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Direct Line & Brake Reports on Safe Driving 2015-2017 **REPORT THREE**

A risky business



Produced by:



Working in partnership with:



direct line



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

"Driving is a risky business. It has been ever since the first motor car rolled out of Karl Benz's workshop in 1886, and it remains so today, despite all the technological advances that have taken place. Roads remain unpredictable shared spaces, and human error can still kill. Increasingly, with improvements in vehicle crash protection, those most at risk are not those behind the wheel but other people they share the road with: people on foot and bike, especially the elderly and the young. For most drivers, there is no other aspect of life where we are put in charge of a heavy, complex piece of machinery, and given such power over life and death.

"Encased within metal frames, with crumple zones and airbags, we often lose our respect for the power we hold at our finger tips when we get behind the wheel. We forget that our actions, mistakes, and risk-taking can so easily lead to horrific crashes, wasted lives and terrible suffering, the reality of which Brake bears witness to every day through its victim support services.

"This casual attitude to driving – as mundane and everyday – has led to a common disregard for the traffic laws that are there to keep us safe, and a tendency to blame everyone but ourselves for road danger. As highlighted in this report, many drivers are quick to point the finger at the risky driving behaviours of others, while simultaneously admitting to those very same risky behaviours.

"What this means for those in the road safety field is that we have to work harder – not just to create and enforce traffic laws, but to educate, inform and persuade all drivers to buy-in to those laws. To prevent road casualties, everyone who gets behind the wheel needs to understand why the rules exist, support their implementation, and accept their own personal responsibility to abide by them and keep people safe."



About this report

This is the third in a series of reports on safe driving 2015-17 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 carried out by research company Surveygoo on behalf of Brake, across the UK. 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 other drivers on the roads today?

UK drivers are confident about their own driving ability, with more than two thirds (69%) believing they are safer than most drivers. Only 1% said they are more dangerous than most drivers. Young drivers are even more likely to rate their driving as safer than others, with three in five 17-24 year olds (58%) saying they are 'much' safer than most drivers, compared with two in five (39%) overall. Given that young drivers are actually far more likely to crash than older drivers, this suggests many overestimate their abilities.

- 0% said they are much more dangerous than most drivers (0% 17-24)
- 1% said they are slightly more dangerous than most drivers (0% 17-24)
- 29% said they are about average (19% 17-24)
- 30% said they are slightly safer than most drivers (23% 17-24)
- 39% said they are much safer than most drivers (58% 17-24)

THE FACTS: CASUALTIES, COSTS AND PREVENTION

Every day, five people are killed and 59 seriously injured on UK roads¹. These casualties inflict terrible suffering, yet are preventable.

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 error².

As well as the appalling human suffering that results from crashes, they have an enormous economic impact. In 2013, reported crashes and casualties in Britain cost the taxpayer £15.1 billion due to the burden on health and emergency services, criminal justice costs, insurance pay outs, and human costs³. This figure is likely to be much higher if unreported crashes are taken into account.

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 injury⁴, due to increased reaction times and poor lane control.

Q2: In the past 12 months, what has been your impression of the standard of driving on UK roads?

UK drivers judge the driving standards of others more harshly than their own, with most (58%) saying there are more dangerous drivers than safe drivers on the roads. This suggests dangerous driving is viewed as endemic rather than the fault of a minority. Four in five young drivers (17-24; 80%) regard the majority of drivers as dangerous, perhaps due to a heightened sensitivity to risky driving behaviours which have become habitual for more experienced drivers.

- 1% said the roads are full of safe drivers (0% 17-24)
- 41% said there are more safe drivers than dangerous drivers (20% 17-24)
- 43% said there are more dangerous drivers than safe drivers (68% 17-24)
- 15% said the roads are full of dangerous drivers (12% 17-24)

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 careful and considerate 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.



slow



sober



secure



silent



sharp



sustainable

Q3: In the past 12 months, how often have you felt endangered by the behaviour of other drivers?

Almost three quarters of drivers (72%) say they feel endangered by other drivers some, most, or every time they drive. Only 28% say they rarely or never feel endangered. Young drivers (17-24) are most likely to say they feel endangered by other drivers, with a quarter (24%) reporting this most times they drive. This may reflect both a heightened awareness of the risky driving behaviours of others, and a sense of vulnerability as new drivers.

- 2% said every time I drive (0% 17-24)
- 14% said most times I drive (24% 17-24)
- 56% said sometimes (51% 17-24)
- 24% said rarely (19% 17-24)
- 4% said never (5% 17-24)

IN THE PAST TEN YEARS...

Since Brake carried out a UK-wide driver survey on this topic in 2005, the number of people who think their driving is safer than average has gone up. In 2005, half of drivers (50%) rated themselves as safer than others, and although this dropped slightly to 45% in 2011, by 2015 it has shot up to more than two thirds (69%).

During this period, drivers' perceptions of the safety of others' driving correlated with their perceptions of their own. In years when drivers rate their own driving to be safer, they also rate other drivers to be more dangerous, a relationship shown clearly in figure 1 (overleaf).

Since the first time drivers were asked by Brake about breaking traffic laws in 2013, the proportion admitting to this, whether through inattention or deliberately, has gone down from more than two thirds (69%) to half (49%), but still remains far too high.



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Figure 1: How drivers rate the safety of their own driving vs. how they rate the safety of other drivers, 2005-15.



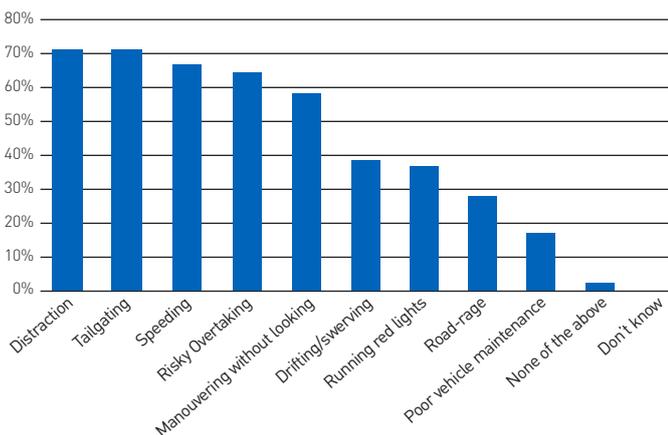
Q4: In the past 12 months, what kinds of unsafe driving behaviour have you witnessed and been concerned about?

Drivers were asked which of a list of unsafe driving behaviours they had witnessed and were concerned about. These excluded secondary causes such as drink driving, tired driving and poor driver eyesight, which are not necessarily observable to other road users. Five behaviours came out clearly on top, with seven in 10 (71%) citing distraction and tailgating, two thirds speeding and risky overtaking (67%, 66%), and three in five (59%) manoeuvring without looking properly.

It is likely that many drivers who expressed concern over certain unsafe behaviours are themselves guilty of them. For instance, in Brake and Direct Line's last survey, 63% of drivers admitted speeding in 30mph limits⁵.

- 71% said distraction (e.g. by mobile phones, eating/drinking, or any other activity at the wheel unrelated to driving)
- 71% said tailgating/driving too close to other vehicles
- 67% said speeding
- 66% said risky overtaking
- 59% said turning, pulling out or changing lanes without looking properly
- 39% said drifting/swerving across lanes or straddling more than one lane
- 38% said running red lights
- 29% said road-rage
- 18% said poor vehicle maintenance
- 2% said none of the above
- 0% said they don't know

Figure 2: In the past 12 months, what kinds of unsafe driving behaviour have you witnessed and been concerned about?



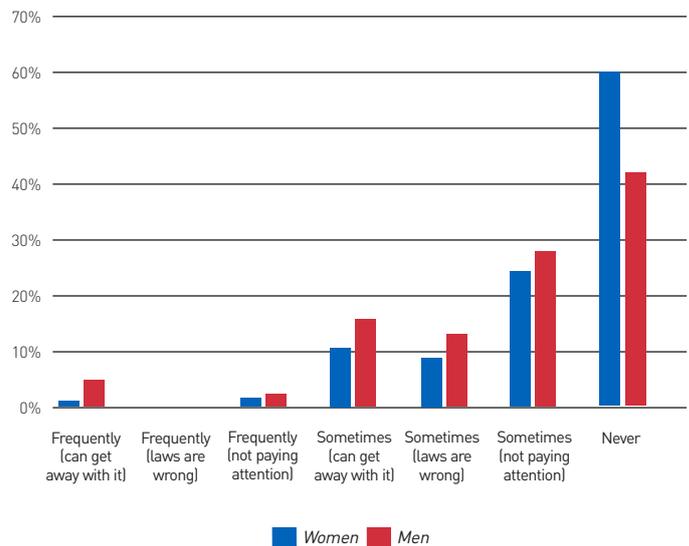
Q5: Breaking traffic laws: which statement is most applicable to you?

Shockingly, half of UK drivers (49%) admit breaking traffic laws. Half of these (25% of the total) say they do so because they are not paying attention, suggesting complacency and overconfidence. The other half (23% of the total) admit breaking traffic laws consciously, either because they think they can get away with it (14% of the total) or because they do not agree with the laws (9% of the total). This suggests more needs to be done both to enhance the deterrent effect of traffic enforcement, and to educate drivers to buy-in to the importance of traffic laws.

Men are significantly more likely both to break traffic laws (58%, compared with 40% of women) and to do so wilfully (32%, compared with 15% of women).

- 51% said: I never break traffic laws (60% female, 42% male)
- 24% said: I break traffic laws sometimes because I'm not paying attention (23% female, 26% male)
- 12% said: I break traffic laws sometimes because I think I can get away with it (8% female, 16% male)
- 9% said: I break traffic laws sometimes because I think the laws are wrong/unnecessary (6% female, 13% male)
- 2% said: I break traffic laws frequently because I think I can get away with it (1% female, 3% male)
- 1% said: I break traffic laws frequently because I'm not paying attention (1% female, 1% male)
- 0% said: I break traffic laws frequently because I think the laws are wrong/unnecessary (0% female, 0% male)

Figure 3: How often do you break traffic laws?



End notes

1. Reported road casualties Great Britain: annual report 2013, Department for Transport, 2014
2. Dimensions of aberrant driver behaviour, Rumar, K., 1995. Ergonomics, 41, pp.39-56
3. Reported road casualties Great Britain: annual report 2013, Department for Transport, 2014
4. Role of mobile phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance: a case-crossover study, University of Western Australia, 2005
5. Brake and Direct Line Reports on Safe Driving 2012-14: report 4, section 2