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*TRAPKIC - worse!* *Sat., June 21,*  
**Traveling Another Direction** 1980

WITH 54 TRAFFIC DEATHS so far this year, Memphis appears headed for another disgraceful record, perhaps even surpassing last year's total of 116 dead and nearly 10,000 persons injured.

We all have heard the jokes about the driving habits of Memphians. Well, peculiar driving habits are one thing, but with a rate of 90 accidents per day and more than 100 fatalities a year it's rather absurd to laugh at the expense of doing something about it.

The Memphis Area Safety Council says the number of traffic accidents and fatalities is directly tied to road engineering, education and enforcement of traffic laws.

Enforcement efforts seem to work well in Memphis, but there is a limit to their effectiveness. The police traffic bureau set out this year to reduce the number of traffic fatalities in the Whitehaven and Frayser areas, both of which registered 10 deaths in 1979. A traffic saturation program was put into effect to crack down on drinking and speeding motorists, the results being only two deaths each in both areas so far this year.

As the number of accidents and deaths declined in those sections of the city, however, they began to rise in East Memphis and Raleigh. And despite weekend crackdowns since February in high accident areas, we seem intent on keeping pace with the rate we set over the same period last year, when there were 53 fatalities.

Statistics indicate that the greatest potential for improving the safety on Memphis streets is for us to do something about our negligence behind the wheel, about our drinking and driving, and about how we as pedestrians get from one side of the street to the other. "No matter how much enforcement we put on the street, if enough drivers are not aware or not willing to do something about it, we're not going to get very far," said Sgt. G. L. Stacy of the traffic bureau.

In the last three or four years, about a third of the traffic fatalities have involved consumption of

alcohol; another third have involved pedestrians struck by vehicles, with 90 per cent of the pedestrians hit while crossing in the middle of a block rather than at an intersection. A majority of the two-vehicle accidents involved driver negligence, which in most cases meant "just plain old not paying attention — people driving along preoccupied," Stacy said.

WE HAVE SUFFERED enough from our own carelessness on city streets with higher than necessary automobile insurance premiums, costly repairs and the ignominy of consistently ranking among the worst three or four cities in our category for the number of accidents and fatalities.

What a turnabout. The driving record for Memphis in the 1950s and early '60s consistently ranked it among the top three or four cities in its category. Whatever the reason for the decline, improving our individual habits seems more fitting than killing and maiming ourselves and making jokes about it.

The Police Department could help drivers learn the rules of the road by making greater efforts to enforce them. All of us have witnessed police cars following cars which make illegal left turns, or make left turns across several lanes of traffic, or exceed the speed limit without making any effort to stop the violators and issue tickets. True, those police cars sometimes are not engaged in traffic enforcement specifically. They are ward cars or other kinds.

But their failure to make the extra effort causes other motorists observing the situation to think the police are not really greatly concerned about law enforcement, and that in turn leads to increased negligence and more violations by motorists.

The people will learn concern when the police make it evident they expect observance of the law. That's the way it used to be in Memphis, and that's the way it should be again.