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FEATURE FOCUS

'Scrap speed cameras now'

Last Updated: 12:01am BST 23/06/2007

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They might be good for the organisers of track days but speed cameras are killing ordinary road users, says Paul Smith, of the Safe Speed Campaign

British road safety is in trouble. The number of road deaths isn't falling as expected and recent figures from Europe put our rate of road safety improvement behind 20 other European nations. We used to have the safest roads in the world but we have been overtaken.



Blinded by science: a reliance on speed cameras ignores the fundamentals of safe driving

Although it appears that Department for Transport (DfT) targets are being met, it's only the trend in serious injuries that provides this positive result. Unfortunately for the DfT, and for the rest of us, the numbers being hospitalised following road crashes haven't fallen for a decade. The only reasonable conclusion is that serious injuries are not falling either, but DfT statistics suffer an increasing degree of under-reporting.

When asked to investigate why road deaths were not falling as expected, the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) deduced that "some drivers must be getting worse".

I have spent the last six years looking at road safety as a system and I'm pretty sure I know what's going wrong. Modern traffic policies are making drivers worse. This has been allowed to happen because the DfT has no working definition of what it means to be a good driver or even a proper understanding of what drivers really do. Yet driver behaviour, specifically the quality of driver behaviour, is the hidden fundamental on which all road safety depends. Unfortunately, the DfT has been taking driver quality for granted or possibly ignoring it altogether, an issue that Sir John Whitmore addressed in his most recent Telegraph Motoring column (June 2).

The process of driving is one of real-time risk management. Drivers who manage risk well stay out of trouble. They recognise risky situations and wait, hang back or steer clear.

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Of course the potential risks involved in driving are enormous. Shutting your eyes for 20 seconds would probably cause a crash, possibly ending or ruining several lives. And while driving blind would certainly be daft, this actually tells us something important. It's not so much what we see that matters, but what we do with what we see. We use it to manage risk.

Sadly, most people haven't been taught to drive as risk managers. We are taught manual skills (steering, clutch control, gear changing) and rules (go this way or that, stop here, don't stop here, don't speed, don't drink and drive).

The necessary risk management skills are acquired gradually with experience (at least as far as that experience goes in everyday driving) and they are easy to overlook because they are mostly subconscious. We learn where to look, how to recognise danger and how to respond to danger when we see it, making all sorts of subtle, semi-automatic judgements.

In particular, we learn to adjust our speed in order to remain safe in the prevailing road,

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weather and traffic conditions. The speed at which you choose to drive is an output from your own internal risk management system. Yet the DfT regards speed as an "input".

Road safety policy should have one overarching purpose - to make our roads safer. And the critical measure of success is the way road deaths are changing. If the number of road deaths isn't falling as expected in Britain, but it is falling as expected in other countries with similar economic conditions, then we know that something is wrong with our policies.

And there is something wrong with our policies. Not only do they neglect driver quality, but they are actively making us worse. We are prioritising and concentrating on the wrong things. At the heart of our policies are speed cameras, which have largely replaced comprehensive traffic policing. The dream is that cameras reduce risk, but the reality is that they are reducing the quality of our risk management.

Cameras give us legal compliance targets, not safety targets. And the divergence between the two is now very marked. We now have a nation of drivers concentrating on compliance rather than safety. The whole concept of speed cameras denies that we are capable of managing risk, yet road safety absolutely depends on individual risk management in real time. So the DfT has not only failed to understand what driver quality is but has given us policies that undermine it. Worse, it has fed us a false dogma to justify its policies. That false dogma has infected our road safety industry, with millions now believing that the only way to safer roads is slower traffic.

Yet our roads are not becoming safer. After falling for decades in spite of vastly increasing traffic, the number of fatal crashes has remained fairly static since the DfT replaced traffic police with speed cameras. If it had announced that all those traffic officers would be issued with blinkers and stopwatches and would sit on a chair at the side of the road looking neither left nor right, we would have thought it madness.

The only possible route forward is for the DfT to admit its fatal mistake and pull the plug on the failed speed camera programme. This would certainly be a dramatic step, but it is an essential one, as a mere change of emphasis would leave the false dogma intact.

We really need a fundamental change of attitude. We need to lead the world again and show the way.

Speed cameras and the official propaganda that justifies them are the cause of our current problems, not the solution. They have to go and they have to go now.

That's why the Safe Speed campaign is launching "Scrap Speed Cameras Week" tomorrow (see www.safespeed.org.uk/sscw.html), and why more than 25,000 people have already called on Downing Street to scrap speed cameras. To add your name to the online petition, which closes at midnight on Tuesday, June 26, go to petitions.pm.gov.uk/scrapcam.

- Paul Smith is founder of the Safe Speed road safety campaign.
- For more information, go to www.safespeed.org.uk.

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It is quite obvious that speeding kills, I have no great objection to the cameras but I do not think it is fair that you can loose your job for 7 miles per hour over the limit. The penalty point system is very harsh and you have no redress. I was done when the 30 limit sign was not illuminated at a busy junction and had to be careful watching other drivers and missed the dam thing after working 14 hours. There is no redress its pay up or you get fined £1000. It might as well be a £million the dole office will be paying me from now on so I have gone from a tax payer to a scrounger and for what?

Posted by Iain Falconer on July 17, 2007 9:43 PM

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Andrew Webb Writes:

"Lets have proper speed limits like 20 mph in all residential areas, outside schools and hospitals if we really care."

This is a perfect example of the fundamental flaw that exists in the UK's road safety policy.

A 20mph speed limit should never be necessary. We should trust drivers to slow to 15-20mph outside schools, even though the legal limit is 30mph.

Speed limits are exactly that - limits. They are not a target speed and should not be treated as such.

Posted by Nick F on July 13, 2007 2:21 AM

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Paul S raises some very good points about individual responsibility being removed from drivers and the consequences of this.

The anti-camera arguments are common sense: A nation of drivers that spend 5 seconds in every minute looking at their speedo and not the road is bad for road safety.

"If you are driving below the speed limit, you are driving safely" is a dangerously oversimplified message.

How can we trust the Authorities to prioritise road safety imperatives correctly when they have a vested interest in the revenue generated by speed cameras? The pro-camera arguments, on the other hand, are all meaningless numbers - 20% of this, 80% of that, 33%

of the other, repeated parrot-fashion by people who have no idea how the numbers were actually arrived at. Personally, I would happily pay another 1p on income tax or another 5p on fuel to be rid of the infernal things.

Posted by Nick Farina on July 13, 2007 2:05 AM

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Polly Smith - Read the Department for Transport reports, do the analysis of their data and you will find that Speeding, which is all that speed cameras can determine and enforce, is MOST DEFINITELY NOT a factor in 26% of fatal accidents. If you troubled to check your claims you would find that speeding contributes to less than 4% of serious and fatal accidents. Like many others, you have been beguiled and taken in by the government spin, hype and propaganda, and as a result our roads are not getting safer as they should be. Speed cameras can, at best, only reduce accidents by a percent, or so, and with the adverse effects they cause they are actual causing more accidents than they prevent. What does cause far more of the serious and fatal accidents are drivers not paying attention to what they are doing and not looking properly. Why not give more attention to that issue when driving? It would be far more beneficial to road safety than gorging at the speedometer to strictly comply with the speed limit.

Posted by Geoff, Northants on July 12, 2007 9:34 PM

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This morning I drove up the A13 in Essex and on the side of the road is a electronic sign "think watch your speed" at the time I was in a steady stream of traffic at around 60mph, now what should I watch - speed or the traffic in front of me? Last week driving up the A2 in a 50mph zone where multiple cameras are located I was following a marked traffic car at the speed limit like the other drivers around me, that car did more for speeding that day that all the camera's on that road. Everything else in the motoring world seems to get reviewed apart from drivers! These days all cars can easily break the limit so why are we stuck to limits that came in to force decades ago? In an housing estate near me I am legally allowed to do 30mph - I dont think I ever have because I dont think it is safe to. Speed does not kill, people that cannot control it or themselves do, teach people to drive, get more patrol cars on the road and you will see less problems, accidents and more importantly deaths on the road.

Posted by Roy on July 12, 2007 3:03 PM

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This whole article is based on a statistical trick. Only Holland and Sweden have lower road death rates than the UK, and then only by a small margin. The only sense in which we are falling behind is in the rate of decrease, but it is obviously easier to cut deaths from a high than from a low level (france has achieved big reductions recently, but remains substantially more dangerous than the UK).

Deaths continue to fall here, but rather slowly now. The worst thing that can be claimed is that speed cameras make only a small difference, but there are environmental and social reasons why lower speed is a good thing. More likely, speed cameras save a few lives every year. How many deaths are we prepared to tolerate to get rid of them? For me if it saves one life, that's enough.

Posted by jonathan hopkin on July 11, 2007 5:36 AM

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Brilliant Article. It is extraordinary that a qualified engineer like Paul Smith with only dedication and commitment as resources has made a far more credible and consistent case for road safety than the politicised placemen (and women) in DfT.

The DfT case for cameras has been exposed as an abuse of statistics and which has had to retreat from its more extravagant claims such as the falsehood that 33% of accidents are caused by speed. I speak as one who has driven nearly a million miles marred only by one minor non-fault accident and have a clean licence. The current climate where anti-driver zealots and short sighted politicians seek to impose their own unjustified prejudices on others and have helped to reduce traffic flow in the UK by 16% is unhealthy and doesn't help us compete in a world market where national infrastructure is essential.

It is clear that the current policies are reducing skills and reducing safety while making small change for a system ordinary law abiding people are seeing as increasingly authoritarian and corrupt.

Posted by Richard ceen on July 10, 2007 10:22 AM

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What's all this about safety - speed cameras are about collecting revenue for a cash strapped government. Also the speeding driver is the quickest and easiest way for the police to acheive their quotas.

We undertook a long journey with caravan and took the greatest of pains to keep within the speed limits. This entailed keeping one's eyes fixed on the ever changing speed limits because for example a road through a village may indicate 30 mph, another 40 mph and yet another 50 mph. There is no consistency which means that road conditions - permanent and temporary - are not an indicator of speed.

Going back to our own story, we got caught going 36 mph in a 30 mph zone but we were only going at that speed for a fraction of time - sometimes the caravan can just push the car out of the limit when going down a hill but this is soon rectified. I do not know if that is what happened to us but it would be similar and in that nano of a second we were caught.

This is made all the more infuriating because people without tax, insurance MOT and driving licence (either a comination or all four of these crimes) are getting away with it altogether or paying so little it is worthwhile taking the chance.

We live in the land of penalties (inland revenue, customs & excise) and if you wish to fight your corner which causes delays in paying the fine you can end up paying an extra heavy fine. Easier just to comply.

In the 'old' days a traffic cop would stop you and maybe let you off with a warning. There was negotiation then which can be effective - these days there is none and so often enough the crime doesn't fit the punishment but hey who cares the money has been secured and the quotas met.

Posted by Elizabeth Carbery on July 9, 2007 11:58 AM

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The Government's petition website is interesting:

Paul Smith- Scrap Speed Cameras- 28069 signatories and unsuccessful.

Cyclists- Change The Highway Code- 29870 signatories and successful.

Smith's been saying for four years that he's winning and cameras will be scrapped. I'd advise him to quit now before he becomes a laughing stock.

Posted by Oliver Hassock on July 6, 2007 2:00 PM

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So no names then?

If Smith is so credible and his silly little graphs are so convincing, how come he's a one-man band? Besides, the crucial point missed is that there does not have to be an accident for speeding to be selfish, arrogant behaviour. Speeding was named the number-one anti-social activity in the British Crime Survey. Speeding intimidates other road users (Smith doesn't even mention increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists in his manifesto- his entire one-man campaign is car-centric, as he himself admitted).

Speeding is noisy, threatening and scary for other people, for goodness sake just get out of bed earlier.

"The 2005 DfT data shows that exceeding the speed limit, which is all speed cameras can determine and enforce, is less than 4% of the contributory factors for fatal and serious accidents."

Not true. Speed is a factor in 26% of fatal accidents - probably many more.

Posted by Polly Smith on July 6, 2007 12:08 PM

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Speed cameras are an ugly, nasty and immoral way of taxing the British and have resulted in a 77 year old man being sent to prison..What kind of society are we allowing to be created in the name of 'road safety'?

And as for the idiots who approve of these things..no doubt they approve of ID cards as well...I only hope they get caught by a faulty one...

Posted by Richard on July 5, 2007 11:57 AM

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Paul Smith has gone to extraordinary lengths, and experienced considerable hardship, to expose the fallacies of the current road safety policies and the excessive use of speed cameras. This is because of his deep concern about road safety, to understand what has gone wrong and to see what can be done to put it back on track. The one thing that has stood out is the huge dependence on speed cameras.

Rather than being castigated, he should be applauded for, and supported in, his efforts.

The 2005 DfT data shows that exceeding the speed limit, which is all speed cameras can determine and enforce, is less than 4% of the contributory factors for fatal and serious accidents. "Failure to look, Poor control, Poor manoeuvres, Pedestrian not looking, Poor judgement, Poor road conditions, Impaired by alcohol, Inexperience and Poor road layout", all non speed issues, typically account for around fifteen times more fatal and serious accidents than speeding, so why don't we focus more on these issues and we might then see some real improvements.

As recent reports have shown, we have more speed camera enforcement than anywhere in Europe, but we are now steadily falling behind many other European countries in our road safety.

The recently released DfT figures show that with all of our speed cameras, and speeding fines and penalties, we are achieving no significant improvement in road safety, but in 2006 there was a 20% increase in children killed on our roads.

Posted by Geoff, Northants on June 30, 2007 4:43 PM

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As recent reports have shown, we have more speed camera enforcement than anywhere else in Europe, but we are now steadily falling behind many other European countries in our road safety.

The recently released DfT figures show, despite all of our speed cameras and speeding fines and penalties, we are achieving no significant improvement in road safety, but there was a 20% increase in children killed on our roads.

It is a pity that drivers now have to spend so much time looking at their speedometers, and worrying about the next speed trap, that they don't notice the child running into the road in front of them.

Posted by Geoff on June 30, 2007 1:11 AM

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As a professional driver, driving buses for the last twelve years, it has caused me some concern for some time that we seem to be developing a mentality that you can do what you like on the road, provided you don't break the speed limit. There seems to be some confusion between what constitutes a safe speed and the speed limit. Please note: you don't have to break the speed limit to drive dangerously. Equally exceeding the speed limit does not constitute a danger per se. The speed limits have been set in a very ad hoc way and are rather idiosyncratic. On the A680 on the road south out of Accrington, Lancs, a length of road has characteristics that apparently require a 30mph speed limit and a camera to enforce it. A further mile south approaching Haslingden, an identical length of road with identical hazards is thought to only require a 40mph limit. I would love someone to explain to me the rationale behind the difference because I can't see one. With such anomalies as this is it any wonder that many become skeptical about the value of speed limits

Posted by Robert Jump on June 29, 2007 11:12 PM

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Totally concur. The scarce numbers of traffic police is appalling. Nor does it help when some traffic cars are waiting around a corner to catch an 'illegal' left turn!

Observe, for instance, over a ten minute period after lighting up time, on any reasonably busy main or subsidiary road and you'll count an average of six cars with faulty headlamps - dangerously so when only one is working.

Posted by Peter Burian on June 29, 2007 6:24 PM

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After driving to the South of France and back last year where the driving conditions are manic (they have a speed limit which appears to be totally unpoliced and you are almost forced into driving at their speeds -- 80 to 90 mph nose to tail on packed motorways) it was with an enormous relief that I joined the M20 at Folkstone at a "speed-camera" induced sedate 70mph.

Posted by G E Bagnall on June 29, 2007 5:58 PM

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Two recent deaths in Bournemouth were Polish nationals living and working here, so no wonder the rest of Europe is catching us up, the nutters are over here!

Posted by Colin Watts on June 29, 2007 3:15 PM

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FAO Russell Jones. I think you'll find Paul's attitude towards driving is far more advanced than your own. He is campaigning for road safety, which in turn includes re-focussing the government on improving driver skill levels instead of the current government attitude (which has evidently fed down to you) of "don't exceed speed limits and you'll be safe". It's my understanding Paul does not have crashes, does not have points on his license and is an exemplary driver, so quite how you deduced that he needs driving lessons I'm not too sure. Learn to read articles properly, rather than being shut out to anything which doesn't conform to your government instructed way of life.

Posted by Mark Tonge on June 29, 2007 12:21 PM

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As a (sensible) motorcycle rider speed traps are a death trap. Riding a bike requires 100% concentration on the road conditions, other drivers, pedestrians, signposts, etc., etc. Having to constantly take one's eyes off the road to look DOWN (not in front as in a car) at the speedo is plain dangerous. Speed cameras DEFINITELY make riding more dangerous.

Posted by Alan Bear on June 29, 2007 10:53 AM

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Speed cameras are a blunt instrument, as many have said. They don't take into account road conditions, time of day, traffic volume or anything else. I had to go to court a few years ago to fight for my right to continue driving, when I had accumulated 9 points, all through cameras. The judge said "your driving record is appalling." Really, I said, well figure this into your thinking. Age 51, driving since 17. For last 30 years or so driving between 25 and 30,000 miles per year, mostly in connection with (my own) business, all over the world. In all that time, no accidents, no injuries to anyone. As my American "one and only" would say, "hey, nobody died!"

I was allowed to carry on driving, since when I have not accumulated any more points, and will be clear in Oct, God willing.

If the point is to stop speeding, that's OK. To take away one's livelihood when no accident has occurred, that's not OK. If the first fine was £50, the second £1,000 and others £2,000 thereafter, THAT would work just as well (better?), but not potentially destroy livelihoods in the bogus name of safety. Let's face it, it's easier, cheaper and makes more money to flood the place with cameras than to use marked or plain clothes cars, which I don't object to at all. (By the way, none of those camera incidents involved speeding by more than 10mph, most were early in the morning on deserted roads going to the airport or some other business meeting).

Posted by Steve Leake on June 29, 2007 10:50 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Interesting the reply to your petition on the PM's web site states:

"The facts are stark. If a child pedestrian is hit at 30mph they stand an 80% chance of surviving. But if they are hit at 40mph they stand an 80% chance of dying. That is why the Government is committed to achieving appropriate vehicle speeds on the roads as part of its integrated road safety strategy"

However, if the child wasn't hit at all because the driver was concentrating at eye level for children near the road instead of looking up and ahead for a speed camera, then there would be a 100% chance they'd survive.

There must be better ways of slowing drivers down to 30mph in areas where children are likely to run into the road which would force drivers to concentrate more on their surroundings and manage the risks.

I agree totally, I manage risk daily as part of my work and safely drive thousands of miles a year, the only accident I had recently was when I hit the back of a police car as I pulled out of a junction.....becasue I was weary of a bunch of children who had just piled out of a dance class & were trying to cross the road! Sadly, and a reflection of the bureaucracy we have now, it tied up 5 traffic cops for nearly an hour to deal with two little dents on his and my car!

This government is fond of reviews, perhaps we need a root and branch review of our road safety policies conducted by one of our European colleagues who seem to be better at it than we are.

Posted by Ian Leonard on June 29, 2007 9:57 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Seeing a policeman or police car makes you adjust your speed. Not seeing a speed camera has no effect in fact knowing that they are around makes you concentrate on your speedo and not the road. Speed cameras are a menace.

Posted by Garry Jelley on June 29, 2007 8:59 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Brilliant article, which provides many of the statistics and fact to back up the argument I have been making for years. I've no axe to grind on penalties, as I have maintained a completely clean licence for all of my 28 years driving (which includes almost all classes of motor vehicle and at least 750,000 miles), and you've only got to ask yourself - would you rather have a driver travelling past pedestrians at ROUGHLY the speed limit, watching for all the hazards, or EXACTLY 1mph under, and watching the speedo?

Posted by Phil Lee on June 29, 2007 5:20 AM

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The current system of speed cameras means that law abiding drivers of legal, registered, taxed and insured vehicles are getting penalised for very minor infringements. Meanwhile uninsured, unregistered drivers in cars with no MOT are able to drive around totally immune to this new type of enforcement. How can any mentally stable person say that this current system will improve road safety! Paul Smith does not need to name any experts! The government's own research proves that cameras are NOT working. Take the government spin off the research findings like Paul does and you too will realise that cameras do NOTHING to save lives

Posted by Julian Deverell on June 29, 2007 12:31 AM

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All the sceptics who want peer reviews and the naming of experts would do better to refer to common sense and logic, I find Paul Smith difficult to fault in these areas. As to his interpretation of the data why don't the sceptics go to the source data themselves? It's not difficult to draw a few graphs and a few conclusions too. Furthermore you don't need to be an expert to know that it's better to look at the road than your speedometer, or to understand that the real villains, the drunks and the car thieves are indifferent to cameras. Long before Paul's website appeared, in 2000 I think, I spent an afternoon in the local library studying the road traffic casualty and accident statistics. I found that the data was presented in such a way that it was exceptionally difficult to come to meaningful conclusions about the influence of cameras, but in the end I satisfied myself that there was, even then, a noticeable increase in traffic injuries since the first cameras appeared in about 1997. The difficulty in extracting the result was suspicious too, and you will find on Paul's website that he has found the same thing.

I believe the following quote is from the Report of the Commission on Road Safety, dated May 1947:-

"Any system under which fear becomes the controlling factor in obtaining the required reaction among so large a section of the public who, as individuals, are generally law abiding, is not, we think, likely to produce the most effective results. The British public co-operates with the Police because relationship between them is generally one of friendly understanding rather than submission to obtrusive authority, and the more it is realised that the policeman is the friend of the motorist and cyclist who wishes to be a thoroughly safe driver or rider, though the deadly enemy of the deliberate offender, the greater will be the co-operation between the police and road users and the sooner will the standard of road behaviour be improved"

Sixty-year-old wisdom, which is still relevant today.

Posted by G.B.Chivral on June 28, 2007 6:54 PM

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"For those poster who claim speed doesn't kill- does their confidence in this lie extend to a practical demonstration? I volunteer to drive into them at 5mph and then 50 mph, they can then indicate as best they can which hurt more. "

Susan, I'll suggest a better test.

I'll drive on a private road at what, in a built up area, is an illegal speed - 35 mph. I'll hit the brakes as hard as I can at a fixed point and where I stop, you can stand just past there. You should be nice and safe next time, right? Then I'll repeat the test at a 'legal' 30 mph, braking at the exact same point. By all the 'speed kills' logic, you'll be well out of harm's way.

Oh, sorry, I almost forgot to mention, first time around it'll be a bright and sunny summer's day. Second time around it'll be pouring with rain with a touch of fog and perhaps a little black ice. I'll also change into some totally legal tires with a good 1.7mm tread all around. But don't worry, I'm not speeding!

You indicate, as best as you can, whether speeding is always dangerous, and more importantly, whether you can be dangerous and under the speed limit. You know, the situation where the police can catch you and the cameras can't.

Posted by Joe on June 28, 2007 6:53 PM

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I was very sceptical about this piece when I read it so looked up some camera partnership data and spent a considerable amount of time on the safe speed web site, and it is difficult to draw conclusions on data presented from both sides, although the government data, transport dept data and the camera partnership data (the latter could have worked for the propaganda dept although its understandable that there fat salaries depend on the cameras) tends to contradict itself on a regular basis, Mr Smith's website was very informative, what seems to be true is speeding in itself causes few accidents in relative terms and a high% of these is stolen cars which speed cameras don't help, so the main causes are inappropriate speed and driver error what do cameras do to solve these problems? so why are we spending so much of our resources on speeding motorists? People who have lived all their lives with no criminal record are now criminals (and louts and yobs have warning given to them for criminal acts in the street) and why if we have 6000 cameras are the road casualties not dropping at a dramatic rate only 1%? and actually increasing for pedestrians!! my answer is we need a balance and on balance I think Mr Smith is doing a good job, so keep up the work Mr Smith I will be reviewing your web site with interest perhaps you may even have a new supporter.....

Posted by Derek Cook on June 28, 2007 5:03 PM

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I drive in the UK about twice a year. After a nasty fine, I have definitely become compliant, but I have also become a much less safer driver. I am concentrating on the wrong things (cameras and speed instead of anticipating situations and looking for danger). I honestly believe I am a less safe driver in Britain than when I drive in Germany, Brazil, Argentina, USA

and elsewhere. This article makes absolute sense.

That said there should be a clearly marked speed cameras outside all schools, shopping centres in 30mph areas. If you are conditioned to know they are there in those locations, then there should be no problem

Posted by julio on June 28, 2007 4:07 PM

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The overarching message here is clear and true - there are far too many drivers on our road who drive 'mechanically' and have no concept of the danger they represent to other motorists. I know this because I spend a lot of time avoiding them. Indeed, on the motorways these days the average competency is scarily low; I would guess upwards of 30% of drivers change lanes without looking either in their mirrors or over their shoulder, for example; and upwards of 80% seem to have no concept of maintaining a 'cocoon' of space around them. I am MUCH less concerned about speed of travel than this kind of sloppiness. And speed cameras are one heck of a distraction to those who are already evidently finding it hard to drive in a straight line.

Advanced driving tests should be made mandatory after (say) 2yrs qualified driving - with so many cars on the road we really can't afford to be so lax. I'm very disappointed to read so many intelligent people lapping up the 'speed kills' dogma with such fervour; in particular Susan Porter whose puerile attempt to validate it simply ignores every sensible point about 'speed appropriate to the conditions'.

Posted by Adam Neilson on June 28, 2007 1:47 PM

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Paul Smith represents a minority of people who question "trends", in this case Speed Camera fashion. I totally agree with his observation that speed cameras do absolutely nothing for safety outside the camera's field of view.

Living in Scotland I completely understand the problem. I can watch drivers heading for Aberdeen at 100 mph, reduce speed to 70 for 100 yds and then speed up again to 100+ mph. I have seen 5 police cars in two years. Drivers see speeding as a low risk activity. I too have learned that I could speed with impunity if I wished.

I spend 50% of my time in the United States. In the city of Houston, I can easily see 10 police cars each and every day. Granted there are some crazy drivers, but in most cases you see them pulled over within minutes by a patrol car. I do not speed on US roads because I know the risk of being caught by a police car is too great. In short speed cameras do nothing for road safety. Only visible policing will improve road safety.

Posted by peterj on June 28, 2007 1:38 PM

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I partly agree with your analysis. Speed cameras can be a risk increasing factor when they are placed on roads like the 40 MPH A217 Reigate - Merton, in Surrey; they cause drivers to hit their brakes just as they see one, and then pass them well below the speed limit. I have seen a couple of pile-ups, and at all accounts drivers concentrate more on looking out for cameras than on the traffic.

I now live in France, where the former Transport Minister (Gilles de Robien) has had some 800 speed cameras fitted. The result was a dramatic drop in the annual death toll, from about 8000 to 5000. But most of these cameras were sensibly placed, i.e. just before well known blackspots or motorway junctions.

Road safety must be improved, but is speeding the only offence? Speeding is definitely the easiest offence to get caught for. But what about drink and drive? I have only been breathalised twice in 24 years, and my tyres have never been checked by the Police. Why not start doing more random checks on drivers (alcohol & drugs)? Don't you think that could help?

Posted by Philip Lewis-Clayton on June 28, 2007 1:21 PM

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What a very interesting debate, and indeed quite polarised as one commentary points out. I actually think that cameras can have a positive impact, particularly red light cameras which deter drivers from jumping traffic lights. I'm certain that SOME speed cameras do have a positive effect, but having recently driven south from Edinburgh on the A1 my feeling was that the cameras, of which there are so many as to be unbelievable, are placed strategically to catch the maximum number of drivers by being in the middle of the only overtaking areas on a long single carriageway road. Even the IAM, of which I am a member, accept that for safety a margin of speed over the speed limit to execute an overtake is acceptable if not taken to an extreme. The cameras remove that overtaking opportunity, contribute to the build up of frustration and eventually the driver could try an overtake in a less safe spot with the obvious consequences.

So I'm not wholly opposed to cameras; a red light camera may have saved a friend's life; but do feel that they should be used carefully and in no way as a replacement for a well trained and human traffic policeman.

Posted by Jon Browne on June 28, 2007 1:03 PM

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There are many responses on here about how speeding kills. I don't agree, as both a car driver and a motorcyclist I believe that its the inappropriate use of speed that kills. However, that's beside the point really. Speed cameras do only one thing and that's check speed. They don't do anything about driving too close, overtaking dangerously, pulling out of side roads into oncoming traffic, driving too fast in reduced visibility, failing to stop at red traffic lights, to name but a few other offences that also kill and have killed or injured people that I know. I didn't see anything in the article that said to drop speed limits, or to not enforce them. Instead, there was an argument that speed cameras don't work. I believe that they don't work because they are too draconian and were used as an excuse to reduce the number of traffic police patrolling our roads. Traffic police in marked police cars make a real contribution to road safety, the indiscriminate use of cameras doesn't.

Posted by Chris on June 28, 2007 12:31 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Before speed cameras, driving was a pleasurable experience where people drove at a speed appropriate to the road they were on and attention was focused on what really mattered such as other road users, children on the pavement, dogs about to run into the road, cyclists, etc. The speed limits felt more "advisory" somehow and the speedometer was something you referred to occasionally. I felt that my first twenty five years of motoring were safe and fun. Modern driving is completely different. Cars are now so quiet and refined and so willing to go fast that many legal limits and particularly 70 on the motorway feel ridiculously slow. The

speedo needs to be referred to every couple of seconds for fear of straying over the limit, road signs need to be scrutinised diligently to ensure awareness of the limit at all times and one eye must be constantly on the lookout for sneakily placed cameras and mobile units. Concentrated attention on hazards and other road users has inevitably gone down the priority list in favour of a license protection strategy. The modern driving experience is stressful, boring and it doesn't feel anything like as safe. It may be a reflection of a natural descent into grumpy old manhood but whenever a group of us get together, conversation often centres on the resentment of speed cameras and the creeping erosion of our freedoms. I'm glad I was able to experience driving in the good old days before speed limit paranoia set in.

Posted by David on June 28, 2007 12:12 PM

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Smith, as usual, is correct. The vested interests of the "Safety Camera Partnerships" has been thoroughly deployed here to divert , somke-screen , and place red-herrings , as is their usual modus operandi - after all " If only a single pound is prevented from being spent elsewhere, then it is worthwhile ".

The existing system is manifestly corrupt and undemocratic - as well as being ineffective and "Not fit for purpose".

Posted by John Bull on June 28, 2007 11:32 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Speed camera's are merely another way to tax the punter. Driving tests do not teach drivers how to handle emergency situations such as skid control or how to steer out of trouble, they learn that through experience. Speed is not the main issue, appreciation of the situation and road conditions is far more important. The damaging concentration by the authorities on speed does not account for experience or vehicle handling qualities but speed cameras bring in revenue. Time and again motorists are fooled and deceived by the police and the legal system. We have no effective motoring organisations to protect us from unjust and unfair traffic policy which is currently ill informed and based on unrealistic criteria. I am afraid it is all about raising revenue, not safety.

Posted by Andrew Stewart Pryce on June 28, 2007 9:27 AM

[Report this comment](#)

First they ignore you.
Then they laugh at you.
Then you win.

Keep sending the message Paul, theyre about to lose the fight.

Best wishes, DW.

Posted by David Walters on June 28, 2007 9:10 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Removal of speed cameras is a lost cause because it provides a huge source of income whether it does or does not save lives. Unfortunately the only action that would save lives is also a lost cause. If we seriously wished to cease sacrificing ten lives a day to the God of Motoring we would stop playing guessing games as to the reasons why drivers cause their vehicles to crash, and simply make it an offence to damage the front of the vehicle in a collision and withdrawal of licence instead of a fine. Unfortunately there are too many incompetent drivers and nearly as many fictional animated cars so this will never happen.

Posted by Frank Mackey on June 28, 2007 8:21 AM

[Report this comment](#)

When will the 'supporters' of speed cameras realise that a significant number of those opposed to them are not in favour of speeding. It's just that there are better ways of reducing it. There is reasonably good government sponsored research showing that speed activated signs have at least much effect in reducing speeding as a camera but cameras vastly outnumber these devices. Driver behaviour is complex and changing it difficult. The idea that still more cameras might ultimately reduce speeding may be attractive to some but the increasing number of tickets issued suggests that this concept is flawed. All it appears to have led to is the perception (maybe correct) that cameras are more about revenue than safety.

Posted by tony branson on June 28, 2007 8:04 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Thank you Paul Smith, a light in the darkness. Thank you Daily Telegraph for publishing this article.

Fairly recently the Mail on Sunday ran an article, "Undercover probe reveals 'Bucketfuls of Money' made from speed cameras." (15.10.06)

Everybody, local councils to the treasury, are involved in a money making scam that has nothing at all to do with road safety.

When I learned to drive the emphasis was on being a good driver. We were proud of our good driving skills and have retained them. I went one step further and passed my Institute of Advanced Driving test. In now 50 years of driving I have never scratched a car or motorcycle.

Driving a car without crashing it is easy and if you want to know how, read Mr. Smith's article again before leaping to the defence of speed cameras.

Posted by Angus Munro on June 28, 2007 7:21 AM

[Report this comment](#)

What an absolute lot of nonsense. The speed cameras programme hasn't failed: it's catching plenty of drivers speeding who otherwise would not have been caught. How is that a failure? And it's certainly not the "problem" rather than the "solution". True it is that the solution lies in altering the attitude of drivers to speeding, but that doesn't for one moment make the speed camera programme the "problem". The "problem" is the speeding drivers, not the cameras! No-one in their right mind could suggest that the people are less likely to speed if the cameras were taken down. David Shaw. Perth WA.

Posted by David Shaw on June 28, 2007 12:05 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Come on ladies and gentlemen, support your statements with official DoT statistics, so that the answer stares you in the face. 2006 not yet published, but 2005 will make the point. Accidents cause death and injury, so all the causes of accidents cause these deaths and injuries. Any sensible policy maker who targets the larger percentiles of the causes would obviously be more successful than the current dimwits who base their entire policy on

targeting a lower percentile. Sometimes there can be more than one cause to an accident, so these figures allow for that. The contributing factors are:

2% Vehicle defects
 5% Emergency Vehicles on Call
 10% Vision Affected
 12% Impairment or Distraction
 13% Pedestrian only
 15% Road Environment Contributed
 25% Behaviour or Inexperience
 28% Injudicious Action
 66% Driver Error or Reaction

Paul Smith suggests we target the last three, the main causes. Isn't that just plain common sense?

"Where is exceeding the speed limit included?" I hear you ask.

Well, it represents just 5% of the last 119%, out of a total of 176%. Oh my, that 5% is exactly the same as Emergency Vehicles on Call!

My viewpoint is from 38 years of driving with no speeding convictions. Currently trying to drive my Porsche whilst constantly looking at the speedometer instead of the road.

These statistics should be common knowledge, but the Police and Government brainwash the general public with "SPEED KILLS".

Posted by Michael Williams on June 27, 2007 9:56 PM

[Report this comment](#)

So if we abandon speed cameras our roads will be safer? There may be small handful of drivers who can think they can drive safely at speed but the majority can not. Driver quality? Don't make me laugh!

No speed cameras would inevitably mean more deaths and more serious injuries on our roads. Anyone who suggests otherwise needs help...

Posted by Richard on June 27, 2007 8:33 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I live in Spain, which is about 10 years behind in speed cameras, and 20 yrs in behind in drink-driving legislation. A recent newspaper article showed that Spain has about 3 times as many accidents, injuries and deaths. The Spanish I know think they can manage the risk. So turning the clock back is not the answer.

Posted by Paul on June 27, 2007 6:09 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I seem to recall that the DfT's own statistics showed recently that travelling in excess of the posted speed limit was the cause in only 5% of accidents, yet "inappropriate speed" - i.e. driving within the speed limit but too fast for the conditions - was the cause of a far higher percentage. This very clearly supports the theory that we are not producing drivers who can assess the risk of a situation, and that speed cameras will not police these poor drivers.

I could drive home tonight and be an extreme danger to other road-users (cars, cyclists and pedestrians) without breaking one speed limit. Alternatively, I could concentrate on the road and others on it, be considerate, anticipate what others will do, look around me, indicate before turning or changing lanes and generally just be aware, and drive at 33 in a 30 zone and get a fine and points. I know which would be safer, and which I would prefer other road users to do.

The real problem is that our driver training does not teach risk assessment, anticipation or looking ahead to see what is happening, when we had traffic police they would ensure the worst culprits were pulled over and given a lecture, thereby helping to improve driving skills by highlighting, at the time of the incident, the errors being committed. Now you drive past a camera and two weeks later get a fine. This has no effect on bad driving, it just makes drivers spend time looking for cameras and at their speedo rather than at the road and those on it.

Posted by Phil on June 27, 2007 6:03 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I'm intrigued at the number of people who have decided that speed is inherently dangerous. Seems the powers of spin are indeed great. Feed people a few stock lines like "people don't get killed walking into each other" and you have the basis of a one-answer-fits-all response. No speed means no risk, so speed is dangerous. Obviously true, no? Perhaps we should all stay at home....

And we can extrapolate. How many people are injured skiing in their living rooms? So clearly skiing on snowy slopes is dangerous and needs to be regulated away. At least drivers have the excuse that they are going somewhere, skiers are just on the piste.

And angling. How many people drown in their kitchen sink? Not many. But venture near a river for nothing more than your own personal pleasure and you are at the mercy of the elements (or at least one of them). How can this be acceptable in a civilised society?

Cooking. How many people hurt themselves with knives (or fires) in the home environment? Food preparation should be left to professionals.

I know it all sounds ridiculous, but so did policing the roads via boxes on sticks until a decade ago.

But it's the evangelists who have decided speed is evil who trouble me most. There is no sensible basis for their beliefs, yet official approval has emboldened them. People, please note that the limits posted by each roadside are arbitrary, not some sort of god-given code. Some limits are too low, some too high. I'll never get caught speeding past a school because I will be exercising greater restraint than the rules of the road demand. Conversely, I've had a lifetime of hooning up and down motorways and around country lanes at triple digit speeds and have never come near to an accident. Why oblige me to waste my time observing a

pointless regulation? I like going fast. It is fun. LEave me to it. And you can go skiing.

If you hate speeding, perhaps we could reach a compromise by hugely increasing speed limits, thus instantly slashing recidivism and saving motorists from their pariah status. Everyone's a winner. After all, it is not an excess of speed that people are objecting to in a discussion about speed cameras, it is transgression of rules. Fix the rules, problem solved.

And in the meantime, real criminals will continue to get away scot-free in their non- or falsely registered vehicles. How reassuring. A penal system that only applies to the law-abiding. That's what I pay my poll tax for...

Posted by Joseph A James on June 27, 2007 3:51 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Genuine question, if Smith claims speeding is safe could he please name which roads, shared with children cycling, he would speed on? You see accidents are not the only predictable consequence of speeding. Speeding is noisy, polluting and threatening. It terrifies vulnerable road users- pensioners, pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. It divides communities and drives people off the roads. It discourages cycling because children are bullied off the roads. All over the country people are appealing for traffic calming and speed cameras to slow down idiot boy racers. Are all these people wrong and Smith alone right? What colossal arrogance! Speeding is aggressive, antisocial behaviour and apologists for criminals should hang their heads in shame.

Posted by Emma Woolworth on June 27, 2007 3:23 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Smith's credibility would receive a boost it desperately needs if he could name any of the experts he claims to have verified his work. Come on Smith, you claimed these experts exist, how about naming them?

Posted by Sheila Dawson on June 27, 2007 3:17 PM

[Report this comment](#)

"Some say Paul's research has not been peer reviewed. I have to correct this. It may not have been reviewed by those with their nose in the speed camera gravy train, but a wide range of road safety experts has reviewed and contributed to his work. These include: Police driving instructors, motorcycle instructors, RoSPA and IAM observers, medical experts and mathematics experts. "

And these experts names are...

I've tried asking the same question on the Safespeed forums and got no answer- you appear to know who these "experts" are so I'm surprised that you share Smith's reluctance to name a single one of them.

Smith has posters on his website who CLAIM to be police officers, but reading the tripe they come out with I have my doubts.. I expect you can allay these by naming those who endorse Smith's "research" from a position of scientific authority.

Cue baffled silence.

Posted by Charles Forth on June 27, 2007 3:16 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Bring back the red flag act then the kiddies can play on all the roads and drunk pedestrians can lark about with impunity.

Dual carrigeway and motorways were built so it would take less time to get from A to B, to limit these to 70 mph is ludicrous. If you want statistics can prove that the less time you spend travelling the less likely you will be involved in an accident, ergo, travel as fast as traffic conditions permit.

Posted by Mularkkian on June 27, 2007 3:15 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Having driven in several other countries in Europe (as well as in Africa), one thing I've noticed is the severity of accidents in the UK can be higher than elsewhere. Maybe this is partly due to the uniform standard of UK roads (particularly motorways) with the junction signs at 1 mile, 1/2 mile, then the last 300, 200 & 100 metre count down signs. This results in a more relaxed level of attention which then leads to more severe accidents. Also the generally less selfish, 'after you', attitude rather than the selfish me-first attitudes which seem to dominate elsewhere.

Here in France, the fairly rigid application of speed cameras in the last couple of years, although resented initially, has had a significant impact on the number of deaths on the roads. Probably reducing the severity of accidents due to excessive speed.

Posted by James Adler on June 27, 2007 3:12 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I hate the whole "Speed Kills" mantra. Especially the "If you hit me at 40mph I'm 80% likely to die. If you hit me at 30mph I'm 20% likely to die". How about if your parents teach you and keep you from playing or running in road like mine did, you wouldnt get hit at all.

The safest roads in this country are the motorways - where cars drive fastest. So its hardly speed that kills. Flexible speed limits which adapt to road conditions will still catch those driving dangerously fast, but not someone doing 43mph on a clear road in a 40 zone, which is often safer than someone doing 29mph in a 30mph with cars parked down both sides in driving rain.

As someone amazingly arguing against the removal of speed cameras said "...feeding kids, badly parking, jumping traffic signals ,pub car parks full..." all cause accidents and have nothing whatsoever to do with speeding or speed cameras.

Maybe there is an answer to make the driving test more realistic - what does the ability to make a three point turn, or reverse park into a massive space actually prove? And one day you can't go on a motorway as a Learner, the next you're free to join the fastest moving traffic with no additional training. How can that make sense?

Posted by Nigel Owen on June 27, 2007 2:32 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Absolutely right! Speed cameras say that an MOT failure Reliant Robin at 69mph in the rain at night is SAFE, and a 911 at 71mph on a dry empty road is UNSAFE! We must return to learning judgement.

Posted by Barry Charles on June 27, 2007 12:12 PM

[Report this comment](#)

How many of you who are being completely disparaging of Paul's work have actually read it and understood its message? Open your minds and think about the facts.

6,000+ speed cameras

Millions of convictions

Less traffic cops

Levelling out of road casualty reduction

Is the medicine working? I think not.

Posted by Trevor on June 27, 2007 10:40 AM

[Report this comment](#)

The problem I see in this highly divisive debate is that we can see that removing the cameras altogether might only encourage the mad and irresponsible speedsters that seem to exist everywhere outside camera-land. But reducing limits much further might result in almost everyone becoming a criminal. So what? As one who has the dreaded three points for driving in Sheffield last year on a wide, well-lit main road at 40 mph at 1 am with no traffic or pedestrians in sight - I can only agree that the law as it stands is just a blunt instrument. I have no quibble with the fact that I did indeed break the law and rightly suffered the consequence. So I accepted the fixed penalty with resignation that that it is just how it is. It was a momentary lapse and it was right to be caught, as this could have been too fast in some circumstances if, say, a child or a drunk had run into the road. But is it beyond the wit of S Yorks 'safety partnership' to accept any mitigation for intent, conditions etc? I tried but it was a waste of time. You can get a caution for drugs, stealing or even violence, but who ever heard of a 'first offence' speed caution these days, when a camera is so much easier. It would have worked with me. Instead like millions of others I just feel resentment. That is the real problem that speed cameras have brought on society. So come on Mr Brown, think of something to get us back on side. This isn't it.

Posted by John Parsons on June 27, 2007 9:55 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Speed cameras are in fact being used by the government as a self financing road policing system. The government can claim Cameras are not being used as a Stealth Tax as such because It doesn't actually create enough profit (12 million last year I believe), but what it does is feed a self sustaining cash rich business in the form of the Camera partnership group.

The simple view: A camera costs nothing to the Government, but a police officer is A DIRECT COST!

The reality: Through not reducing accidents cameras actually cost more to the government with all the associated costs and indirect costs of accidents. But these are hidden costs that that don't show up in government statistics or budgets.

The evidence for this is illustrated by the fact that the government has now altered the way cameras are paid for - from revenues from a camera being directly fed back to financing cameras (easy to see the cash link), to a Grant System (difficult to see the cash link).

Instead of doing what we all know is the obvious and right thing to do - they will carry on with cameras, change the details to fudge the issue and attack anyone that suggests going over the speed limit is safe "(Driving within the speed limit is the safe thing to do isn't it)" - No, driving with due care and attention, with skill and consideration is the safe thing to do.

Posted by Harry Makings on June 27, 2007 5:00 AM

[Report this comment](#)

First of all could somebody please tell me the definition of speeding? Our absolute maximum speed limit in New South Wales is 110 km/hr on the expressways and yet in a lot of European countries it is 130 km/hr, so if I am travelling on the freeway at 125 km/hr in NSW I am a danger to myself and the community and yet overseas I would be well within the speed limit. Speeding seems to be an arbitrary figure dictated by the politician's preference at the time. I think that NSW is going speed crazy now with even rural roads being signposted at 80 km/hr and signs being painted over for lower speeds everywhere in the state, rural and urban.

In contrast I spent a couple of months in the UK 18 months ago and found the driving easy and relaxed, we ended up putting over 5000 miles on the hire car (sorry about that!). Truth is, speeds are generally higher in the UK (especially if you can stay off A-roads) and we found that even some unclassified roads were kept to a very good standard, it also meant that when you got to a village you tended to keep below the speed limit as you knew that in a little while you could get up to a reasonable speed again, loved the VASigns at the entrance, worked so much better than speed cameras.

Unfortunately I found that when I got back to Australia all the bad habits came quickly back, aggressive behavior, stress, arrogance, the list goes on. I'm afraid that from my experience a lot of Australian drivers (me included) are pretty poor drivers compared to their UK cousins so don't be too hard on yourselves.

By the way, I'm not a young man, I'm a 55 year old male who was brought up in England but has been in Australia for 30 years.

Posted by Terry on June 27, 2007 12:49 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Oh dear, the comments section thoroughly overrun by 'speed-kills' twits I see - a concerted campaign it seems.

Well, since no one actually pays any attention in these useless 'user-generated' areas, my tuppence worth of electrons is this - all the caravan-towing, driving gloved idiots who would far rather glue their wrinkled eyeballs to their speedo than work out how they're next going to cause a crash should be strung up by the short 'n' curlies until they learn to distinguish the difference between safe driving and proceeding at a speed below the limit in whatever fashion they fancy. Most will be dangling for an eternity since you can't teach an old twit new driving skills.

Posted by Wizzaaa on June 26, 2007 10:38 PM

[Report this comment](#)

As expected all the comments refer to being caught speeding.. Risk analysis includes, in my experience , a requirement that one has followed the rules of the process, Driving is a process and "Adhering to the Speed Limit" is a requirement". So if you do not exceed the speed limit you will not be taking a risk.

Furthermore, if we all adhered to the speed limit there would be no need for cameras, costly court cases and wasting police time/money.

Posted by G S Perry on June 26, 2007 9:06 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Not everyone likes to change their behaviour, but this is a typical case requiring paradigm change. Paul Smith is right concerning this. This also explains why so much readers complained about Paul's work focus.

Posted by Yoichi Kajiki on June 26, 2007 7:27 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Paul Smith seems to have become the chief anti-speedcamera rent-a-quote, appearing wherever there is a related story but pedalling the same message regardless.

He claims to have spent the "last six years looking at road safety as a system" but it seems more apparent that he decided what he wanted to believe and then spent the last six years looking for evidence to support this point of view.

Much of his research appears to be somewhat dubious voodoo science and his central argument is this article is entirely flawed. Speed cameras cover only a tiny fraction of the road network - but they're somehow responsible for drivers being unable to assess risk on the other 99% of roads? It doesn't even begin to make sense, does it?

Posted by Ken on June 26, 2007 2:20 PM

[Report this comment](#)

"Paul Smith has spent the past few years of his life studying reports, statistics and facts about road safety. He does this almost 24/7 and is without doubt one of the worlds foremost experts in road safety." Really? Care to list Smith's published work, verified and peer-reviewed as with all scientific research? Points deducted if you merely say "it's on his website". The reality is not one word of Smith's laughable "research" has been peer-reviewed. I could set up a website saying porridge gives you cancer- wouldn't make it true any more than Smith's confused ramblings. This article is irresponsibly pandering to those drivers who feel that their right to drive dangerously overrides all other considerations.

Posted by Graham Forde on June 26, 2007 1:37 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I figure Smith could have achieved more in terms of road safety if he put more effort into road safety and less into his war on cameras. But then that is a bit dull, not very emotive and unlikely to get one on telly or many visitors to one's website. Far better to whine on about unfair cameras (even though there are far bigger things in the world to worry about) and make out that sensible speed is fine and acceptable. So more people will speed and more people will die. There's a lot of bad karma coming that feller's way.

Posted by S. Garnett. on June 26, 2007 12:56 PM

[Report this comment](#)

"Paul Smith has spent the past few years of his life studying reports, statistics and facts about road safety. He does this almost 24/7 and is without doubt one of the worlds foremost experts in road safety." Errrrm, would it be Paul Smith's expertise and insightful gift for discussing road safety that lead him to proclaim that cyclists are more dangerous than light goods vehicles? You can still see this bizarre nonsense on Smith's website. The real danger is that an irresponsible speeding driver may take Smith's word as truthful...

Posted by Karl Meadows on June 26, 2007 12:51 PM

[Report this comment](#)

One factor that must not be forgotten and that is the apparent safety and sophistication of modern vehicles. We drive in protective cocoons that mask the reality outside. Compare the humble Mini of today to its predecessor of the 60's. Today the interior of the Mini allows normal conversation at speeds far exceeding the national speed limit, a quiet flexible engine and gearbox, exemplary suspension, brakes and road holding generally and a calm comfortable atmosphere in the cabin. In these conditions one can become oblivious to the dangers developing outside the safety shell. The Mini of yesteryear was noisy, the gearstick "sizzled", the chance of achieving the national speed limit was a challenge, you felt every roadmenders patch, air conditioning was the window open a little or a lot and the non-servo brakes required a degree of forethought. In essence inside the cabin you couldn't help, but be aware of the road conditions. Therefore people drove with an added level of caution, because no one in their right mind wants to end up at the scene of an accident.

In summary modern cars allow us to drive unwittingly to the extreme.

Posted by Roger Collar on June 26, 2007 11:43 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Speed cameras are all about "stealth" tax and nothing to do with safety. Put cops back on the roads, and give them some discretion. The law is an instrument to be used with skill and intelligence...

Posted by alun thomas on June 26, 2007 9:09 AM

[Report this comment](#)

I am in favour of scrapping the speed camera's as other measures are more effective

Posted by D Hassanian on June 26, 2007 8:05 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Not for the first time, Paul Smith writes complete balderdash in denigrating 'speed cameras. If Mr Smith had a toothache he would, naturally, visit a dentist for treatment. And if he had a bellyache or pain in the neck he would seek treatment from his doctor. So, as he obviously has a chronic problem with his inability to drive safely and responsibly in accordance with the laws of the land, why on earth does he not visit a professional driving instructor and purchase a course of remedial driving lessons? It is a perfectly painless operation and he would then be able to enjoy his motoring much better afterwards. Before attending the course, he would be well advised to adopt a much better attitude towards driving, which is often the underlying cause of the problem!

Posted by Russell Jones on June 25, 2007 11:59 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Paul Smith has spent the past few years of his life studying reports, statistics and facts about road safety. He does this almost 24/7 and is without doubt one of the worlds foremost experts in road safety. We then read comments from closet "experts" who know nothing at all except than their own limited experience damning this expert assessment of road safety in the UK. All those blinkered and self opinionated supporters of the current approach to road safety should ask themselves one simple question. Why has the number of people killed on our roads stopped falling when other similar countries (where speed is not considered the primary cause of collisions) are witnessing a continuing decline? The only answer is contained in the article above. Read it properly, digest what is being said and understand the truth about the message "speed kills" It is this message which is fundamentally preventing the improvement in UK road safety.

Posted by Ron Spencer on June 25, 2007 10:56 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I ride my bike fast, within the prevailing conditions. Sometimes very fast. Why? because I like it. And who is mostly at risk? Me. However, I don't push my luck, I always ride within given limitations. Rules are for the strict obedience of fools, and the guidance of wise men.

Posted by Gordon Buckman on June 25, 2007 9:56 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Why do you constantly give this man publicity?

Posted by Edward Baxter on June 25, 2007 8:25 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Tom Heavey

I am glad You are not teaching anyone I know how to drive. You have clearly not understood the article, and statistics prove you wrong. I am a flying instructor, and am quite aware that my students, when they leave me, will initially be at their highest risk. Then, if they continue to fly, will become progressively safer, especially after the first 200 hours.

The same applies to drivers. Statistics show that the highest-risk drivers are those with little experience. The reasons are detailed clearly in the article. Ignorance of such basics of safety suggest driving instructors are failing their students; it shows a lack of culture of safety awareness, and even ignorance of his own lack of safety culture.

Posted by Richard on June 25, 2007 6:37 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I see that Portugal has the same approach as Spain, i.e. traffic lights that change to red if the oncoming driver is exceeding the speed limit. This type of device is often found in small villages in Spain and is a jolly good idea.

Spain also has the sensible rule that permits overtaking at up to 20km/h above the posted speed limit, therefore making it legally possible to overtake obstructive traffic, rather than amble past sedately just to stay within the speed limit.

In Colombia, the situation is entirely different: the national speed limit is 80km/h and most roads are in such appalling condition that it is usually impossible to exceed the limit!

Posted by SJK on June 25, 2007 6:10 PM

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Keith Brown asks "Would any, properly trained, driver care to supply a coherent reason why these things should even be a source of discussion?" I would.

According to the data released by the police over many years, speed above the limit is a causative factor in less than 3% of accidents, and is a contributor to less than 4%. What's more, since speed limits are erected by people with very few skills or experience in safe driving - sometimes by people who don't even drive at all - it's not surprising that speed limits don't seem to play much of a part in road safety, and enforcing compliance therefore can't significantly help accident rates.

Here's something else funny. Most of our accidents happen in adverse weather. Everybody knows you should slow down in bad weather. But it's not enforced, or even encouraged (because we're all concentrating on the legal limit). So, the rain starts, or the fog comes down, and the country is paralysed by crashes. Speed cameras just make this worse.

We've tried it. Our accident rate (which fell at a steady 5% per year for 50-odd years) had now levelled off and is in some areas increasing. We no longer have the safest roads in the world, we are distinctly second-division. Enforcing speed limits isn't saving lives - it's costing them. We tried it. It didn't work. Now it's time to try something different - either return to what was working before, or try what other, more successful countries are doing.

We know that the biggest cause of accidents in the UK is not speeding, it's tailgating - that is clear from the accident statistics compiled by the Police. In Germany, for example, they have laws about tailgating, and automatic tailgating-enforcement cameras. They are still showing a reduction in accidents and injuries. We don't, we don't, and we're not.

Posted by Jules May on June 25, 2007 5:34 PM

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Speed Cameras cause accidents because they are something for which drivers keep a careful watch for, along with the 47 other road signs per mile. They therefore are not concentrating on pedestrians, children playing, animals, (I recently hit a stag, very slow speed thankfully), and other road users.

Make the test tougher and the MOT stricter, safer drivers in safer cars is the answer, not artificially reducing speed.

Every major city in Europe encourages cars to get to their destination quicker and thus get off the road. Not Here. Slower and Slower, destroying air quality and reducing concentration!

Posted by David Coulter on June 25, 2007 4:45 PM

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The problem is that the Police are relying on cameras to do their jobs for them. The Government and the Police are moaning how drink driving rates have increased, well obvious isn't it? A camera cannot pull you over to the side of the road and breathalyse you or check that you actually have a licence, can they?

Posted by Dave on June 25, 2007 4:34 PM

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An article such as this always brings out the same polarised comments. We should have higher limits on motorways and trunk roads to reflect the developments in car safety over the years since the 'temporary' 70mph limit was introduced. with slower limits in more buuilt up areas.

Posted by Paul on June 25, 2007 3:41 PM

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I think there is a massive logic jump from saying our roads are not getting safer despite speed cameras to saying speed cameras are causing road safety to decline and that they should therefore be abolished. Of course if you caught speeding you will get fined as this is a deterrent to stop you doing it again.

Paul Smith's arguments appear to suggest he has been hit in the wallet a few times by speed cameras. Those of us who have never had a speeding fine seem to be quite content for speed cameras to be placed on our roads. I wonder if thats a coincidence? I doubt it!

I think if we we're all honest we would know that a) sometimes we drive too fast; and b) sometimes we don't pay enough attention while driving. And we should welcome road safety initiatives that encourage us to control our speed and to be more careful on the road.

Posted by Bryan on June 25, 2007 3:13 PM

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Those who think speed cameras are a good idea seem to rely on being rude about the author of the article, not any form of reasonable argument. Big surprise from the self-righteous "we know best" brigade that has taken over the UK. Face facts: most of us speed much of the time and 99.99% of us do not have or cause serious or fatal accidents. Any activity that is undertaken by millions every day in safety is clearly not dangerous - those who claim otherwise are simply bamboozled by large-sounding numbers. Nor are cameras located at "black spots": the location of accidents is random and thus accidents will show clusters over a short, 2-3 year period. The locations will then revert to the mean and magically accidents at most of the clusters (where the cameras are) will go to zero. Speed cameras are a flawed p[olicy carried out in a flawed way and supported by people who like to boss others around using spurious and junk science.

Posted by Tim on June 25, 2007 3:02 PM

[Report this comment](#)

For those poster who claim speed deosn't kill- does their confidence in this lie extend to a practical demonstration? I volunteer to drive into them at 5mph and then 50 mph, they can then indicate as best they can which hurt more.

Deal?

The claptrap Smith puts out is depressingly familiar. He has no evidence for his claims other than his pretty graphs which he claims "proves" that he is right and every single official published evidence is wrong.

Smith's relentless publicity seeking is depressing, and his attitude encourages reckless speeding since he serves as an apologist for speeders.

Speeding kills, cripples and intimidates vulnerable road users.

Slow down or get out of bed earlier for goodness sake!

Posted by Susan Porter on June 25, 2007 2:36 PM

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With the exception of a few cameras most are simply automated PR/Spin intended to make people feel something good is being done.

Now we've got rid of Blair perhaps we can get the government to really concentrate on the causes of life's problems instead of papering over the gigantic cracks in their ill thought out policies.

Posted by Neil Jones on June 25, 2007 2:26 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Some say Paul's research has not been peer reviewed. I have to correct this. It may not have been reviewed by those with their nose in the speed camera gravy train, but a wide range of road safety experts has reviewed and contributed to his work. These include: Police driving instructors, motorcycle instructors, RoSPA and IAM observers, medical experts and mathematics experts. Only 4% of accidents are caused by speeding. 95% of effort is spent lowering limits and rigid enforcement.

the result is a focus on compliance rather than reacting to danger. cameras do more harm than good.

Posted by nigel virgo on June 25, 2007 2:21 PM

[Report this comment](#)

A small exercise in semantics and statistics here. If we were once the safest in Europe, then obviously our RATE of road safety improvement will be less than anybody else, as we are already much further down the road.

There is no mention of deaths and serious injuries increasing, but the number of cars on the roads is increasing. The logical assumption would therefore be that the number of injuries/deaths per vehicle has decreased, an improvement?

Just what is the truth?

Posted by Ian K Pestell on June 25, 2007 2:12 PM

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The fundamental problem is not speed cameras, it's the drivers. The average British driver is convinced that they are above average and rarely make mistakes, and are therefore somehow qualified to break laws that keep the most vulnerable safe. In my experience, the average British driver is seriously incompetent, and having been passed by vehicles doing well over the 60mph speed limit in pouring rain an hour ago hasn't changed my view.

Posted by Richard Burton on June 25, 2007 1:42 PM

[Report this comment](#)

The entire argument regarding speed trap cameras should be academic. I completely ignore them. By virtue of the fact that I look at, and observe, the speed limit notifications I have no need to look out for Speed trap cameras and, indeed, have never been "caught" by one. Would any, properly trained, driver care to supply a coherent reason why these things should even be a source of discussion?

Posted by Keith Brown on June 25, 2007 1:31 PM

[Report this comment](#)

What a healthy debate Paul Smith has created!
Something that occurs to me as missing from the discussion so far is responsibility. One of the contributors mentions the storm of instructions; what to do and what not to do and so forth. Even on a short journey you will see anti-skid surfaces, maximum speed signs for bends and a storm of information much of which requires a reduction in the concentration on the actual situation, couple this to the sophisticated stability and safety systems found in many cars and we find that the driver is largely absolved of almost all responsibility to make a decision (or 'risk assessment') for themselves. The line between driving a real car with flesh and blood people in it and a video game becomes finer.
These safety aids are exactly that: aids. Not a replacement for common sense, processing information and planning the next moves.
All road users have a right to safe highways and also a responsibility to use them so as to ensure the safety of others and oneself.

Posted by Woody on June 25, 2007 1:28 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Paul smith is quite right, speed cameras have only one job, As an automated tax collector. I agree that cameras which are placed near schools and such like are needed. But you only have to look at the number of rear end shunts caused by drivers slamming there brakes on because they " Think" they may be driving a few miles over the speed limit, this causes them to take their eyes off the road frantically looking at the speedo in panic and hitting the brakes, I've seen it time and time again! we need more driver education and more police patrol cars!

Posted by Daniel bates on June 25, 2007 1:13 PM

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Speed cameras are a façade for road safety the government uses in order to appear to be doing something. Where the proclaimed success is achieved only through faulty statistics - I am in no doubt that these devices were never intended for and could never improve road safety but only for generating revenue.

Posted by Andy on June 25, 2007 1:12 PM

[Report this comment](#)

speed cameras were not the correct solution in the first instance and removing them all is not the right course of action. a small proportion of the speed cameras probably do genuinely reduce accidents where they are positioned near "accident black spots", its the mindless positioning of cameras on roads where there is no necessity that needs to be addressed.

Driver ability, and the lack of it in the majority of cases, can only be addressed by enforcing regular assessments of driver standards, this is where independant organisations such as the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) should be consulted by the government and given a higher profile. I recently passed the IAM advanced driver qualification and found it an eye opening experience. like many drivers i thought i was a good driver and made good decisions when driving, however the system of driving that the IAM teach made me realise how little useful observation i actually did when driving and how little information i actually used. it is these elements of driving, the observation and use of information, that is the key to safe driving.

Posted by D Mannion on June 25, 2007 1:08 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I WOULDN'T scrap cameras, but I would limit fines to cover costs only.

Instead I would limit driving licences to fixed durations of entitlement. (eg. 10 years). The photocard licences are already time-limited but for identity NOT entitlement.
When one reaches the end of the licence period, the licence is reviewed. 0-3 points incurred and it can be renewed automatically, 4-8 pts and the licence holder must sit a theory test to continue driving, over 9 pts and it's an automatic full driving test. In the case of multiple vehicle category entitlements, the theory & practical tests would be for whichever category was for the largest vehicle. Any new entitlements gained would be able to run until after the second renewal (ie max of 20 years).

Adopting such a program would increase driving standards across the board.

Yes, costs would increase, but only for bad boys & girls!

Posted by Jon on June 25, 2007 12:39 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Speed cameras are dangerous, plain and simple. There are several on the A12 in London just north of the Blackwall Tunnel located at merge points (3 lanes into 2). Just at the point where you need to be watching for traffic merging in someone's stuck a speed camera in so you're watching the speedo instead.

Driving fast is not dangerous. Driving TOO fast is dangerous. Speed cameras won't catch "too fast" - if someone's driving too fast and is over the speed limit they'll simply slow down for the camera then accelerate away afterwards. And of course if they're "too fast for conditions" (but within the speed limit) the cameras won't catch them anyway.

Tom Heavey would do well to read the concealed TRL595 report which shows that speed cameras in motorway roadworks not only increase crashes they also increase the severity of crashes.

Let's get these dangerous devices removed from Britain's roads as soon as possible.

Posted by Glenn on June 25, 2007 11:38 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Paul's repeated requests to scrap the speed camera would certainly be extremely damaging to road safety. Speed cameras are providing very effective protection for our most vulnerable group of road users, the pedestrian. Scrapping speed cameras would certainly cause an increase in the number of men, women and children killed on our roads. Speaking as an ex

driving instructor, his criticism over the driving test standard is also flawed. The driving test has been based on decades of development, not merely a few thousand hours of research and is perfectly fit for purpose. When passed, it produces perfectly safe and competent motorists as the driving instructor addresses both the cognitive and motor functions of driving a vehicle. Sadly, once the test is passed both the cognitive and motor function skills associated with competent vehicle control start to deteriorate rendering the experienced motorist increasingly vulnerable to collisions. It is the degeneration of these same skills that cause so many motorists to speed passed speed cameras, that also cause so many fatalities on our roads. Paul however does have one valid point, driving standards have to improve, but these standards must improve BEFORE the numbers of speed cameras are reduced and not the other way around.

Posted by Tom Heavey on June 25, 2007 10:50 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Agree with every word. Speed cameras are bad anyway because they reduce situational awareness, but their insidious cumulative effect on driving skills (remembering 93% of accidents are not caused by excess speed) is quite possibly worse.

Of course the irony is that speed limits are (or at least should be) set to define safe driving speeds under good driving conditions. Under poor conditions e.g. fog or heavy rain, these speeds will not be safe and drivers need to use their own judgement to determine a safe speed.

Thus with speed cameras we have the stupid situation that drivers are not trusted to assess what is a safe driving speed in perfect conditions but *are* trusted to do so when conditions are bad...

Posted by Phil on June 25, 2007 10:31 AM

[Report this comment](#)

There is a simple contribution to this, and that is of course more traffic police who can monitor and guide us in our risk management. However, there is one fundamental flaw, and that is it will cost money, and the british taxpayer is not prepared to pay, all they want is lower taxes. On the basis that speed cameras are at least self financing (they wouldn't be if we didn't have a problem), then they can/should be an assisting tool in managing one of the determining factors in the seriousness of injuries, speed. In our village, it was quite normal to see the traffic flowing through in excess of 30mph. Since we have had a speed camera installed, the speed of traffic through the village has noticeably fallen. I for one feel safer because of this both as a pedestrian and a driver. This could also be achieved by having a traffic policeman in constant attendance, which is of course not practical, or by better education and training, which as yet, we are still a very long way away from. So for now, we still need the speed camera. The most effective ones being the average speed cameras which reduce a drivers speed, and makes sure this speed is maintained for the duration.

Posted by Ian K. Pestell on June 25, 2007 10:24 AM

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"We now have a nation of drivers concentrating on compliance rather than safety."

That one astute sentence sums up the folly of relying on these Greed Scameras.

Posted by Steve on June 25, 2007 10:11 AM

[Report this comment](#)

This doesn't surprise me. I have had a clean licence since taking my test in 1966 and my wife is now so bored by my commenting "look at that idiotic driving" nearly every time we go out in our car. Tailgating, road rage, excessive speed in inappropriate road conditions, poor lane discipline etc etc appear to be the norm - joining the M4 westbound or eastbound from Reading, where we live, is a scary experience.

It is so obvious to me that the standard of driving in the UK is falling.

We spend a lot of time in France and over the last three or four years have witnessed a dramatic improvement in the way people drive there. There are still some French people who will overtake in a suicidal manner, but bearing in mind what French drivers used to be like, there has been a marked improvement in driver behaviour. Although the French have introduced speed cameras, both fixed and mobile, the gendarmerie still have a very obvious presence and pull drivers in at random to check for violations of the traffic law. We need our police to do the same.

Posted by Howard Kitson on June 25, 2007 10:06 AM

[Report this comment](#)

They are certainly right about drivers' inability to manage risk, but to address that we need to enforce better training of drivers, not scrap speed cameras. And what about operating the camera at my local crossroads to catch red-light jumpers when I'm trying to cross the road?

Posted by Nigel Kavanagh Brown on June 25, 2007 10:05 AM

[Report this comment](#)

I have no doubt that speed cameras will not be scrapped despite any number of petitions. The reason is that, just as here in New Zealand, speed cameras have nothing to do with road safety and everything to do with raising huge amounts of cash for the government.

Posted by David Hawk on June 25, 2007 9:34 AM

[Report this comment](#)

"Shutting your eyes for 20 seconds would probably cause a crash" Was this man paid money for his "insights"?

Posted by Declan Ryan on June 25, 2007 9:00 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Perhaps Mr Smith could tell us what training he has, what qualifications in statistical processing he has passed and why he refuses to submit a single word of his "research" to peer review. Anyone can set up a website and draw pretty graphs in order to "prove" something, the real test is whether the person making such surprising claims is qualified to do so. I have my doubts in Mr Smith's case.

Posted by Alexander Savage on June 25, 2007 8:55 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Driving in Portugal recently was an enlightening experience. Rather than punish speeding by fines the authorities use fixed speed monitors to regulate traffic lights along the roads. If you go faster than the speed limit the monitors turn the next set of traffic lights red and you journey have to stop. And at the next and the next... Drive within the limit and your journey is unimpeded. How enlightened is that? I need not comment on the British approach!

Posted by James Chapman on June 25, 2007 8:33 AM

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This story hits the nail on the head. Bad driving is the cause of accidents, not speed itself. Inappropriate use of speed is simply indicative of bad driving. We need far more real traffic police to enforce good driving standards, and much better continuous training for drivers.

However, I disagree that or roads are becoming safer, indeed they are becoming more dangerous. Road surfaces are getting worse, there are more and more complicated junctions to cope with traffic, indeed traffic volume itself is growing.

I passed an IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) advanced test twice. The IAM simply teaches quicker risk identification and better risk management - i.e. Better driving.

Posted by J Morgan on June 25, 2007 8:31 AM

[Report this comment](#)

It is an undeniable fact. Speed cameras can only monitor speed, they can only monitor speed in one precise area and do not check or modify driving behaviour and while they remain the predominant method of enforcement, drivers will seek ever more devious ways to defeat them.

The mobile traffic patrol however, cannot be fooled. It has trained officers with the skill to detect poor driving, be it ever so subliminal, with the added dimension of judgement as to whether to prosecute or just to advise. Their role in prevention is incalculable: how is your driving affected by being followed by a traffic car, or just by seeing one at the roadside?

I travel the UK road network extensively and am frequently left wondering if the mobile patrol has ceased to exist. I can travel in excess of 200 miles and see only one police vehicle, two if I am lucky. This cannot be a good thing. Their highly visible presence on the road leads to improved driving behaviour and an altogether safer road. This affair with 'Big Brother' policing has to be seen for what it is, a moneymaking exercise and not a serious attempt to enhance our safety.

Posted by A Driver on June 25, 2007 6:58 AM

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I agree with the article completely. Speed cameras do nothing about drunk driving, dangerous driving and so on. This allied to the failure of the police in general in other areas rural crime for instance has resulted in their alienation by the mostly law abiding motorist

Posted by David Pepper on June 25, 2007 6:20 AM

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What improvements there have been in road safety over the years has nothing to do with the DFF. It is because cars are much safer now: ABS brakes, energy absorbing structures, improved handling, etc, etc. We have the car manufacturers to thank.

Posted by Christopher Larmer on June 25, 2007 5:43 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Unfortunately, they are no longer safety items - purely revenue raisers. More Police costs more, cameras give money back so despite their total inability to improve safety on the roads, they will only proliferate as the bean counters will no doubt advise. You can't beat the reduction of civil liberty, and you certainly can't be allowed to think for yourself or even imagine yourself to be qualified enough to make your own decisions. That's what the government is there for.

Posted by Henners on June 25, 2007 4:39 AM

[Report this comment](#)

This whole thing reads like the whining of someone caught breaking the law by a speed camera. "It's not fair". Grow up man, the easy way to avoid speeding fines is to drive safely. Too many apologists for criminal behaviour around these days, I can't help mugging someone cos I'm poor, I shouldn't get a speeding fine cos I'm a fabulous driver, sheesh.

Posted by Dr Oliver Stewart on June 24, 2007 6:53 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I agree. Speed does not kill; Inappropriate use of speed does kill. The New Average speed cameras are fundamentally flawed: as J. Clarkson has already voiced, they make you concentrate absolutely on the speedometer rather than "reading the road". They also have the added bonus of encouraging the practice known as "tailgating", as if you drive very close to the car or lorry in front, the cameras cannot read your number plate (and the closer to the vehicle in front the better) and thus Mr Brown won't be sending you a nice request for cash even if you complete the distance to the next camera at 250mph. It is not much of a leap to see how dangerous this could be; as a result I refrain from this practice, but as a result run the risk of being caught marginally over the speed limit on an empty dual carriageway.

Posted by Andrew from Cambridge on June 24, 2007 4:57 PM

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The Government targets speed simply because it's easier to measure and fits with their overall philosophy of managing people as though they are machines (egged on by 'safety partnerships' that have made millions on the back of motorists).

We don't just need to get rid of speed cameras, we need to get rid of the strangely secretive Department of Transport that for years has operated as though the people who pay their salaries are the enemy.

Posted by Scary on June 24, 2007 3:53 PM

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Paul Smith seems more interested in scoring political points than saving lives. Lack of police presence is a real problem, but other than removing speed cameras and criticising other initiatives, what positive initiatives does he propose?

Posted by Vicki Stone MBE on June 24, 2007 12:26 PM

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Good points, well made !

And I suspect it's not only road safety that's being adversely affected by the current fashion for focusing so much on what can be measured by simple automatic devices & simple processes !

Posted by Chris Hunter on June 24, 2007 11:50 AM

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Paul is correct of course, but it will be difficult for the purveyors of the "speed kills" dogma to admit fault.

In truth, I believe that there is a good case for a class action against the authorities on this point. It would be very difficult for them to argue complete ignorance of all the evidence that would have been available to anyone seeking the truth.

For example, we have been aware of the relationship between demand and human performance since Welford's familiar inverted U-shaped curve graphically depicted the fact that human performance increases as demand (stress) increases, up to a maximum at an individual optimum level of stress, and decreases as demand increases past that point. Society has habitually perceived the speeder as a person who cares little for their safety, and even less for the safety of others. Welford's research could be used to show that the reason why some people tend to drive faster than others is more related to their particular optimum stress level position, implying that people who habitually speed are actually doing so to ensure their safety, and the safety of other road users.

This may not be correct 100% of the time, however, it is far closer to the truth than the dogma peddled by the authorities - speed kills, etc. - that ignores driver skill, experience, and wholistic behaviour.

If the truth be known, most drivers are safe despite the incompetence of their training and government interference intended to make them safer. After all, we have our lives at stake, governments only risk bad publicity if they get it wrong, and even that has been cleverly twisted to their benefit with the Speed Kills Mantra.

Posted by Peter R Callil on June 24, 2007 10:39 AM

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It is not only in the UK where this is a problem. Here in Melbourne, Victoria, the place where the speed camera was first used, we have the same problem. Speed cameras were meant for us to have safer roads and reduce road deaths & injury. In fact after a few years of improvement this has now flattened off.

The real problem is the standard of driving not speed. If drivers do not look beyond the tail gate of the car in front, or look left or right before changing lanes, what hope is there.

Posted by sim_in_mel on June 24, 2007 9:43 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Slowing down allows one to manage risk. So slow down. And when you get home safely, do read the Highway Code [link](#)

Posted by HenryCrun on June 24, 2007 9:39 AM

[Report this comment](#)

At last, sanity returns!!
Thank you Paul.

Posted by r.cross on June 24, 2007 9:11 AM

[Report this comment](#)

How many people are killed by walking into each other? Not many, so I suspect speed really is an issue in any accident. Speed cameras stop me speeding because the thought of having to pay large fines bothers me a lot. It might be a coincidence that I haven't had an accident for a long time and I'm happy about that.

Posted by rob semple on June 24, 2007 8:54 AM

[Report this comment](#)

Reducing road casualties obviously demands more than speed enforcement alone, and holding drivers to be properly accountable for their actions would make a major contribution to making our roads safer. However, without speed enforcement many drivers would treat the public road as their private race track to a greater degree than they do already, especially those who have no interest in 'risk management' but are overt risk-takers and thrill seekers. Even the everyday driver is unlikely to ever perceive the true level of risk they are taking, especially with the safety of others, something which is inescapably a product of the over-confidence of most drivers in their own abilities and the many safety features built into modern cars. The biggest error with the current speed enforcement regime was the shift to widely advertised, 'high visibility' cameras. This effectively gives motorists the green light to drive at any speed they think fit anywhere there isn't a bright yellow box by the side of the road. As a consequence, although casualties have fallen at most camera sites, this has been offset by rises in casualties elsewhere. We also need to get away from the view that speed enforcement is entirely to do with casualty reduction. Speeding intimidates vulnerable road users and reduces the quality of life of those who live alongside a road, which is most people. Until motorists demonstrate the ability to drive responsibly and that they actually understand what an 'appropriate speed' is by driving slower than the legal limit whenever the road conditions dictate, speed enforcement will remain a necessity, if only to reduce the seriousness of the consequences when the poor skills of most drivers sooner or later results in a crash. To give such unskilled drivers the green light to drive at any speed they think fit before improving their skills would be a recipe for disaster! The bottom line is that no matter what the cause of a crash - and speed almost always plays a significant role in the complex chain of events which results in a serious or fatal crash- the primary determinant of how serious the consequences of a crash will be, however caused, is the speed of the vehicles involved.

Posted by Howard on June 24, 2007 8:33 AM

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The standard of driving in London has deteriorated markedly in the past 20 years - the roads are simply unpoliced. Speed cameras are a joke - I've witnessed a collision where a driver hit the brakes approaching a speed camera only to be hit by the vehicle behind. When I phoned the police whilst following a drunk driver, who was swerving all over the road, they were not

interested – despite the fact that he crashed into then reversed off a pedestrian barrier – presumably the police were happy for Joe Public to pick up the bill for its repair rather than prosecute the driver responsible.

We are hounded and fined by police with laser guns because “speed causes accidents” - and yet when an actual accident does occur, such as to my friend recently who was knocked off his motorbike by an uninsured driver, the (Met) police handed the keys back to the uninsured man and sent him on his way as they didn't have the facilities available to impound the car. That is surely criminal negligence? Putting up more speed cameras that only affect those who drive legally while there's an explosion in the number of illegal drivers sickens me, it proves it's a revenue generation scheme rather than for road safety.

There is no political will amongst the Guardian reading people in power to clamp down on illegal drivers, it will clog the already over-burdened “Justice” system as well as uncover the scale of illegal immigration and general lawlessness in London – things the left are only too happy to bury.

Posted by Steve Lee, London on June 24, 2007 1:36 AM

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Lets think out of the box. How can we make people risk adverse - when it gets expensive. Vehicles of all types might become an un-insurable risk with no legal remedy to recover loss from a third party - if its damaged in any way its your problem. Damaged vehicles might be automatically impounded and scrapped unless the owner pays for repairs. Third party injury insurance might be compulsory for all owners, operators and drivers. Personal injury compensation awards and medical bills should be ultimately recoverable from the insured. I wonder how risk adverse drivers and vehicle operators will be if their asset is totally vulnerable to their own actions and the actions of those sharing the road around them. They will be even more careful with the total absence of any 'cushion' from the consequences of causing personal injury. By the way, I don't exclude train companys from this ethos...

Posted by Graham W on June 24, 2007 1:14 AM

[Report this comment](#)

While Paul Smith's arguments are dubious to say the least and his conclusions are, for the most part incorrect, he has made one telling point – we do need a fundamental change of attitude.

Research shows that speed is a factor in a significant number of accidents. Research also shows that a small reduction in overall average speed does bring measurable reductions in both the number and severity of accidents. Yet on today's roads few cars travel at or below the speed limit – except in the vicinity of speed cameras. Along with a general problem with speed, we also have widespread problems with driver behaviour ranging from inconsiderate driving to outright aggression and bullying. Add to this the arrogance of drivers like Paul Smith who believe that their superior skills allow them to decide for themselves what an 'appropriate' speed is, which, by implication, could be above the limit, and we have the situation today where road safety in the UK is not improving as it should.

What we need is for drivers to chill out a little. For drivers to be in less of a hurry, for them to show more consideration for other drivers, and, more importantly, for non-motorised road users – pedestrians and cyclists.

We also need more and better enforcement from the police, including more, rather than fewer speed cameras, particularly of the mobile, randomly sited variety. We should also have more towns and cities following Portsmouth's example of blanket 20 mph limits.

Posted by Boyd Johnston on June 23, 2007 9:56 PM

[Report this comment](#)

I am surprised and disappointed that the Telegraph has chosen to give credence to the irresponsible and indefensible arguments of Safe Speed by choosing to publish them. We have speed limits particularly in urban areas, not only for the safety of drivers who might feel inconvenienced by them, but for the safety of the innocent others who they might hit in accidents - a fact that Paul Smith seems to ignore completely. The 20 and 30 mph limits in our town and city streets are for the protection of the pedestrians, particularly children, who live on those streets. Mr. Smith may dispute the fairly overwhelming evidence regarding the role speed as a factor plays in causing accidents, but I doubt that even he could pretend that an accident at 60mph would be no more harmful than one at 30mph. Small wonder that parents today feel that it is no longer safe for their children to play outside with people like Paul Smith exploring the limits of their risk management skills nearby. Speed cameras may not be 100% effective, but they do send a message about the type of reasonable care that people and communities expect drivers to exercise on our streets, a message that Mr. Smith might have the courtesy to acknowledge.

Posted by D. Clift on June 23, 2007 9:28 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Oh good grief, not Paul Smith. The man who's drawn loads on interesting graphs on his website that “prove” that speed cameras kill people. What qualifications does this chap have again?

Posted by Lucy Benjamin on June 23, 2007 8:53 PM

[Report this comment](#)

Absolutely spot on and perfectly expressed. I have been trying to propose this argument for years, but not having access to a newspaper column means that no-one outside my immediate circle listens. Thanks for bringing it to the attention of many.

Posted by Malc Johnstone on June 23, 2007 8:16 PM

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This guy is a complete fruitcake! Why on earth are the DT giving him space? His views don't seem to be based on any evidence whatsoever and patronise the intelligence of the average motorist. I'm a motorist and would like to see many more cameras to deter speeding - speeding drivers are a menace and a danger to all of us. And so are Smith's views.

Posted by Keith Hemmings on June 23, 2007 7:47 PM

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The advice in this article is far to sensible for Britain's incompetent government to follow.

The reason that the government has replaced traffic policing with speed cameras is purely fiscal.

Posted by Gervas Douglas on June 23, 2007 7:10 PM

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I agree with the needs of having traffic police not being met, however I do not agree with abolition of speed cameras despite being uncomfortable with their presence. We need both. There are numerous speed cameras used in Europe without the apparent detriment we suffer from. Perhaps the UK is just doing things on the cheap. It could be worse however. The US has few cameras but poor driver training and negotiable speeding tickets. The standard of driving is very poor with commensurate fatalities and accidents

Posted by Neil Redpath on June 23, 2007 7:01 PM

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What a load of rubbish - how can you publish this kind of guff without giving some comment. This is just opinionated claptrap, no evidence, just trying to stir up trouble. Of course it will appeal to those who let the car control them instead of the reverse. This writer should be made to attend road traffic accidents with the ambulance service until he can see the error of his ways. Of course it is the driver, not speed itself which is the problem- you only have to walk the roads any housing estate to see car drivers using mobile phones, speeding, feeding kids, badly parking, jumping traffic signals ,pub car parks full ,etc. But-until these people can learn to control themselves, a camera system is one of the best ways to identify these culprits.

Posted by r sharp on June 23, 2007 4:46 PM

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Coercion promotes rebellion. In between the speed cameras drivers are actually going faster. 100mph is common on motorways and on our local trunk road, the A14. Modern behaviourist theory teaches that the carrot is far superior to the stick. Too much stick and no carrot is where road safety is going wrong. I find "kill your speed" signs particularly offensive and would like to see them all replaced with "Think thirty" or "Thank you for driving safely". We now have a police state and the mentality that goes with it.

Posted by Nick Wilson on June 23, 2007 4:09 PM

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What an excellent, factual rebuttal of our elected servants' abdication of their duty in favour of lazy money raising.

Police Traffic Departments have been transformed into undermanned Road Policing Units - as if roads, as distinct from the traffic on them, need much policing.

As the police presence has declined, the standard of driver behaviour has followed downwards, but redressing the balance will require vision and cost money, so don't hold your breath.

Posted by Richard Hook on June 23, 2007 3:09 PM

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What's the problem?

Risk management for what?

All those motorists who feel that speed cameras are not the right answer to driving too fast see the problem from the sensible perspective of the majority.

But it's not the majority who kill and maim, it's that small section of irresponsible motorists who have no respect for life and limb, who don't care about safety, insurance, pedestrian crossings, speed limits, etc.; so-called 'risk management' for them is a laugh.

So, keep it simple, drive carefully and if you don't want a fine don't drive over the limit. If you feel that keeping down to a certain speed level occasionally forces you to glance at your speedometer and this glance lies outside your driving ability then you shouldn't be on the road. Don't forget - the weakest road users aren't protected by airbags and crash-designed bonnets.

The laws need to be strictly adhered to and strictly administered.

Posted by Ian on June 23, 2007 1:49 PM

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I have been connected with safety cameras since the initial trials from 1988 onwards leading the team undertaking the trial of such devices in the Metropolitan Police Department of Transport project evaluation. I am satisfied that the cameras do save lives when used appropriately and are not responsible, in themselves, for accidents - the skill and inattention of motorists, however, is. Cameras saw a significant decrease in KSI (killed and seriously injured)

accident figures. The early years of the scheme saw the cameras deployed by Police specialist officers and traffic engineers at significant accident locations and a 'top down' approach isolating the greatest speeds (and the potentially serious accident candidates) for sanction and hopefully leading to behavioural change. The present profusion of cameras and the apparent acceptance of the inevitability of a speeding penalty by the motoring public (and recently insurance companies) has led to a proliferation of cameras and the application of penalties for marginal offenders. The reduction in accidents initially was accompanied by a reduction in many areas of specialist traffic patrol police officers patrolling the road network. Now we see an increase in KSIs due to fewer Traffic Police and a lack of respect for a camera system that targets marginal speed offenders in large numbers rather than the potentially most dangerous drivers. It is said that speed kills - it is in effect the consequences of rapid deceleration when things go wrong! - the greater the speed the more serious the consequences. The Police have been seen to be chasing their own Home Office Policing targets and showing little sympathy for the Department of Transport targets. Surely now is the time to consider a national traffic police akin to the American Highway Patrol tasked by the Department of Transport. Cameras could then be applied to national penalty standards, driver education made a priority and policies developed to reverse the increasing KSI figures.

Posted by Derek Walker on June 23, 2007 11:59 AM

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So the rest of the world is wrong? More speed cameras are being installed across Continental Europe and roads deaths are falling. Those with active knowledge of safety performances across many industries will know that initially, there is a reduction of incidents when new measures are introduced. This reaches a plateau as you are then maintaining your performance. The last bit is extremely difficult to achieve. Safety needs an arsenal of tools to maintain and improve levels. Speed cameras are part of that, driver education and others are also part of it.

Lets have proper speed limits like 20 mph in all residential areas, outside schools and hospitals if we really care.

Posted by Andrew Webb on June 23, 2007 11:16 AM

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Go and sign the petition - not that it will make any difference - this government is deaf and blind as far as reacting to what the electorate wants.

Posted by Julian Marsh on June 23, 2007 10:15 AM

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Paul Smith has got it absolutely right; British drivers are over-regulated and can't assess risk properly. The proliferation of road signs prohibiting this and that also means we are overloaded with largely irrelevant information which distracts attention from what is happening on the road. Thanks Paul; you've put my thoughts very well indeed!

Posted by Alan Gilmour on June 23, 2007 9:57 AM

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The only cameras that may be justified are the ones looking at jumping red traffic lights & even then I remain to be convinced.

Otherwise get rid of them now.

I spend virtually all my driving time looking for speed limit signs, cameras and keep my eyes glued to the speedo whenever anywhere near a camera or a camera sign. I may be compliant with the limits but it is only a matter of time before I cause an accident because I am not observing my surroundings as much as I want to.

Not my choice but at least I keep my licence. As say, get rid of the camera & make the road safer.

Posted by david on June 23, 2007 9:29 AM

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What a jaundiced view this man has. The answer isn't to stop the Police looking for rapists and murderers, so they can educate drivers. The correct application of technology has got to be the best way to manage the millions of car journeys that take place every day.

Posted by Annette Klass on June 23, 2007 9:24 AM

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I agree absolutely with Paul's position: driving well is about risk management. The resultant driving/speed culture is about avoidance of being caught out by a compliance target and most of us spend 50% of driving looking in the hedge/lay-by for speed cameras; this can't be good for safety. Perhaps the policy makers should undergo leadership/management training and understand how our most successful organisations get the best out of their workforce through culture change and buy-in.

There are, however, some very good examples of well sited, well signalled speed cameras at dangerous junctions; I'd buy in to that policy across the country.

Posted by Geoff Arnott on June 23, 2007 8:44 AM

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"The number of fatal crashes has remained fairly static since the DfT replaced traffic police with speed cameras."

In the years since this was done, traffic density in the UK has increased substantially, but as you yourself admit, the *number* of fatal crashes has remained "fairly static". Sounds like the speed camera program is a success to me.

Posted by Mini Driver on June 23, 2007 8:38 AM

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I absolutely agree with Paul Smith. I have been out of the UK for four years, and on my return I have been amazed by the growth of distractions that are placed on the road by the authorities. Cameras, warning signs, road markings all draw away the driver's attention from the real job of driving safely. I believe that many drivers in this environment are lulled into a false sense of security and drive in a rather lazy way. Next time you are on the road just notice how many drivers don't even bother to use their indicators to signal their intentions.

Posted by Rod Harrison on June 23, 2007 6:15 AM

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Cameras are located only at specific sites where they can do good. Collisions at junctions in

towns, or on rural roads cannot be dealt with by cameras. True, traffic policing has been heavily reduced, but where are the officers to come from? Few drivers are actually good drivers and standards do need to be improved substantially. I am an observer with the IAM and meet drivers who have poor knowledge of traffic signs, many bad habits and lack basic skills, despite having driven for years. Its great to improve their skills. Cameras (fixed ones being signed and painted yellow) are here to stay and Safespeed must realise that. Keep to the speed limit and do not tailgate is my starter message for safe driving. I could say more, but there is insufficient space.

Posted by Peter on June 23, 2007 5:59 AM

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Well said. I live in Peru where the drivers are essentially nutters, but manage risk better than any part of Britain. I rarely see accidents -at least not in town, where driving would terrify most British drivers. Not a speed camera in the country.

I've been saying for some time that there is a fundamental flaw in UK traffic policing and this article puts the case precisely.

Posted by Pablo Miguel on June 23, 2007 12:17 AM

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