

Press release: ‘Don’t be a Space Invader’ – says former ‘Stig’ Ben Collins

Ben – best known for his role on BBC motoring show TopGear as the ‘tame’ racing driver in the white suit – has coached hundreds of celebrities from Tom Cruise to Lionel Richie around the race-track, and is also a championship winning Le Mans racing driver.

But today his focus was on the drivers travelling on England’s motorways and major A-roads every day, and a message to them about the risks of driving too close to the vehicle in front.

He said:

I discovered the dangers of tailgating at a very early age – in an overly enthusiastic game of musical chairs. The music stopped. So did the kid in front of me. But I didn’t. I face-planted the back of his head instead.

Following the vehicle in front too closely reduces your vision to zero, along with your time to react to danger. Stay safe, stay back and look ahead.

Statistics show that one in eight of all road casualties are caused by people who drive too close to the vehicle in front, with more than 100 people killed or seriously injured each year.

Nearly 9 out of 10 people say they have either been tailgated or seen it. And more than a quarter of drivers admitted to tailgating.

While a small minority of tailgating is deliberate, most is unintentional by drivers who are simply unaware they are dangerously invading someone else’s space.

Last September, Highways England launched a campaign featuring the well-known Space Invader video game character to alert drivers to the anti-social nature and risks of tailgating.

A survey by the company revealed that tailgating is the biggest single bugbear that drivers have about other road users. And in-car research – using dashcams, facial recognition, emotion tracking and heart monitors – reveals that a driver’s typical reaction to someone who tailgates them is surprise, anger and contempt, with a spike in heart rate.

Highways England says good drivers leave plenty of safe space for themselves and others.

Richard Leonard, Head of Road Safety at Highways England, said:

It's great to have someone of Ben's experience backing the campaign and the message today is really simple around tailgating. We know that if you get too close to the car in front, you won't be able to react and stop in time if they brake suddenly.

Tailgating also makes the driver in front feel targeted and victimised, distracting their attention from the road ahead and making them more likely to make a mistake.

It is intimidating and frightening if you're on the receiving end. If that leads to a collision, then people in both vehicles could end up seriously injured or killed. We want everyone to travel safely, so the advice is – stay safe, stay back.

A host of companies have already backed the 'stay safe, stay back' campaign, including National Express, which is carrying the message on some of its long-distance coaches. Other advocates include the RAC, National Police Chiefs Council, leading road safety bodies Brake and the Institute for Advanced Motorists, and Thatcham.

Highways England has a dedicated [webpage](#) where drivers can find more information about tailgating and what they can do to stay safe.

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General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.