

Ask the Mechanic

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SEND YOUR
QUESTIONS TO

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A Q&A page where a mechanic provides expert advice, troubleshooting tips and more.

How do I help my wife become a better driver?

Hello Paul, every time my wife drives my car, she comes back with a new dent. How do I teach her to handle it better without causing a fight? **Justice**

Hello Justice, you need to approach the issue of shared car dents with more kid-glove diplomacy than teacher-like authoritarianism. Getting a car dented in Kampala can be an honest mistake or an unavoidable intrusion during the chaos of morning or evening commuter traffic, with illegal multiple lanes created by impatient motorists and boda boda motorcycles. Dents can happen whether you or your wife is driving, regardless of skill level or how careful one is.

That said, there is a way to address driving skills improvement while avoiding the tension and fallout typical of a "home driving school" or "traffic courtroom."

If there is a genuine skills gap on your wife's side, keep the conversation smooth by shifting focus to the challenging features of the car rather than pointing out shortcomings in her driving. Address practical issues such as adjusting seat position, improving visibility of blind spots and understanding the car's

steering performance when manoeuvring in tight spaces. This approach subtly "shifts blame" to the car, placing both of you on the same side as you work together to find solutions to the dents.

Take an active role in helping your wife adjust to the sightlines of your shared car. Some minor accidents occur because drivers, male or female, have not fully adjusted to where the bumpers or fenders end. You can practice together by driving to a large, empty space where you can walk around the car. Stop at different points and ask whether she can see you clearly. This allows her to adjust her seating position and calibrate her vision as you move around the vehicle.

You can also create visual markers together. For instance, use the centre of the extreme left wiper as a guide for maintaining a two-foot safe distance from the kerb. The tip of the side mirror can serve as a reference for how close the car is to a nearby wall or parked vehicle.

Technology can also help one reduce dents during reverse or forward parking. Affordable options such as parking sensors or reverse cameras can be installed at most garages. These devices provide real-time warnings while manoeuvring in tight parking spaces.

It is also important to practise defensive parking. Avoid squeezing into tight spots where other motorists may dent your car when opening their doors. Park at the end of a row where only one side of your car is exposed.

While driving in Kampala's traffic crawl-ups with illegal multiple lanes, avoid aggressive driving. Give way to offenders and resist the urge to challenge them, even when you are in the right lane, let them pass.

Ensure that headlights and wipers are functioning well for good visibility during rainy weather or at night. Be open about the challenges you face when visibility is poor; your wife may share similar experiences.

Acknowledging these shared difficulties, such as blind spots, parking challenges, holding your lane amid aggressive motorists and boda bodas, and visibility issues, can create a safe space for her to openly discuss where she struggles, making it easier to find solutions together.

NOTE
PRACTICE
DEFENSIVE
DRIVING



Why does my speedometer stop at a fixed speed?

Hello Paul, my speedometer works normally until I hit 47km/h, then the needle freezes there, even as I accelerate. Once I slow down below 30km/h, it becomes active again. What causes such a specific failure? Semanda

Hello Semanda, the failure of your speedometer at a specific speed of

47km/h suggests a consistent mechanical or electrical signal fault at that point. The cause is usually a mechanical or electrical failure within the speedometer or the stepper motor in the electronic instrument cluster.

The speedometer uses a stepper motor to move the needle, which indicates the current speed of the car as you drive.

Over time, the stepper motor can lose its

magnetism or torque at a specific position, such as 47km/h, due to ageing. Another possibility is that the speedometer needle may physically stick at that particular speed and only release when dropping to lower speeds.

This is the most likely cause of the needle sticking at a fixed position on your instrument cluster.

If your pickup truck uses an electronic instrument cluster, the stepper motor

may have a specific angle where it fails to operate, even though it is still receiving an electrical signal.

Replacing the stepper motor in your speedometer can help resolve this problem.

However, it may be better to consider replacing the entire instrument cluster, especially if other components are worn out, to ensure accurate communication of your vehicle's speed.

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