



*Senior Correspondent LLF, Baton Rouge LA:* The first thing seniors should know about a cross-country journey by car is to expect the unexpected. If it extends for as far as the nearly 3,000-miles across America coast to coast, glitches will happen. There are traffic jams, road repairs, detours, accidents and a host of other obstacles requiring drivers to be alert for anything at any time.

Make all the necessary pre-trip preparations, so that the journey has the best chance for optimum safety, efficiency and comfort. Complete check-ups for both car and driver will assure a less worrisome trip. If the senior driver needs medications, prescription or over-the-counter, they should be purchased and stored aboard. The car's vitals should be checked and put in perfect working order, including tires, spare, lights, electrical system, engine, air-conditioning and other items.

Consult with auto club experts and check with friends who've had cross-country driving experience along the expected route. With GPS and other current electronic equipment, plot the entire trip, keying in best routes, anticipated stops for fuel, overnight lodgings and more vital information.

Proper diet and sufficient rest are essential for a safe cross-country road trip. Statistics show that after eight hours of continuous driving, the driver's alertness and efficiency drop by ten percent for each additional following hour on the road.

It's possible for a driver to get from either U.S. coast to the other in as little as 50 hours of consecutive driving, except for short stops for fuel and food. The total distance is usually about 2,700 miles. However, any driver who attempts such as feat should realize that for at least the final 500 miles, the car or truck can be a lethal weapon driven by a person operating on less than 25 percent efficiency.

The best schedule is to drive four hours, then take a break for potty, food and fuel. If followed by an hour of rest or nap, it can be even more beneficial. After a total of two or three four-hour shifts on the road, the driver should then get between four to eight hours of undisturbed sleep.

If budget restrictions make it preferable to sleep in the car, rather than book a motel room, the

tired driver should not just pull over anywhere on the side of the road. It's too dangerous to just curl up in the back seat and snooze, even if the car is locked from the inside and has an alarm system.

For safety sake, the sleeper's car should be parked in a lighted, busy truck-stop area. Some drivers find it most assuring to pull off the main highway, look for a town police or fire station, and snooze in the parking lot for a comfortable, safe night's sleep.

The cross-country driver, especially one who makes the journey alone, should have at least a basic, fully-charged Smartphone within reach at all times. Programmed in should be the 9-1-1 emergency number for one-punch calling, as well as numbers of family, physicians and others who may be needed for contact during the trip.

With good pre-trip preparation, a healthy car and driver, equipped with up-to-date electronics, can make a cross country road journey in safety and comfort.