AVOIDING COSTLY DAMAGE

Even the most careful and experienced of drivers sometimes find manoeuvring and reversing in car parks difficult. Most of us don’t do much reversing when you consider that a fraction of our driving time is backwards and the statistics speak for themselves. Around 28%* of all accidents with company cars involve reversing while parking and manoeuvring in car parks.

While these accidents happen at low speeds, the design of modern vehicles means that even a small error can result in a four figure bill.

Low speed often equates to a low perceived risk and often we fall foul of mentally switching off in the car park.

So, how can business drivers ensure that they avoid costly dents, scrapes and prangs to vehicles while parking? Being aware of the pitfalls and following a few simple safety steps can make a real difference.

*Arval 2015 accident data

Think

R E V E R S E

When it comes to avoiding accidents while manoeuvring, R.E.V.E.R.S.E. provides a reminder of some of the key points to remember.
**R** Reversing – into a parking space is generally much safer than reversing out into a potentially busy area. On leaving, it means that you can simply drive straight out of the bay, giving you the best visibility of oncoming traffic. When reversing out of a space, your observation tends to be limited, especially if larger vehicles are beside you.

**E** Ensure accessibility – by parking your vehicle in the centre of a parking bay. By doing so, you ensure that your vehicle is accessible while also giving neighbouring cars plenty of space. This reduces the likelihood of either car getting scratched or scraped.

**R** Remember: mirror, signal, manoeuvre – It might be years since you passed your driving test but the message remains the same: use your mirrors before signalling and finally manoeuvring into the parking space. Watch out for other cars and pedestrians.

**E** Evaluate the situation – It’s up to you to check that the parking bay can accommodate your car, to decide whether reversing is the safest option on that occasion and that it’s safe to manoeuvre your vehicle into place. Also it is important to assess the likelihood of your car being damaged while parked. Consider whether it is appropriate to park where there is a greater likelihood that your car will be hit such as on a corner, narrow driveway or section of road, or at the end of a row.

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**Van driver?**

Reversing to the right side allows you to look out of the driver side window into the area which you are heading rather than reversing unsighted to the left.

**E** Exercise caution – from the start and you immediately reduce the risks associated with parking and reversing. Take your time before you park. Pause to consider how to simplify your manoeuvring rather than parking in the first available space.

**V** Verify blind spots around you – All cars have blind spots and they differ from one make and model to another. Identify where the blind spots on your vehicle are located and then check them, whenever appropriate, when parking.

**Mirrors** allow drivers to see areas low down and close to the car that we can’t see over our shoulders. However, looking over both shoulders will allow us to see what isn’t visible in the mirrors. That is why learners are always taught 360-degree observation supplemented by mirrors rather than using mirrors alone.

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**S** SLOW – If you take your time while manoeuvring your car into the parking bay it helps to ensure that you remain in full control throughout the process.

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CAR PARK PRANGS
The possible causes

1 Car parking spaces seem to have been getting smaller
This increases the likelihood of your car getting accidentally scratched or dented, either when you manoeuvre into the bay or get in or out of your vehicle. If possible, find car parks which give you and other drivers an appropriate amount of space.

2 Cars have been getting bigger
The average car is now longer, wider and taller than ever before as manufacturers aim to make cars safer and more comfortable. Bigger cars combined with smaller parking spaces present more opportunities for bangs and scrapes.

3 Momentary lapses of concentration
The causes of these are many and varied. Simple measures like reducing the volume of audio equipment while parking or asking for the co-operation of the other occupants of your car can help.
How to...

**REVERSE INTO A PARKING SPACE**
Five steps to perfect reversing

Like most processes, reversing into a parking space becomes much easier if it is broken down into a few, simple steps.

1. After identifying the bay you intend to reverse into, pull up roughly one car length past it.

2. Make sure that you’ve thoroughly checked for other vehicles, low obstructions and pedestrians. Then use your indicators to show that you intend to reverse into the bay and put your car into reverse. Allow plenty of room as the front of the car will swing out.

3. Look through the rear window and reverse at a slow speed to accurately position your car within the bay. Carry out other checks for vehicles and pedestrians whenever appropriate.

4. Guide your car into the space and don’t hesitate to glance in your door mirrors to ensure that you are well away from neighbouring vehicles.

5. Straighten your steering wheel to position your car centrally within the bay. It’s frequently necessary to manoeuvre your car into place using forward and reverse gears.
PARKING TECHNOLOGY
Tools to help you park

Parking sensors: the most common reversing aid

These are fast becoming a normal part of driving and cars of all sizes now have them fitted. However, while sensors are very good, they are there to help the driver, not replace them, as they cannot detect obstructions above or below the line of vision. Instead, they alert drivers to the proximity of other parked cars and any other stationary or moving objects which are out of vision, from children to low walls.

Drivers should always carry out normal checks when reversing and only use their parking sensors as additional safety tools.

Parking sensors usually begin working automatically when reverse gear is selected and trigger an alarm if anything is detected. This sound – which can either be a bleeping noise or a buzzer - gradually increases in frequency as the object gets nearer.

The two main types of parking sensor

Ultrasonic parking sensors tend to be the ones that most car manufacturers fit and work by bouncing sound waves off obstacles.

Main disadvantage: they can’t generally be used with a tow bar and have been known to miss small or narrow objects.

Electromagnetic parking sensors work by creating an electromagnetic field around the car’s bumper, in which they are located.

Main disadvantage: as a general rule, they only detect objects once the car is moving.
Reversing cameras: see what’s behind you

Known alternatively as backup or rear view cameras, reversing cameras aim to aid safety by displaying what’s behind your vehicle. They are normally activated when you engage reverse. A camera attached to the rear of the car relays an image of the view to your vehicle’s navigation screen. Many manufacturers now fit them either as optional extras or as standard and some use graphic lines on the screen to guide the driver into the parking bay.

Especially for larger cars which do not always have good rear visibility, reversing cameras can be very beneficial. However, they do not provide a peripheral view and are not always effective at night when they rely on reversing lights to illuminate what’s behind the vehicle. Also, cameras won’t always pick up higher obstructions such as an overhanging fire escape or tree branches. Like parking sensors, cameras help you, not replace you.

Automatic parking systems: the car that parks itself

Self-parking cars have been created to take the stress out of the manoeuvre by enabling your vehicle to park itself. Several manufacturers now offer ‘automatic parking systems’ either as optional extras or as standard. Some automatic parking systems can also assist drivers reversing into car park bays. The technology, which utilises a series of sensors positioned around the car, has been designed to make the process of parallel parking as straightforward as possible.

The driver simply locates a space in conjunction with the car’s automatic parking system which scans the area to ensure that it’s an appropriate size.

After reverse is selected, the car then steers itself into the space with the driver controlling the accelerator and brake. Some vehicles require the driver to align the parking guides with the chosen space, to ensure the vehicle parks accurately.

At any point during this process, the driver can over-ride the system – normally by moving the steering wheel or pressing the brake firmly.