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Direct Line & Brake Reports on Safe Driving 2012-2014 **REPORT THREE**

A risky business



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direct line



Julie Townsend, Brake's deputy chief executive, says:

"Driving is a pretty unique activity: it's the most risky thing most people do regularly by a large margin. It's complicated: it takes a long time to learn, and years more to become experienced. Every journey is different, even if it's a familiar route, because you're sharing the road with everyone else, and you never know what they're going to do. Yet it's easy to forget the risks: most drivers feel confident and comfortable at the wheel, and many think they can get away with risk-taking.

Taking risks at the wheel can easily lead to horrific crashes that end lives and inflict terrible suffering, which Brake bears witness to through our support services for bereaved and injured victims. This report reveals the extent to which drivers often forget or ignore this fact, thinking they can get away with breaking important safety laws or driving in treacherous conditions.

It also reveals an almost universal view among drivers, which no doubt plays a key part in the level of risk-taking and number of devastating casualties on our roads. Almost all think they are at least as safe as the next, despite most simultaneously owning up to breaking laws that are there to protect lives. Men think much more highly of their driving than women, despite being far more likely to cause a fatal or serious crash.

There is clearly a lack of self-awareness at play here, which makes persuading drivers to be safer all the more challenging. Brake works hard to overcome this through our awareness-raising and educational work. We use our Pledge and events like Road Safety Week to get the message across that none of us are immune to the risks or above safety laws and guidance. But by taking simple steps to be safer, we can all play a part in reducing road risk and stopping tragedies."



About this report

This is the third in a series of reports on safe driving 2012-14 by Brake and Direct Line. It examines attitudes and behaviour in relation to risk and risk-taking on roads, including how safe drivers think they and other people are, how likely they are to break laws or drive in risky conditions, and what level of penalties they think are appropriate to deter risk-taking.

The report is based on a survey of 1,000 drivers across the UK carried out by research company Surveygoo on behalf of Brake. For other reports in the series, visit www.brake.org.uk/safedrivingreports.

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HOW SAFE IS YOUR DRIVING?

Q1: How do you think the safety of your driving compares with that of an average driver on the roads today?

Almost all drivers (99%) think they are at least as safe as the average driver, with men more likely than women to think they are comparatively safer. More than half (52%) of men think they are safer than most, compared with four in 10 (39%) women.

Among all drivers:

- 44% think they are safer than most drivers
- 55% think they are about average
- 1% of all drivers think they are more dangerous than average

Men vs women:

- 52% of men and 39% of women think they are safer than most
- 47% of men and 60% of women think they are about average
- 1% of both men and women think they are more dangerous

SERIOUSLY INJURED

Fenella Shelton

Fenella Shelton, then age 21, had just left her home in Southampton on 3 November 2007. She was using a pelican crossing to get across a 30mph road to go for a run when she was hit by a speeding driver. She was left with a multi-fragmented fracture of the tibia and fibula bones in one leg, which required nine surgeries and seven visits to hospital to repair. She also suffered a broken scapula, broken ribs, and injuries to internal organs. She spent three years recovering, and had to take a year out of medical school. The driver who hit her received a £600 fine and a six month driving ban.

Fenella says: "I'm so angry I lost three years of my life to recovering from a crash because a driver just didn't think about his speed. Too many drivers think they can handle taking risks on roads, but the reality is that they can't; by speeding or breaking other traffic laws, you risk causing horrendous injuries or even killing someone."

Q2: Thinking about the behaviour of other drivers within the past 12 months, what is your impression of the standard of driving on the roads?

Four in 10 drivers (41%) believe there are more dangerous than safe drivers, showing a contrast between many drivers' opinions of their own driving and everyone else's. Young drivers (age 18-24) are much more likely to think overall standards of driving are very poor.

Among all drivers:

- 5% said the roads are full of dangerous drivers and hardly any safe
- 36% said there is a mixture, but more dangerous than safe
- 58% said there is a mixture, but more safe than dangerous
- 1% said the roads are full of safe drivers and hardly any dangerous

Among young drivers:

- 27% said the roads are full of dangerous drivers and hardly any safe
- 36% said there is a mixture, but more dangerous than safe
- 36% said there is a mixture, but more safe than dangerous
- 0% said the roads are full of safe drivers and hardly any dangerous

ADVICE FOR DRIVERS: MAKE THE PLEDGE

Driving is an everyday activity for many people. This can lead to complacency and overconfidence behind the wheel, causing drivers to take dangerous risks, sometimes without a second thought. Yet the reality is that this risk-taking often results in crashes, sometimes with appalling consequences. That's why Brake urges all drivers to pledge to be a careful and considerate driver and stick to traffic laws at all times: a socially responsible and potentially life-saving commitment. Make the Brake Pledge at www.brake.org.uk/pledge.

Q3: Do you break traffic laws? (tick the statement most applicable to you)

Worryingly, a large majority (69%) own up to breaking traffic laws, despite almost all claiming to be at least as safe as the average driver. While a third put it down to inattention (33%), a slightly higher proportion (36%) indicate they do so knowingly, almost all of them believing they can do so without posing a danger. A far greater proportion of men than women reported this. Young drivers were much less likely to admit breaking laws, and those who did were more likely to put it down to inattention.

Among all drivers:

- 32% said: "I never break traffic laws"
- 33% said: "I break traffic laws sometimes, but only when I'm not paying attention"
- 35% said: "I break traffic laws sometimes, but only when I know I can do so safely"
- 1% said: "I break traffic laws frequently, and sometimes when I know it's taking a risk"

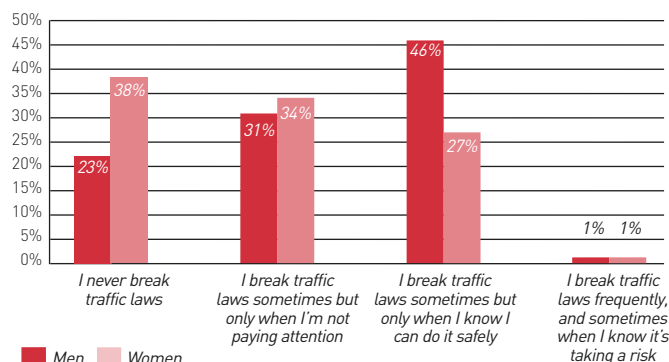
Men vs women:

- 23% of men and 38% of women said: "I never break traffic laws"
- 31% of men and 34% of women said: "I break traffic laws sometimes, but only when I'm not paying attention"
- 46% of men and 27% of women said: "I break traffic laws sometimes, but only when I know I can do so safely"
- 1% of men and 1% of women said: "I break traffic laws frequently, and sometimes when I know it's taking a risk"

Among young drivers:

- 45% said: "I break traffic laws sometimes, but only when I'm not paying attention"
- 9% said: "I break traffic laws sometimes, but only when I know I can do so safely"
- 0% said: "I break traffic laws frequently, and sometimes when I know it's taking a risk"

Figure 1: Do you break traffic laws?



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THE FACTS: CASUALTIES, COSTS AND PREVENTION

Every day, five people are killed and 63 are seriously injured on roads in the UK.¹ These casualties inflict terrible suffering,² yet are avoidable.

The vast majority are at least partly caused by drivers taking risks, such as speeding, or being distracted or impaired; more than 95% of fatal and serious crashes are down to human error.³

As well as the appalling human suffering that results from crashes, they also have an enormous financial impact. In 2012, crashes and casualties in Britain cost the taxpayer £34.3 billion due to the burden on health and emergency services, criminal justice costs, insurance payouts, and human costs.⁴

Traffic laws are there to prevent devastating crashes, and no driver is able to break traffic laws safely, no matter how much experience they have. Basic physics means speeding drivers have less time to react and stop in an emergency, and will hit harder if they crash. Drivers on a phone call are four times more likely to be in a crash that causes injury,⁵ because of increased reaction times and poorer lane control. And if you've had even small amounts of alcohol, reaction times increase, and judgment and co-ordination are impaired.⁶

End notes

1. *Reported Road Casualties Great Britain main report 2012, Department for Transport, 2013 and Police Recorded Injury Road Traffic Collision Statistics 2012, Police Service for Northern Ireland, 2013*
2. *Review into the needs of families bereaved through homicide, Victims Commissioner, July 2011*
3. *Dimensions of aberrant driver behaviour, Rumar, K., 1995. Ergonomics, 41, pp.39-56*
4. *Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain: 2012 Annual Report, Department for Transport, 2013*
5. *Role of mobile phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance: a case-crossover study, University of Western Australia, 2005*
6. *The relationship between serious injury and blood alcohol concentration (BAC) in fatal motor vehicle accidents: BAC = 0.01% is associated with significantly more dangerous accidents than BAC = 0.00%, University of California at San Diego, 2011*

