



# Community Issues

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## how do australians feel about road safety?

The ATSB commissions annual community attitude surveys to determine the views and attitudes of Australians about a range of road safety issues. The ATSB also commissioned an extended survey on speeding and enforcement in 2003 (see chapter 13).

### The 2003 Community Attitudes Survey

The main purpose of the ATSB's *2003 Community Attitudes Survey* (CAS), the sixteenth in the long-running survey programme, is to monitor attitudes to a variety of road safety issues, evaluate specific road safety countermeasures, suggest new areas for intervention, and identify significant differences between jurisdictions.

The population for the survey was persons aged 15 years and over. Interviewing, using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology, was conducted in March and April 2003. A total of 1 638 interviews were conducted with an average interview length of 16 minutes. The response rate was 68 per cent.

*Speed is the factor most commonly nominated by the Australian community as the main cause of road crashes.*

## Factors perceived to contribute to road crashes

The Australian community continues to identify speed as the single most likely cause of road crashes. When asked to identify the main factor that leads to road crashes, 40 per cent say speed (37 per cent in 2002), 15 per cent say inattention/lack of concentration (significantly higher than the 2002 finding of 11 per cent), 11 per cent mention drink driving (unchanged from the 2002 result) and 9 per cent mention driver fatigue (down from 11 per cent in 2002).

When asked to nominate up to three factors that lead to road crashes, 62 per cent of the community nominate speed (the same as in 2002), 44 per cent drink driving, 30 per cent inattention/lack of concentration and 26 per cent driver fatigue.

For the first time since 1998, lack of concentration was a more commonly mentioned contributing factor (30 per cent) than driver fatigue (26 per cent).



## Alcohol and drink driving

### Random Breath Testing (RBT)

Community support for RBT is almost universal, with 98 per cent agreeing with RBT (84 per cent strongly agreeing and 14 per cent somewhat agreeing). Support for RBT has been in the 96–98 per cent band for the last 10 years.

Three-quarters of the sampled population have seen police conducting RBT in the last six months. This proportion is consistent with those reported in previous years and continues an upward trend in terms of the perceived visibility of RBT operations.

*68 per cent of wine drinkers underestimate the number of standard drinks in a bottle of wine.*

### Attitudes to drink driving

In 2003, 44 per cent of ‘active drivers’ say that when driving they restrict what they drink, 40 per cent say that when driving they do not drink at all, 16 per cent do not drink at any time and 0.1 per cent (one in a thousand) say that if driving they do not restrict what they drink. This pattern of response has been consistent over the last ten years.

### Awareness of standard drinks and alcohol consumption guidelines

Just over half (53 per cent) of beer drinkers accurately identify the number of standard drinks in a stubby/can of full strength beer (around one and a half), and 14 per cent underestimate,

meaning that they may be at risk of accidentally consuming more alcohol than they think is the case. The proportion of beer drinkers able to accurately identify the number of standard drinks in a full strength stubby/can has ranged from 39 per cent to 53 per cent over the last 10 years, with the 2003 figure (of 53 per cent) being the highest on record.

Only 23 per cent of wine drinkers correctly identify that a bottle of wine contains seven or eight standard drinks (28 per cent in 2002). Sixty-eight per cent of wine drinkers underestimate the volume of alcohol contained in a 750 ml bottle of wine (64 per cent in 2002).

The published guidelines stipulate two standard drinks for males and one standard drink for females in the first hour, with one standard drink per hour or less after that. A significantly higher proportion of males (47 per cent) had accurate knowledge of the guidelines compared with females (28 per cent).

*More than half the community still believes that speeding fines are mainly to raise revenue.*

## Speed

### Speed enforcement

Seventy two per cent of all respondents are of the view that the level of speed limit enforcement has increased in the last two years. The current result represents a significant increase compared with 2002 (65 per cent) and confirms an upward trend in recent years (from 58 per cent) in 2001.

Just under a quarter (23 per cent) of those that have held a licence and driven in the last two years had been booked for speeding at some stage during that period, with 35 per cent of this group (8 per cent of current drivers) reporting having been booked for speeding in the last six months.

### Selected attitudes to speeding

The proportion of the community agreeing that a crash at 70 km/h will be more severe than one at 60 km/h has been fairly static in recent years, but increased from 80 per cent in 1995 to 91 per cent in 2003. The level of agreement with the statement that speed limits are generally set at reasonable levels has fluctuated somewhat over recent years from 88 per cent in 2001 down to 83 per cent in 2002 and back to 86 per cent in 2003. Awareness of the road safety message that you are more likely to be involved in a road crash if you increase your speed by 10 km/h has continued to increase steadily from 55 per cent in 1995 to 70 per cent in 2003.

There has been a slight tapering off in the extent to which the view is held that speeding fines are mainly intended to raise revenue (down from a peak of 58 per cent in 2001 to 54 per cent in 2003) and also a tapering off in the proportion of the community that believe it is acceptable to speed as long as you are driving safely (down from 32 per cent in 2002 to 29 per cent in 2003).

### Perceived acceptable and actual speed tolerances

Just over a third (35 per cent) of the community believe that there should be no tolerance when it comes to booking people for speeding, that is, the maximum speed at which people should be allowed to travel in a 60 km/h zone in an urban area is 60 km/h. When looking at perceptions as to



what speed was actually permitted in 60 km/h zones in urban areas before a speeding fine would be issued, it emerges that 15 per cent of the community (12 per cent in 2002) think that zero tolerance is enforced, 47 per cent believe there to be a tolerance of up to 5 km/h (52 per cent in 2002) and 19 per cent feel that speeds greater than 65 km/h will be tolerated without a speeding fine being issued (28 per cent in 2002).

Just over a quarter (26 per cent) of the community felt that the maximum speed people should be able to travel in a 100 km/h rural area without being booked was 100 km/h. This finding, consistent with previous years, indicates a slightly more relaxed attitude toward speeding in 100 km/h rural areas compared with 60 km/h urban zones. Just over 1 in 10 respondents (11 per cent) thought

there was no permitted tolerance for speeding in a 100 km/h area, 12 per cent felt speeds between 101 km/h and 104 km/h would be tolerated, 19 per cent thought there was a 5 km/h tolerance, and almost a quarter (24 per cent) thought there was a 10 km/h threshold for speeding in a 100 km/h rural area before a speeding fine would be imposed.

### Self-reported driving behaviour

The proportion of those who had driven in the last two years reporting either always or nearly always driving 10 km/h over the speed limit has more than halved over the last 10 years, from 15 per cent in 1993 to 7 per cent in 2003.

## Driver fatigue

The incidence of having ever fallen asleep while driving remains unchanged, at 15 per cent, over the last three years, with the most commonly mentioned preventative measure being getting a good night's sleep before driving (26 per cent). Other preventative measures frequently mentioned include frequent/regular stops (13 per cent), pulling over to get something to eat/drink (12 per cent), pulling over for a walk/to get some fresh air (11 per cent), winding the window down (10 per cent), having food/coffee/a smoke (without mentioning pulling over) (10 per cent) and sharing the driving (also 10 per cent).

Along similar lines, strategies mentioned for dealing with tiredness/fatigue while driving

*15 per cent of Australian drivers have fallen asleep while driving.*

include the need to pull over and rest, have a nap/sleep, have a walk/get some fresh air and/or have something to eat or drink with these types of responses (i.e. involving stopping driving) much more frequently mentioned than those involving trying to stay awake while continuing driving.

## Compulsory licence carriage

Consistent with the findings of previous surveys, the 2003 survey shows community approval for the compulsory carriage of a licence while driving remains high (86 per cent), with 67 per cent strongly approving and 20 per cent somewhat approving. The 2002 overall approval rating was 85 per cent.

## Seat belt wearing and enforcement

The proportion of people who always wear a seat belt when travelling in the front seat of a car has remained largely unchanged (between 95 per cent and 97 per cent) since 1993. While the proportion of passengers who always wear a seat belt when travelling in the back seat has always been at slightly lower levels, 2003 results show the gap to be the narrowest yet observed (96 per cent front seat/91 per cent back seat).



# 3.4

## improving road safety through community involvement

There has been a growth in interest in Community Road Safety (CRS) in Australia both by road safety authorities and communities around Australia. This is consistent with the notion that road safety is everyone's business – not just the responsibility of governments.

The primary purpose of CRS is to reduce road crashes and the resulting deaths and injuries. Other objectives include raising the level of awareness of communities about road safety matters, drawing on local resources and skills to improve road safety, promoting measures and programmes of proven effectiveness, adopting road safety programmes that are appropriate to

particular communities and are culturally sensitive, and providing opportunities to effectively coordinate and integrate various programmes.

Local government is responsible for most (about 80 per cent) of Australia's road network. The involvement of people in small communities or localised areas can closely target road safety issues specific to those areas. CRS programmes could also reach groups that cannot be effectively reached by conventional media.

One of the aims of CRS programmes is to create a positive road safety culture in which continuous improvement in road safety is considered a

desirable outcome, and road safety considerations become incorporated in decision-making processes.

Successful CRS programmes require a local body to be in charge of implementing strategy (usually a local council), personnel who can undertake the duties involved, and a commitment of local resources, including funds and in-kind contributions. Many CRS programmes use the services of volunteers. Ideally, government support of CRS at the state/territory level should involve long-term commitment, appropriate funding, management support, advice, and evaluation of programmes.



## CRS programmes

Some examples of CRS programmes are described below.

*Driver Reviver:* The Driver Reviver programme provides coffee and refreshments to drivers, particularly during holiday periods. The programme depends on volunteers at individual sites.

*Safe Routes to School:* This community based programme, based mainly on influencing behaviour, is intended to improve the safety of children travelling to and from primary schools. The programme involves surveying travel patterns of children travelling to and from school, taking account of concerns of parents and carers and evaluating hazardous sites. Families participating in the programme are provided with information enabling them to make choices about safer routes to school.

*Mobilising potential advocates of road safety in communities can achieve benefits not readily available by other means. Local government and schools are well placed to support local advocacy and other road safety initiatives within communities.*

THE NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY ACTION PLAN 2001 AND 2002

A programme called the *Walking School Bus*, which has been implemented overseas, is being trialled in some Australian jurisdictions (see chapter 25).

*Drink Drive Prevention Coordinators:* Some jurisdictions have coordinators based in different areas who work with local communities in developing locally-appropriate interventions based on information, provision of alternative transport, and responsible alcohol serving practices.

*School Crossing Supervisor Schemes:* Supervisors at school crossings stop vehicles and ensure that children cross safely.

Various other community programmes relating to the road safety of children are described in chapter 25.



## Road safety slogans

Road safety slogans are pithy statements, which convey road safety advice to the community, often in a witty manner. They are therefore usually memorable. The following is a selection of such slogans from around the world.

Click Clack – front 'n' back  
Clunk, click, every trip  
Children should be seen and not hurt  
Stop–look–and–listen  
None for the road  
It's better to be a minute late than 'the late'  
Stay alert, stay alive  
Look every way everyday  
Alert today, alive tomorrow  
Danger lurks where caution shirks  
It's better to be 10 minutes late in this world  
than 10 minutes early in the next

Don't be rash and end in a crash  
Take your time, not your life  
Driving faster can cause a disaster  
Be slower on earth than quicker to eternity  
He passed them all, all saw him passing  
If you drink like a fish – swim, don't drive  
The speed that thrills is the speed that kills  
Don't dash – you will cause a crash  
Hug your kid at home, belt him in the car  
It's better to be late than never  
It's better to be late than dead on time

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## unfinished trips: remembering those who didn't arrive

### Roadside memorials

Roadside memorials are widely regarded as a valuable part of the grieving process for bereaved families and friends of crash victims. They often appear as spontaneous acts of remembrance – typically in the form of a bunch of flowers, a small wooden cross, or photographs of the deceased person – and sometimes evolve into more elaborate (and more permanent) shrines or monuments.

The proliferation of these memorials in many parts of the world has been accompanied by the emergence of organisations and Internet sites devoted to honouring and aiding (or exploiting) the practice.

*Roadside memorials are folk art  
created out of love and grief....  
they say, we will not let you die unnoticed,  
you are valuable, you deserve to be  
remembered.*

C LEIMER, 1996





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In Australia, this form of public mourning appears to be respected by the community at large. Judging by the level of media attention and other anecdotal evidence, it is also becoming more prevalent. A recent programme broadcast on ABC Radio National suggested that as many as one in five road crash deaths are now marked by roadside memorials.

As a measure of the growing interest in this issue, the First International Symposium on Roadside Memorials is being hosted in June 2004, by the University of New England, Armidale. The symposium aims to examine the phenomenon from a range of academic and social perspectives, including its role in road safety.

## Government policies

The practice of placing commemorative objects at the roadside is not entirely uncontentious. It has been argued that they are emotionally intrusive or culturally offensive to some people in the community. More serious concerns have focused on the potential for memorials to adversely affect road safety, either by distracting road users or by constituting a physical obstruction.

Safety considerations, in particular, have led to various policy responses by governments, including the imposition of stringent controls on the nature and location of memorials. In some countries they have been banned altogether.

Australian and New Zealand authorities have generally taken a sympathetic approach to roadside memorials, as long as they are not overtly hazardous to road users. However, a number of jurisdictions have attempted to restrict or discourage the ad hoc erection of memorials by implementing official crash marker programmes. These programmes aim to 'standardise' the appearance of roadside markers, and typically include detailed installation and maintenance guidelines.

In South Australia and Tasmania, official markers are standard roadside guide posts painted black to indicate a fatal crash or red to indicate a serious injury crash, usually with a small reflective cross or vertical dash near the top.

*Standardised markers may not work well for memorialising victims, and in fact it seems that is not their primary purpose. They are intended as a public service message.*

C LEIMER, 1996

In Western Australia, people may choose to mark a death with one of the following approved memorials:

- a small timber cross, painted white
- a grey concrete paver displaying a white cross
- a black decal displaying a white cross, to be located at the base of a traffic signal pole or street light column
- a plant that complies with roadside vegetation guidelines.

In New Zealand, white timber crosses may be installed at fatal crash locations on state highways.

## Why roadside crash marker programmes?

Official crash marker programmes in Australia and New Zealand have often been presented as public safety initiatives, for example:

- serving as a positive road safety reminder (Transit NZ)
- keeping the road environment safe for all road users (Main Roads WA)
- reflecting the government's ongoing commitment towards the involvement of local communities in road safety (Transport SA).

The road safety rationale appears to be well accepted by the public, at least in areas where they have been implemented. Market research undertaken after markers were installed in one South Australian district found that most local residents supported the scheme and believed it raised community awareness of road safety.

Despite these sentiments, there is a dearth of objective evidence on the actual road safety effects of crash marker programmes. The most reported evidence relates to the death and injury marker campaign run in the Millicent district of South Australia between 1994 and 1998. One evaluation study attributing significant crash reductions to this programme has often been cited as proof of

the effectiveness of crash markers. However, the conclusions of this research have since been rejected on technical grounds by a number of other researchers.

A more rigorous investigation by the Road Accident Research Unit (University of Adelaide) examined the effects on driver behaviour and community perceptions of crash markers installed in the Gumeracha (Adelaide Hills) area. The study included measurements of the speeds of vehicles in the vicinity of marker posts, before and after installation, and found no change in either the average or the 85th percentile speeds.

*There is no direct evidence available that marker posts are an effective road safety measure and any justification of their continued use can only be based on a positive public perception and possible but unproven long term and indirect effects.*

CN KLOEDEN, AJ McLEAN AND AJT COCKINGTON, 1999





# 36 Ls, Ps and beyond: can driver training work?

## A high risk group

People aged between 17 and 20 are seriously over-represented among vehicle occupants killed and seriously injured on Australian roads. In 2002, this group represented 16.3 per cent of all vehicle occupant deaths, but only 7.3 per cent of the total population. Drivers in this age group are eleven times more likely to die per kilometre of road travel than drivers aged between 40 and 44. Chapter 27 provides a detailed survey of risk factors associated with young drivers.

Recent research shows that there are several promising options for improving the safety of young novice drivers.

*Kermit: Fozzie, where did you learn to drive?*

*Fozzie: I took a correspondence course.*

JERRY JUHL AND JACK BURNS, THE MUPPET MOVIE SCREENPLAY, 1979

## Graduated licensing

A graduated licensing system allows new drivers to gain experience and competence in relatively low risk conditions, through a series of restrictions that are progressively relaxed as they move through the system. A basic model would consist of a learner period, at least one stage of solo driving with some restrictions and possibly testing at the end, and then full licensing on completion of the prior stages.

Graduated licensing can incorporate a variety of elements, such as an extended period of supervised practice, restrictions on carrying passengers or night time driving, and zero or low-alcohol restrictions. Specific types of training and/or testing can also be included at different stages.

Successful enforcement of any restrictions on novice drivers would require drivers, and possibly

their passengers, to carry identification. Most Australian jurisdictions do not have compulsory licence carriage rules. The *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004* lists this as a priority. Interestingly, the ATSB's annual Community Attitudes Survey shows that most drivers believe that they are required to carry their licence, and an even higher percentage approve of such a law (chapter 33). Introducing restrictions also requires consideration of the potential social effects, and what exemptions will be allowed (e.g. driving at night if the person needs to get to work).

### Extended practice

Research has highlighted the importance of providing extensive supervised on-road experience (with or without formal instruction) for young drivers during the learner period. The ATSB and other safety agencies in Australia recommend as much as 100–200 hours of practice during the



learner period, under a wide range of conditions including night and wet weather driving. There should also be a gradual progression from simplest and least risky to more complex conditions as the new driver gains confidence and competence.

Many jurisdictions have already increased the length of learner periods and are working to encourage young drivers to spend a longer time practising before driving solo.

### Alcohol restrictions

Driving after drinking any quantity of alcohol increases crash risk to some extent, and alcohol is a significant factor in young driver crashes. A zero or low blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit has been shown to reduce young driver crashes, and it has been suggested that it might also encourage the development of safer drinking and driving habits after the restriction period ends. All





Australian jurisdictions have implemented a zero or 0.02 BAC limit for young novice drivers (usually for the first three years for solo driving).

A requirement that all drivers and riders carry their licence and produce it when requested by police is important for effective enforcement of this limit.

### Passenger restrictions

The risk of being involved in a fatal or serious injury crash is generally higher for young drivers when passengers are present in the vehicle compared with driving alone (although it may depend on who the passengers are, e.g. parents or peers). Inexperienced drivers, for whom the basic tasks of driving are not yet automated, would find distractions and interruptions particularly hard to deal with.

Some countries have passenger restrictions for novice drivers, although these are generally places with lower licensing ages than Australia (for example, New Zealand and some US states).

The idea of legal passenger restrictions was one of a number of options examined in an extensive review carried out by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) a few years ago. The researchers identified some potential problems, including:

- potentially more young inexperienced drivers on the road at any one time, and
- the possibility of reduced opportunities for a 'designated driver' approach to avoid driving when affected by alcohol or fatigue.

Various reviews have noted that the evidence is limited, but does support the safety benefits of passenger restrictions.

### Night-time driving restrictions

Crash risk is higher at night for all drivers, and especially so for young inexperienced drivers. Fatigue is a significant risk factor for young drivers. They are often juggling many lifestyle demands, and may not recognise the signs or dangers associated with driving while tired. Driving at night is also more challenging because of the difference in visibility.

Restricting night time driving reduces new drivers' exposure to risk until they have more experience and are likely to be better equipped to cope with the extra challenges of night driving. Research has shown that night driving restrictions reduce both night-time and overall crashes, due to reduced risk exposure.

*Drive carefully – 90 per cent of people  
are caused by accidents.*

BUMPER STICKER



## Reduced tolerance of driving infringements

It is possible to increase the consequences of traffic violations, for example by reducing the number of demerit points available. There is as yet no conclusive evidence that this approach reduces young driver crashes. On the plus side, it is relatively simple to introduce, and may help to address the motivational components of the young driver safety problem (whereas the restriction-type measures are more aimed at reducing exposure).

Several Australian states and territories have special point demerit limits for provisional licence holders.

## Exit tests to progress to next stage

Movement between stages of a graduated licensing system, whether to a less restrictive provisional stage or to a full licence, can either be automatic after a fixed time period (which can be extended for driving offences) or an exit test can be used. The safety benefit of such tests in themselves is unknown, but they can provide an opportunity to assess higher order skills and check the development of any ‘bad habits’. Perhaps most importantly, setting exit tests is an opportunity to influence the type of training or practice attained during the provisional stage – in effect keeping the pressure on for novices to continue improving their driving and focusing on particular skills.

## Driver training and education

Although the terms ‘training’ and ‘education’ in the driving context are often used interchangeably, they do not have the same meaning. Training generally refers to the practical development of vehicle control skills and other competencies, usually over a short period of time. The concept of education (which may include training) is broader and targeted at the cognitive level, extending to a more complete knowledge and understanding of the complex driving task. It has been suggested that ‘driver development’ is a more meaningful description of a potentially effective approach than training or education.



Past evaluations of driver training programmes have produced disappointing results – particularly for programmes that focus on developing vehicle control skills. There are several possible reasons for this. As crash risk is generally low for individual drivers, training that focuses on vehicle control skills or relatively rare emergency situations is likely to result in learning decay. Improved knowledge and skill does not necessarily translate into changes in on-road behaviour. Training may be unable to overcome personal traits and values developed over many years. Overconfidence or optimism bias can induce drivers to take more risks. Novice driver training can also increase crash risk by factors such as an unwarranted increase in confidence, earlier licensing and greater risk exposure.

While there is evidence that developing successful novice driver programmes is not easy, that does not mean that nothing worthwhile can be done.

There is considerable interest among road safety and driver education experts in educational programmes to promote safer driving through raising awareness of risks and promoting a culture of safe driving.

In Europe and particularly Scandinavia (and later in several other countries including Australia), work has gone into developing new driver training and education models along these lines. Driver development programmes that seek to raise awareness about risk factors and how risk is often underestimated, to improve decision making and

judgement of risk, and to provide novice drivers with insight into their own skill limitations, are sometimes referred to as ‘insight’ training. The term ‘insight’ refers to the objective of increasing novice drivers’ understanding of their abilities and limitations through experiential learning.

Early evaluations of programmes based on these principles have provided some evidence that they may contribute to crash reductions for new drivers.

*Some people have learned to  
drive by accident.*

ANON

## Developments in Australian driver education

At the Australian Transport Council (ATC) meeting in May 2003, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon. John Anderson MP, proposed that Australia should establish a compulsory national programme of driver education for all new provisional licence holders.

This initiative had strong support from leaders of the Australian automotive industry who have offered to help implement and maintain a national

programme, and support from insurance and other industries.

Transport Ministers agreed that Austroads, the association of Australian and New Zealand road transport and traffic authorities, should review relevant national and international research, and consult with relevant stakeholders on proposals for a best-practice national programme of driver education.

Austroads, with the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority as lead organisation, has undertaken a review of relevant research, and existing programmes in Australia and overseas. This review proposes development and evaluation of a course based on the 'insight' programme developed in Finland, and suggests this could ultimately form the basis of a best-practice national programme.

## Other driver education initiatives

The states and territories all provide road safety education in schools, although approaches vary. Tasmania, Victoria (*Keys Please*) and the ACT all have pre-driver education programmes.

The ACT's *Road Ready* is a holistic staged programme, intended to reduce the high road crash involvement of young drivers aged 17 to 25. A pre-learner stage encourages students to observe and talk about driving with their parents. The year 10 course (also available outside the school system) is a pre-requisite for a learner's permit and includes research activities, statistics, problem solving and decision making sessions, to help make pre-learners aware of issues relating to safer road use. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging parents or supervisors to provide learners with many hours of driving practice.

Reviews of school-based driver training programmes have consistently found little or no evidence of a crash reduction benefit; however, programmes such as *Road Ready* and *Keys Please* focus on encouraging a greater amount of driving practice, which has been linked with safety benefits.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the optional *Road Ready Plus* course can be taken after six months of driving solo. It includes pre-course activities and facilitated discussion sessions intended to encourage participants to share their driving experiences and learn from each other. Provisional drivers pay a fee to attend, and incentives include the awarding of four additional demerit points and permission to not display P plates.

In 2001, the ATSB, with the Australian Driver Trainers' Association, introduced the *Key Facts for New Drivers* package. The package consists of handouts for driver trainers to use with learner drivers and their parents, with information about risk factors such as speed and fatigue, as well as particular hazards for young drivers and strategies for dealing with them. The aim is to make young drivers more aware of important safety issues and to involve parents more in the learner period.





# 37

## vehicle advertising: is there more scope for promoting safety?

Over many years, a sense of disquiet has been building among road safety experts about the emphasis on speed and aggressive driving behaviour in car advertising. During 2001 the issue was brought to the attention of the National Road Safety Strategy Panel, which includes representatives of federal, state and territory road safety agencies, police, health and medical authorities, insurers, motoring organisations and community groups (see chapter 38).

The majority of Panel members were concerned that motor vehicle advertising was placing an increasing emphasis on speed, power and aggressive driving behaviour. Such advertising is at odds with prevailing community standards and is likely to be a contributing factor to road deaths in Australia.

*...some advertising displays a lack of understanding, or perhaps of concern, with the possibly damaging effects on road safety.*



## What is the problem with (some) vehicle advertising?

Many road safety agencies in Australia devote considerable resources to undertaking road safety research and publicising information to the community, including through road safety advertising campaigns. The consensus of these agencies and other National Road Safety Strategy Panel members is that vehicle advertising that emphasises speed and power undermines road safety messages and presents contradictory and confusing messages to viewers.

Vehicle advertisements sometimes depict activities that would be illegal on public roads, such as speeding and dangerous manoeuvres. It is

sometimes argued that many advertisements, particularly on television, represent a ‘fantasy’ situation. The words ‘filmed under controlled conditions’ are often included to somehow distance the images from reality. However, it is clear that the advertisement would be of little value if viewers did not identify with the drivers and the scene and therefore want to purchase the product. Adding such a disclaimer does little to convey to drivers that the behaviour depicted is inappropriate on our roads.

Research has shown that even minor levels of speeding increase crash risk significantly (see

chapter 13) and therefore even a subtle influence on driver behaviour could have a significant impact on road safety. Advertising that presents dangerous behaviours as acceptable, fun, and desirable contributes to misconceptions about the real risks involved in driving, especially speeding.

In the past, advertisers have questioned the appropriateness or relevance of expecting advertisements not to portray speeding and/or dangerous driving behaviour, when such material is commonly included in other television content. However, there are important distinctions between programme content and advertising.

Advertisements are generally carefully designed to shape perceptions and influence behaviour. Often, products are marketed by 'selling' desirable images. Sometimes advertising goes further, to define which aspects of a product are most desirable, through the advertiser's choice of features that are promoted.

Concerns about vehicle advertising are not new. In 1983, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Road Safety undertook an inquiry into the impact of advertising standards on road safety. In its report the Committee reported that:

...Advertisements which contain unsafe driving can have an effect on viewers particularly those who are impressionable or who already have a predisposition to behave irresponsibly on the road. People may be conditioned into a sub-conscious assessment that unsafe driving is less dangerous and more normal than it is.

...Some advertising displays a lack of understanding, or perhaps of concern, with the possibly damaging effects on road safety.

...Advertisements which glamorise unsafe driving ought to be considered socially irresponsible regardless of where they may have been filmed, and ought not to be excused by narrow legalistic interpretations of the codes.

## Young drivers are at greater risk

Of particular concern to transport and safety agencies is the influence that advertising featuring speed and other irresponsible driving behaviour may have on the behaviour and attitudes of young drivers. While drivers aged 17 to 25 represent only 17 per cent of people old enough to drive (17 years and above), they account for about 28 per cent of all drivers killed and seriously injured. Males in this age group are at considerably higher risk of death or serious injury than females.

*Various national and international bodies, including the UN General Assembly, have expressed concern about the marketing of speed by vehicle manufacturers.*

A study published in the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention in 2003* notes that ‘...an emphasis on speed and power, [in advertising] without pointing out their deleterious effects, can have the side effect of glamorizing and legitimising high-speed travel,’ and that the message to ‘a young and especially high-risk population, is that speed is fun and risk free.’

Research by the United Kingdom Automobile Association investigated young adults’ attitudes to cars, car use and advertising. The researchers note a distinct gender difference, with young males showing definite interest in advertisements depicting speed and power. They concluded that

car advertisements may influence the attitudes of young adults, in combination with other influences, including other sectors of the media (for example, car chases in films).

Many of the car advertisements featuring speed and aggressive driving appear to target younger drivers (aged about 17–39 years), and males in particular. Advertisements often show impressive vehicle handling skills, far beyond those required for safe driving, to appeal to these segments of the market.

All government road safety agencies in Australia are working towards reducing the over-

representation of young drivers in road trauma. Research has shown that learning to recognise risks and hazards is a most important element for novice drivers in learning to drive – more important (and more difficult to attain) than learning mechanical skills like manoeuvring and braking. Based on strong research evidence, most agencies have adopted a common approach of trying to reduce the emphasis on advanced vehicle control skills, and assisting novices in developing an understanding of risk factors such as speed, and hazard perception skills. Vehicle advertising that shows off complex and flashy manoeuvres, or that glorifies speed and power, is directly in conflict with these efforts to improve young driver safety.

## The international situation

The potential conflict between particular styles of vehicle advertising and road safety aims has also been recognised internationally.

In 2003, a report by the UN Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly stated that ‘Peer pressure is a contributing factor to vehicles travelling at high speed, as is the marketing of speed as a desirable attribute by vehicle manufacturers.’ The World Health Organisation has urged vehicle manufacturers to ‘Advertise and market vehicles responsibly by emphasising safety’ (see chapter 2).

In November 1989, The European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) adopted a resolution on advertising that conflicts with road safety aims. The resolution urges ECMT member countries ‘to regard as inappropriate any advertising whose content extols performance or power and treats driving as a sport [or] shows

scenes evoking motor racing, lightning acceleration and top speeds.’

Denmark and Spain, among other countries, have introduced laws permitting banning of advertisements that encourage dangerous or irresponsible behaviour, or requiring special permission for such advertisements.

In 1999, the European Advertising Standards Alliance published the results of a survey conducted among its European Union members, which found that seven member states had self-regulatory systems that included specific codes or sections relating to motor vehicle advertising. In general, these included provisions referring to not showing unsafe or aggressive driving; avoiding messages based on speed, performance and acceleration; and not presenting technical advances and safety features in ways which might encourage a false sense of security and lead to dangerous and

irresponsible driving. In many cases, the advertising codes had been negotiated by the national car industry association and given to a self-regulatory organisation to administer.

The United Kingdom has separate advertising codes for television and radio, which were developed in conjunction with advertisers and the motor vehicle industry, and are enforced by a statutory corporation, the Office of Communications. A further code covering non-broadcast (print) advertising is administered by the Advertising Standards Authority, an independent self-regulatory body.

The UK television code precludes advertisements that ‘encourage or condone dangerous, inconsiderate or irresponsible driving or motorcycling’, encourage fast driving or refer to speeds over 70 mph, or ‘demonstrate power, acceleration, handling characteristics etc, except in

*The majority of the Australian community believes there is too much emphasis on speed in motor vehicle advertising.*

a clear context of safety’ and without implying excitement or competitiveness. Similarly, the code for radio advertising requires that ‘references to the power or acceleration of motor vehicles or automotive products must not imply that it is acceptable for speed limits to be exceeded, and there should be no accompanying suggestion of excitement or aggression’.

The non-broadcast (print) code requires that advertisements do not make speed or acceleration claims the predominant message, or portray speed in a way that might encourage motorists to drive irresponsibly or break the law, or portray or refer to practices that encourage anti-social behaviour.

In 1999, the UK Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee’s report, *Young and Newly-Qualified Drivers: Standards and Training* recommended consultation with advertisers, as well as motor manufacturers, to ensure that irresponsible advertising of cars is ended, and that advertisers seek to promote safe driving.

In New Zealand, a self-regulatory industry body is responsible for the *Code for Road Safety in Advertising*, which requires consideration of ‘currently accepted road safety practices’. The code also includes a list of specific unacceptable elements including: actions which would constitute traffic offences, associating driving with

alcohol, glorifying excessive speed and unsafe driving practices, and showing cyclists or motorcyclists without helmets.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has noted that in the US, judgements about the social responsibility of advertising are generally left to advertisers and broadcasters. Advertising industry groups are subject to voluntary standards, but there are no specific rules or guidelines for car advertisements. The Institute considers that there is a need to tighten voluntary standards in the US, making them more specific like those in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, to prevent inappropriate advertising.



## Community views

In Australia, community sentiment about speed in car advertising is becoming increasingly strong. Governments at all levels regularly receive correspondence from individuals and community groups expressing concern, anger or amazement about advertisements focusing excessively on speed and power, or showing aggressive or illegal driving.

In 2002, the ATSB commissioned a survey of 2 543 people, and included questions about views on speed in car advertising. The results showed that a clear majority (56 per cent) of adult Australians agree that there is too much emphasis on speed in advertising. Community opinion on this issue is unusually strong: 41 per cent of people said they agree strongly that there is too much emphasis on speed (compared with 17 per cent who said they disagree strongly), and only 4 per cent of respondents did not have an opinion.

The results of a survey of 1 601 drivers reported in the October 2003 *AAMI Crash Index* indicated that

75 per cent agreed that car advertising builds an unrealistic expectation of being able to drive fast and freely on Australian roads. Further, 85 per cent of drivers said they would like to see a greater focus on safety rather than speed in car advertising. This figure rose to 95 per cent among women aged 55 and over.

A 2003 study in the US analysed the content of car and passenger van advertisements from 1983, 1988, 1993 and 1998 (they did not consider sports

utility vehicles). By far the two most predominant themes were sales incentives and performance (rapid acceleration, vehicle moving at speed, vehicle cornering at speed, claims about turning radius). Safety was rarely a primary theme in advertisements. The authors noted that research has shown that safety concerns play an important part in car purchasing decisions, but that this is not generally reflected in the messages advertisers use to sell cars.

*Research in the US has shown that vehicle manufacturers are missing an opportunity to promote vehicle safety – a feature that consumers have indicated is very important to them.*



*In the absence of traditional authority, advertising has become a kind of social guide. It depicts us in all the myriad situations possible to a life of free choice. It provides ideas about style, morality, behavior.*

RONALD BERMAN, 1981

## Working towards appropriate Australian vehicle advertising standards

In 2001, the issue of inappropriate vehicle advertising came to the attention of the National Road Safety Strategy Panel. At that time, the existing *Advertiser Code of Ethics* provided little specific guidance for vehicle advertising, requiring simply that advertisements not depict material contrary to ‘prevailing community standards’.

On behalf of the Panel, the ATSB began discussions with the Australian Association of National Advertisers, who are responsible for the *Advertiser Code of Ethics*. Senator the Hon. Ron Boswell, then Parliamentary Secretary to the

Minister for Transport and Regional Services, met with representatives of the advertisers and the vehicle industry in April 2002. Although the vehicle industry representatives did not accept that their advertisements could be linked to road crashes, they recognised the importance of road safety. Consequently, the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI) agreed to introduce a new voluntary industry code for vehicle advertising.

In August 2002, the FCAI introduced the *Advertising for Motor Vehicles Voluntary Code of*

*Practice*. At the August 2002 meeting of the Australian Transport Council (ATC), all Transport Ministers welcomed the new code and said that they would watch with interest the change in advertisements expected under the new arrangements.

The vehicle advertising code operates within the existing self-regulatory framework, in which the Advertising Standards Board (ASB), a non-government organisation, is responsible for reviewing advertising complaints. The code applied to new advertisements from 8 August 2002

and to all advertisements from 1 December 2002. In the explanatory notes accompanying the code, the FCAI asks advertisers to be mindful of the importance of road safety and to ensure that advertising for motor vehicles does not contradict or undermine efforts to achieve improved road safety outcomes. The code requires that advertisements do not portray obviously unsafe driving, driving at speeds in excess of speed limits, or other practices which breach road laws.

The Panel established a monitoring group, chaired by VicRoads, to assess outcomes under the code. Road safety officials from all jurisdictions, the Australian Automobile Association and the ATSB are all concerned that although there has been some improvement in vehicle advertising overall, the first iteration of the code has not produced satisfactory outcomes. They consider that some of the specific provisions of the code need to be

strengthened, and also that the ASB's decisions on formal complaints about advertisements should be informed by a less permissive interpretation of the code, with advice from a road safety expert.

Some state transport ministers have pushed for mandatory regulation of advertising, and proposals for mandating vehicle advertising standards are to be presented to the ATC. However, the ATSB and state and territory transport agencies have indicated that they still see merit in continuing to negotiate with industry representatives to improve the voluntary system.

In November 2003, the FCAI announced a comprehensive review of both the vehicle advertising code and the way it is administered, in consultation with the Monitoring Group and other stakeholders. At present the FCAI and the monitoring group are working together on an

amended version of the code. This will be considered by Ministers at the next ATC meeting.

At any time, complaints about specific advertisements can be lodged with:

Advertising Standards Board  
Level 2, Northbourne Ave,  
Turner ACT 2612

Telephone: (02) 6262 9822  
Fax: (02) 6262 9833

website: [www.advertisingstandardsbureau.com.au](http://www.advertisingstandardsbureau.com.au)



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## national coordination: the National Road Safety Strategy Panel

The first National Road Safety Strategy was developed in an attempt to build a uniform national approach in an area where the legislative, administrative and enforcement functions were based in the states and territories. The first National Road Safety Strategy was developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and was endorsed by federal, state and territory Transport Ministers in April 1992.

Implementation of the strategy was achieved through a task force comprising representatives from federal, state and territory road safety authorities and key national stakeholders

representing education, police, health, local government, the heavy vehicle industry, motorists organisations and vehicle manufacturers. This group was known as the National Road Safety Implementation Task Force, and it was chaired and coordinated by the then Federal Office of Road Safety (now the ATSB).

The role of the task force was to provide representative leadership, and its responsibilities were to:

- encourage lead agencies to develop and implement their own road safety strategies

- facilitate the exchange of information
- develop road safety targets
- coordinate research priorities
- monitor and report on progress of the National Road Safety Strategy.

## The National Road Safety Strategy Panel

Austrroads, the association of road and traffic authorities in Australia and New Zealand, has responsibility for identifying and promoting best practice in a range of areas including road safety and traffic engineering. The Australian Transport Council (ATC) – which comprises Ministers with transport responsibilities from the Australian Government and the states and territories, and an observer from local government – took the decision in May 1997 to merge the Austrroads Road Safety Advisory Panel and the National Road Safety Implementation Task Force into one body. This new body – the National Road Safety Strategy Panel – reports to ATC through the Austrroads Council.

The Panel's role is to:

- monitor implementation of the National Road Safety Strategy and Action Plans
- develop and administer projects that enhance road safety and the transfer of best practice under the Austrroads Road Safety Programme
- identify and recommend areas of research which will assist in reducing the impact of causes of road trauma, including input to Austrroads' national strategic road research programme
- provide a forum for the exchange of information between stakeholders on road safety matters

- ensure that effective linkages are in place so that road safety strategies and action plans at the jurisdictional level are consistent with overall national objectives
- assist in the harmonisation of road safety policies and practices between jurisdictions
- promote the development and implementation of road safety countermeasures based on research and national best practice
- assist in identifying emerging national road safety priorities.

The National Road Safety Strategy Panel is chaired and coordinated by the ATSB. Its membership reflects the broad alliance of government, industry and community organisations that work together to reduce the burden of road deaths and serious injuries.

## National Road Safety Strategy Panel – Membership (at 22 March 2004)

Mr Phill Allan	Department of Transport and Urban Planning (SA)	Professor Soames Job	Roads and Traffic Authority NSW
Mr Robin Anderson	Australian Local Government Association	Supt. Peter Keogh	Victorian Police
Mr Kym Bills	Department of Transport and Regional Services (ATSB)	Mr Murray Kidnie	Austroads
Mr Chris Brooks	Department of Transport and Regional Services (ATSB)	Supt. Bob Langford	Western Australia Police Service
Mr Iain Cameron	Department of Premier and Cabinet (WA)	Mr Gary Mahon	Queensland Department of Transport
Ms Fiona Campbell	Bicycle Federation of Australia	Mr Peter Makeham	National Road Transport Commission
Mr Garry Cislowski	Australian Council of State Schools Organisations	Mr Jeff McDougall	Australian Driver Trainers Association
Ms Jacqueline Clarke	Institute of Public Works Engineers Australia	Mr Lauchlan McIntosh	Australian Automobile Association
Mr John Collis	Department of Transport and Regional Services (ATSB)	Supt. Steve Mewburn	ACT Policing
Ms Angela Conway	Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (Tas)	Mr Joe Motha	Department of Transport and Regional Services (ATSB)
Ms Leah Croke	Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment (NT)	Dr Ken Ogden	RACV Ltd
Chief Supt. Kerry Dunn	Queensland Police Service	Mr Peter Robertson	Department of Transport and Regional Services (VSSB)
Mr Graham Fraine	Queensland Department of Transport	Mr David Rynne	Australian Trucking Association
Dr Raphael Grzebieta	Australian College of Road Safety	Mr Keith Seyer	Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries
Chief Supt. John Hartley	NSW Police Department	Ms Kerry Smith	Department of Health and Aged Care (Cwlth)
Dr Andrew Hearn	Land Transport Safety Authority of New Zealand	Mr Guy Stanford	Australian Motorcycle Council
Mr Jon Henchy	Department of Transport and Regional Services (ATSB)	Mr Ray Taylor	Australian College of Road Safety
Mr Eric Howard	VicRoads	Mr Gordon Trinca	Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
Supt. Peter Gordon	Northern Territory Police	Mr Geoff Vogt	Motor Accident Commission
Mr Stephen Jiggins	Department of Urban Services (ACT)	Supt. Roger Zeuner	South Australia Police







