



**The Channel One-Nine Special
Channel One-Nine #6
Air Date: May 7, 2020**

Todd Dills [00:00:00] Hey, it's Todd Dills again with Overdrive Magazine, here to answer your questions about trucking. [answering machine beep]

Carter Miles: [over the phone] [00:00:06] My name is Carter Miles, calling from Denton, Texas, the home of the Peterbilt factory.

Todd: And since we opened up the phone lines a few months back, we've heard from a lot of you wanting to know the same thing:

Carter: How regular drivers can help truckers be more courteous on the highways, so that we can all be more safe.

Natalie: [over the phone] How can cars and trucks co-exist in the road?

Kelsey: [over the phone] How can we be safer on the road together?

Todd: You wanted to know what our trucking listeners appreciate...

Richard: [over the phone] Rules of the road that you really appreciate we'd follow.

Todd: ...and what really gets under their skin.

Kelsey: [over the phone] Things that are annoying or even dangerous for truckers.

Todd: So we asked. [theme comes in: acoustic guitar music begins]

Tom Kyrk: I think the biggest thing I'd like people to understand about trucking is that truck drivers need room to maneuver.

Todd: And well, everyone we talked to pretty much said the same thing.

[montage of various responses with sound of engine running in the background: "*give 'em room, don't cut in front of them and slam on your brakes, it takes a football field to stop a truck, you really wanna pull up in front of me and stop on a dime?*")]

Todd: So for this Channel One-Nine Special, I guess you could say it's "driver's ed" day, highway-cutoff edition.

Gary Buchs: [over the phone] Yeah this is exactly what I did this week with 500 drivers ed students in Chicago.

Todd: And we'll be in good hands. Meet your instructor:

Gary: My name is Gary Buchs, I live in Central Illinois, about 30 miles outside of Bloomington

Todd: I've known Gary for close to a decade at this point, but just a few years ago I took a run in his truck with him from where I live in Nashville, up to the Northwest corner of Illinois. Now, I'd already been writing about trucking for a while by then, but that trip – watching Gary in action and hearing his play by play commentary on the flow of vehicles around him – it fundamentally changed the way I drive on the highway. [music fades out]

[00:01:55] What really stuck with me is the importance of following distance: that is, the space you leave between yourself and the vehicle in front of you.

Gary: Know your stopping distance and know that you have to be able to do it at a safe pace.

Todd: From a highway speed, your car can stop pretty quickly -- in just a few seconds. But for an 80,000 pound tractor-trailer, it's much different.

Gary: It's pretty true that for every ten mph, it will take you a little bit more than one second to stop. So it can take a truck seven to eight to nine seconds to stop at a highway speed.

Todd: And guess how far the truck will travel in that time?

Gary: Seven hundred feet, and I know this from experience, when I've been caught with an emergency stop situation.

Todd: Gary has actually put this to a test, by programming his GPS to drop virtual 'breadcrumbs' as he drives.

Gary: I had a program in my truck that tracked a breadcrumb every second, and I was going 45 miles an hour, hit the breaks as quick as I could, and it took me 4.5 seconds to stop that truck, 450ft.

Todd: He also has a nice trick to make sure he leaves enough space in front of his truck.

Gary: I have a little sticker on my windshield, and I paced out 700 feet. And that I use as a sightline to keep that open space that I have to manage in front of my truck.

Todd: Meaning, if he can see a car below that sticker on the windshield, he needs to back off and leave more space.

Gary: No one else is going to manage that space in front of my truck and that is the most important space for me to be safe.

Todd: Of course, what Gary can't control, is what the other cars and trucks do around him, and this is where the drivers ed portion of the episode comes in. [steady upbeat percussion comes in]

There is another trick Gary taught me – that in retrospect seems obvious, but it's something that I've found few of my friends or family members ever do. It has to do with how you pass a truck.

Gary: Everyone wants to drive faster than the truck; they want to be in front, they can't see around the truck well. But think about, "do I really need to pass?" And if we're gonna pass, try to avoid passing on the right side, because that's where we have the most trouble seeing other vehicles and people.

Todd: That's the first part. But say you've decided to pass, and you're doing it on the left side like he said – then what?

Gary: Here's my suggestion. It's pretty simple. When you get to the front of the truck, when you're beside that front tire, the steer tire, if you're going to change lanes to the right, in front of the truck, put your turn signal onto the right. Indicate to everyone around you that that's your intention. Proceed forward – don't pull in right away – proceed forward. When you can see the full front of the truck in your rear-view mirror, looking out the back window, you're about 100 feet in front of the truck, generally by then. Then, slowly begin to come over.

Todd: Got that? Don't start the merge before you can at least see the whole truck in the rear-view mirror.

Gary: Speed and spacing. You have to be aware of those things, and it's a constant adjustment.

Todd: Before I met Gary, I'd never used this particular tactic – of signaling well before I actually change lanes. And the signaling is key, because that's what tells the impatient driver on your back bumper to sit tight, so *they're* not tempted to swing into the right lane too early to cut off

the truck either. Thus, you can avoid yet another instance of the infuriating highway-cutoff. It works. [acoustic music comes in]

And those truckers watching it play out behind you – well, I know they’ll thank you.

One more thing a couple of you asked about: if a truck passes you, flash your headlights when the trailer clears your front bumper to let them know they’ve got room to come back over. Key thing here is to actually turn the lights on, then back off, or vice versa if it’s nighttime. Just don’t use those high beams.

The Channel One-Nine Special is a feature of Over The Road, from Radiotopia and Overdrive Magazine. It’s produced by Ian Coss and myself – Todd Dills – with support from Lacy Roberts, Paul Marhoefer and Julie Shapiro. Since we talked to Gary for this edition, the owner-operator has sold his Freightliner and retired from the road, though he still keeps a wheel or two in the lane via one-on-one business coaching, mentoring those new to trucking or in need of a fresh start. You can find more of his insights via the Overdrive Extra group blog, where he’s a regular contributor. Find it at OverdriveOnline.com. Thanks also to the truckers whose voices you heard at the top: Tom Kyrk, Devrie Jones, Jason Earlywine, Tad Schultz and Sue Wiese.

Paul will be back with you next week with his own personal “Haul of Fame.” ‘Til then, drive safe out there. [music fades out]

[00:07:24] **END OF EPISODE.**