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SAFETY EXPERTS get depressed every time it rains. It's not the gloom nor the dampness—it's the knowledge that soon they'll be deluged with reports of highway injuries and deaths.

The chances of being involved in a traffic accident triple every time it rains. And if you're not impressed by New York State figures showing that 20,000 of 120,000 accidents occur in wet weather, remember it rains only five percent of the time!

Three factors cause this sharp rise—decreased visibility, poor traction, and "highway hypnosis." All can be avoided by the cautious motorist. Take visibility, for example. Despite wide-angle windshields and improved wiping devices, the motorist's vision has been increasingly limited by rain. The reason is that faster speeds send a car through more rain in a given time. At 60 miles an hour, you travel through 88 feet of rain-laden air each second—and that's a lot of water to sweep away.

Engineers, however, have developed wipers equal to the job. One manufacturer, for instance, offers a two-range, variable-speed wiper that travels around the sides of wrap-around windshields. This wiper can sweep

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clear a large area of the window with a comparatively slow stroke, or be switched to a faster stroke which covers a smaller area.

A development has been completed whereby these wipers also can be synchronized with the car's headlights. On low beam—used ordinarily in congested areas—the wiper provides a wide stroke; on high beam—used on highways—the stroke is narrower but faster. Thus the wiper automatically adjusts its action to the stroke best suited for prevailing conditions. Of course, any windshield wiper depends on good blades, and since the elements dry out rubber, experts suggest a change every year.

The varied-speed wipers, incidentally, are insurance against that "highway hypnosis" we mentioned. The term describes the sleepy condition induced in a driver by the monotonous rhythm of the wiper and the drone of the motor. If the wiper's beat is varied—say, by normal dimming and brightening of lights during highway travel—the hypnotic effect is broken. Of course, the

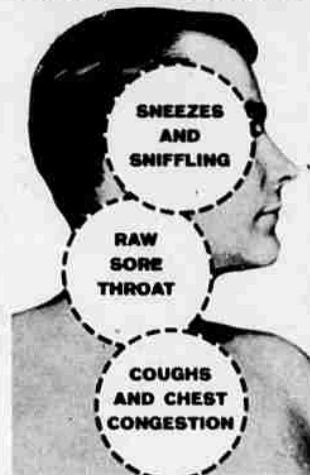
best cure for highway hypnosis is periodic rest stops.

Similarly, the best safeguard against the hazards of rain-slick pavement is still the driver himself. When visibility is decreased and braking distance increased, it's obvious he should travel more slowly. But the mechanical aspects of driving should be on his side, too. Balding tires and poorly adjusted brakes work against the driver in any weather, but particularly in rain. The few extra miles he may squeeze from a worn set of tires can be the most costly ever traveled.

The windshield washer is a small mechanical item on today's car, but it has proved a big asset in rainy-day driving. It's especially valuable when oncoming vehicles throw a muddy haze on the window. A push of the button squirts a solvent on the windshield, and the wipers clean away the mud, restoring visibility in seconds.

These devices result from the safety engineers' awareness of bad-weather dangers, but that awareness must be shared by drivers. Combined with their common sense, these features can minimize rainy-day dangers.

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