

The "Speed Kills" Myth

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Tuesday, 13 December 2016 12:08

Speed Kills. We've seen it in the media and in government publications: "Speed Kills." But, does speed really kill? Here are the 1993 Statistics from the U S National Highway Traffic Safety Administration concerning speeds at which accidents occurred and the percentage of accidents:

0-20 mph

2.0%

25-30 mph

29.7%

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35-40 mph

30.4%

45-50 mph

16.5%

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55 mph

19.2%

60-65 mph

2.2%

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Commercial aircraft travel about ten times the speed of automobiles. Yet, hard statistics tell us that travel on commercial aircraft is the safest way to travel!

Annually, about 300,000 people are killed in motor vehicle accidents throughout the world.

Approximately 50,000 are killed in the US. Traffic accidents kill more Americans 5-32 years of age than any other cause. About 67 percent of all accidents are driver caused. Approximately 40 percent of all traffic deaths involve alcohol abuse. (Andrea and Flynn.)

The German Autobahn system was started before WWII and has been in constant operation since. Parts of the Autobahn are without a speed limit. On these portions, people drive 80 mph in the slow lane, 100 mph in the center lane and 130 mph plus in the fast lane! (Smith). Yet, it

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has earned a reputation of being safe and delivering people to their destinations more quickly.

In Germany, there were 42.5 million registered vehicles (35.5 million cars) in 1990. The network of roads totals 221,000 km, including 11,000 km of autobahns (motorways). In size, it is second only to the United States. An ongoing safety program of driver training in schools, improved vehicle safety and better roads have produced fewer fatalities on the Autobahn in spite of greater traffic density. The one exception is the area that comprised the old German Democratic Republic [the former communist East Germany]—it has a higher accident rate since it has had to adjust to more traffic and faster cars. (Here is another confirmation that becoming more socialistic is wrong!) To earn a license in Germany, one must complete 33 hours of classroom instruction and 18 hours of road training. Every modern car in Germany is designed for safety and high performance. Their vehicles stick to the roads on curves and will "stop on a dime."

Drunk driving laws are strictly enforced in Germany. And with good results, too! We must

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enforce our drunk driving laws!

President Dwight D. Eisenhower saw the efficiency of the German Autobahn system first hand while Supreme Allied Commander. After WWII, he supported a system of highways in the United States based on the successful German Autobahn model. However, he wanted speed limits. (Smith).

The faster people and freight can be delivered on our highways, the more efficient our transportation system becomes. This saves manhours and money, which raise the individual standard of living. It also speeds up the economy, *thereby generating more taxes without raising the tax rate!*

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Keep in mind that the original reason that President Nixon reduced our national speed limit was to save gasoline! That reason is no longer valid—if it ever was.

Now, what really kills? Lack of drivers' training and education kill! Using common sense and not abusing drugs—illegal and prescriptions—go a long way to avoid accident! So to be more precise, what is really needed for highway safety?

1. *Each driver must drive safely.* Drivers need to be educated in driving principles rather than in following laws legalistically. There are times when one can safely drive 85+ mph in a given area and there are times when a safe speed may be 25 mph or even "0" mph—one should stay at home! Motor vehicle operators who have certain physical or mental limitations must operate a vehicle only in circumstances where they can safely drive. Physicians must insure that patients who are not qualified to drive do not drive.

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Incidentally, government publications that state that citizens do not have a *right* to drive and that

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given by some bureaucrat, are wrong. All citizens have a right to operate a vehicle if they can

drive safely!

I have observed in Missouri that many do not use their turn signals, or misuse them. Also, some

tailgate, which is a very dangerous habit.

Human limitations must be programmed into instruction and mechanical engineering. One

example of a universal human limitation is that we have an irregularly-shaped blind spot in each

eye. This blind area occurs where the optic nerve meets the retina. It is about 15 degrees to

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the left in the left eye and 15 degrees to the right in the right eye. We are not aware of these "black holes" in our vision, because the brain, like a computer, "fills in the blanks." Maybe you have experienced not seeing a car to our left as you merge into traffic. Therefore, there is a need for better engineering of rear-view mirrors to compensate for the blind spots. Highway signs should direct through traffic in the left lane on trafficways, because merging drivers may not see the merging vehicles. This is also showing common courtesy for those trying to enter the highway. *Courtesy is contagious.* Courtesy also helps counteract anger, which contributes to accidents.

2. The whole highway system needs to be redesigned. The new design should be integrated with safer vehicles and more intelligent laws.

3. Vehicle design must have safety as a priority. Higher miles-per-gallon and less expensive cars must be secondary goals. Such improvements as air bags (driver, passenger and side),

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seat belts, protective side beams, roll bars, antilock brakes, collapsible steering posts, head rests/restraints and safety bumpers are a good start. However, safety research and development must be ongoing with prompt implementation.

4. Vehicle inspection should be used as a means to provide safer vehicles rather than as a source of revenue.

5. Law enforcement officers should be taught properly. They must not be pressured to "collect illegal taxes" through tickets. The old "Boss Hogg-Roscoe P. Coletrane syndrome" must be terminated! While law enforcement officers are not judges, they of necessity must exercise judgment. A good question they must ask is, "How can I help drivers?" Not, "How can I fill my quota of tickets today?" Another good question is, "Is this operator driving safely?" Rather than, "Did he break some law?" I know of two handicapped ladies who were given tickets on a street that had its speed limit lowered from 35 mph to 25 mph for a month or so (My wife was driving

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and had a senior passenger). In my opinion, there was no safety violation, and at most, a warning ticket should have been given.

I served as a Chaplain with Military Police in Vietnam. I also served with the following Army Reserve units in the United States: Prisoner of War, Criminal Investigation, Confinement Facility, and the U S Army Disciplinary Barracks [Prison] in Leavenworth. (Some Military Police were Reservists who also served in civilian law enforcement). I have the highest regard for law enforcement officers who are capable and who are doing their job right. However, it galls me (and good law enforcement officers) when it isn't done properly. It isn't right for any one in authority to vent hostility on innocent citizens. It is not right to break the bones of passive protestors. It is not right to "go on the take" and become a corrupt cop. It is right to assume the posture of public servant and attempt to help people!

The correct philosophy is not to *punish* lawbreakers and exact a pound of flesh, but *correct* and

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lawbreakers to society where possible. Citizens will imitate a good law enforcement role model, including those who drive safely.

We all have the moral imperative to make driving safer and more efficient. We can have both—Germany has proven this! We must save lives. We must raise the quality of life in the United States.

Speed does not kill. Lack of education, lack of training and not using common sense do!

Resources

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Special thanks to the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 4645 Reservoir Road NW, Washington, DC 20007; and the German Information Center, 950 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022-2781 for help in Autobahn research.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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—Peter Meiderlin 1626.

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