

Educational Film about Road Safety (1920)

Abstract

This educational film from the early 1920s combined animation and live-action footage from the streets of Mannheim to educate viewers about road safety. Mannheim, a busy industrial city in the southwestern German state of Baden, offered a unique location for such instruction, given the straightforward grid pattern of its streets (an anomaly in Germany). The city had also played a central role in the development of several new forms of transportation, including the bicycle, the tractor, and the automobile, meaning that residents had a fair amount of experience figuring out how to share Mannheim's roads and boulevards. Even as late as the 1920s, as this film makes clear, handcarts, horses, bicycles, pedestrians, electric trams, cars, trucks, buses, and motorcycles all vied for access to the city's streets, revealing a scrum of premodern and modern conveyances.

As more and more Germans began driving their own automobiles in the 1920s, the number of accidents across the country increased commensurately. The first national law regulating the use of motor vehicles on public roads, the 1909 "Law on Motor Vehicle Traffic" [*Gesetz über den Verkehr mit Kraftfahrzeugen*], had largely left traffic regulations to the local police and focused its attention instead on the drivers, by imposing registration, testing, and licensing requirements, which included the stipulation that women secure their husband's permission before applying for a license. Interestingly, that same law also regulated liability in the case of accidents, revealing an early awareness on the part of legislators of the dangers of automobiles. Later governments amended the law several times, and individual municipalities and even some automobile clubs began installing traffic signs to regulate the various vehicles' right of way or give warning of upcoming blind spots or other hazardous conditions. Berlin only installed its first traffic lights in 1924, having hitherto relied exclusively on uniformed police to direct the flow of cars, buses, trams, and horse-drawn wagons on its crowded streets. This film clearly laid out the rules of the road as defined by law and even showed traffic police conducting checks to prevent accidents, suggesting a desire to both instruct viewers and to offer them reassurance that the government played its part, too.

Source

[Title credits are missing]

Intertitles:

The automobile driver.

Look sharp!

Pay attention to others!

Caution!

Drive on the right!

Pass on the left!

Swerve to the right!

Drive slowly on busy streets and at corners.

Always indicate your direction at an intersection.

Turn right in a small arc and left in a large one!

They are driving correctly.

Making a wrong turn can be dangerous.

Stop when people are stepping on or off the tram.

Wrong!

Correct!

The vehicle coming from the right has the right of way.

When coming to a junction, signal in good time!

Be especially cautious at exits, otherwise...

Attention, make way for the fire truck! Stop!

Irresponsible cyclists block the way of the fire truck.

Traffic control.

Wagoner, this is no way to park your vehicle.

It is forbidden to carry objects that could obstruct traffic on the sidewalk.

A protruding pitchfork can bring disaster.

Do not block bends and corners.

The handcart.

Avoid tram tracks.

Street vendors should not stand on corners, otherwise vehicles will not be able to drive properly.

Therefore street vending is prohibited on high traffic roads.

The black line marks the restricted area.

An inconsiderate driver.

Source: *Film über richtiges und falsches Verhalten im Straßenverkehr* (archive title), 1920. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv, Filmwerk ID: 19906. <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/19906/687557>

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