

Parking lot can be a headache for drivers

Follow simple rules to avoid common accidents among parked cars

By Robin Jones

Ron Salamanca says parking lots can be hazardous for motorists. He should know. As an Auto Club Driving School supervisor, Salamanca has been teaching student drivers for longer than a decade. In one of his lessons, Salamanca explains how to handle parking-lot dangers, from view-obstructing walls and hedges to distracted pedestrians and speeding drivers. As Salamanca tells his students: “Many parking-lot accidents occur because drivers get too relaxed when doing errands that they’ve done a million times before.”

But you can avoid the most common types of crashes if you follow a few simple rules. Here are Salamanca’s top five pointers for safely navigating parking lots:

- Check your surroundings before you get in your car. Salamanca instructs his students to survey the area as they return to their parked vehicle. “Look for anyone in the driver’s seat of a nearby car, or anyone who’s getting ready to get into a nearby car,” he said. “Then, when you back out, you’ll know where everyone is, and you’ll be aware of other drivers who might also be getting ready to pull out.”
- Look every which way when you’re backing out of or pulling into a parking space. Many drivers rely



LOTS OF PROBLEMS – Drivers should use caution before pulling in or out of spaces in a parking lot. Image: v_sot. Adobe Stock.

solely on their rearview mirrors or backup camera when they’re reversing, Salamanca said, and that’s risky. In addition to using the mirror and camera, be sure to “look over your right shoulder first, through the back passenger window, because that’s the closest path of travel for another car,” he said. Then, repeat the process over your left shoulder, and finally,

look through the back window for brake lights or reverse lights on cars behind you. If pedestrians or vehicles are not close enough to pose a hazard, you can start backing out.

- As you’re pulling into a spot, check to make sure that drivers or passengers of cars in adjacent spots are not opening their doors to exit their vehicles.

- Keep your foot off the gas pedal as you’re backing up. Cars in the aisle have the right-of-way, so it’s up to the driver who’s pulling out of a parking space to stop if there’s potential for a collision. What’s more, it’s usually easier for the car that’s backing out to make an emergency stop, because vehicles in the aisle generally are going faster. That’s why it’s always smart to inch out as slowly as possible, with your foot over the brake.
- Watch for distracted pedestrians. Many pedestrians aren’t as aware as they should be while they’re walking through parking lots. Maybe they’re carrying groceries, trying to wrangle kids while pushing a full shopping cart, or texting while they’re walking. So, don’t expect them to see you. Instead, keep your eyes peeled, and remember that people sometimes weave through parked vehicles, making them hard to see. “Look for shadows passing under or near cars,” Salamanca said. It’s sometimes the only indication that a person is there.
- Slow down. Speed limits vary in parking lots, so look for posted signs. And as you drive around the parking lot, keep an eye out for other cars that are backing out of their spaces.



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