says Tidwell, who enjoys time behind his Lincoln Navigator and Dodge pickup. "Better to be prepared."

Contact information: Gaylon Tidwell (903) 278-6401