

# NEWSLETTER



## The Cardiff Group Of Advanced Motorists



November 2004

July 2011

Group's Web Address : [www.cardiffiam.co.uk](http://www.cardiffiam.co.uk)

# DIARY 2011

August – NO MEETING AS USUAL

***Thursday, 1st September 2011 at 7.30pm***

Group Meeting, Lisvane Memorial Hall, Heol-y-Delyn, Lisvane, Cardiff  
Sept – Cardiff Police Driving school presentation

***Thursday, 6th October 2011 at 7.30pm***

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Lisvane Memorial Hall, Heol-y-Delyn, Lisvane, Cardiff  
We are hopeful that Chief Constable Peter Vaughan will be able to attend.

***Thursday, 2nd November 2011 at 7.30pm***

Group Meeting, Lisvane Memorial Hall, Heol-y-Delyn, Lisvane, Cardiff  
Details to be confirmed.

***December 2011***

XMAS MEAL – Details to be confirmed.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS WHO HAVE PASSED THE  
IAM ADVANCED MOTORISTS DRIVING TEST**

Mr Denzil Richards	Observer – George Grant
Mr David Randall	Observer – Gordon Davies

**FEWER PEDESTRIANS KILLED AS DRIVERS STOP SPEEDING**

Latest road safety figures from the DfT show that compliance with 30mph urban speed limits continues to improve while pedestrian fatality levels are falling.

In 1998, 69 per cent of cars were driven faster than the limit in 30mph zones in free-flow conditions – by 2010 this had dropped to 46 per cent. Those exceeding 40 mph in a 30mph limit has halved since 2003, now down to 16 per cent. At the same time, pedestrian fatalities have also reduced significantly, down 40 per cent since 2005 from 671 to 405. Ninety-six per cent of pedestrian accidents happen on urban roads.

Reducing traffic speeds and risk in towns has been high on the road safety agenda, but rural roads, on which drivers are still most likely to be killed, now require even greater priority to reduce casualties further.

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: “The good news is that drivers are not driving faster on the less crowded roads – and more people are sticking to the limit in urban areas where there are many hazards. A combination of consistent road safety messages, new road layouts and police enforcement appears to be paying road safety dividends for city people. However despite this positive effect in urban areas, road safety on rural roads, where the majority of serious accidents and fatalities occur, needs much more attention. In the UK, between two-thirds and three-quarters of fatalities occur on rural roads, yet driving on rural roads still isn't a mandatory part of the basic driving test. Most young drivers get plenty of exposure to urban hazards but often their first experience of a rural road comes after the test when they are on their own. This is unacceptable.”

## **MOTORING TAX IS HIGHWAY ROBBERY**

Only 38 pence of every pound that motorists pay at the pump is for fuel - 62 per cent is tax in the form of fuel duty and VAT, according to Motoring taxation and public spending, the latest report from road safety charity the IAM.

The report also finds that:

- The percentage of tax paid at the pump rose from 47 per cent in 1980 to 75 per cent in 2000. It has fallen to 62 per cent in 2010 as a result of increases in the price of oil.
- In 2010, the pump price of petrol increased by 27 per cent and that of diesel by 18 per cent. In the first half of this year the pump price of petrol increased by eight per cent and diesel by 12 per cent.
- Motorists paid £28,747 million in tax and duty in 1985-6 compared to £43,885 million in 2007-8 in real terms<sup>1</sup>.
- While motorists are paying more generally, the amount paid per individual car owner has fallen. More cars on the road are spreading the tax burden among more motorists.
- The government spends only about one-third (£12,752 million) of its total tax revenue from road users (£43,885 million) on roads and local public transport.
- Increased spending in the past decade has been mainly on public transport; spending on local roads has also increased substantially but is likely to fall considerably from now on.
- Since 2002, the government has spent more on rail infrastructure than road infrastructure, although rail is used for only seven per cent of all passenger travel. In 2008 the government spent £4,807 million on road infrastructure compared to £5,567 million on rail infrastructure.
- Motorists and businesses spend ten times more on buying and running their vehicles (£42,700 million) than the government spends on roads (£4,807 million).

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: "Using so little of the taxes motorists pay on road upkeep is plainly unfair. Motorists are also paying the price as Britain's potholed and increasingly dangerous roads take their toll, damaging tyres, wheels, steering and suspension. Cuts are clearly going to have an impact on transport investment, but as more roads become more potholed and dangerous, spending on infrastructure now will save money in the long-term."

## **CAR USE DOWN AS FUEL PRICES RISE**

Eighty per cent of drivers have changed their driving behaviour to save fuel, according to the IAM's latest opinion poll. Of the 2,500 people polled, half said they had changed to a more eco-friendly driving style.

Other changes in behaviour include:

- Making fewer journeys (38.10%).
- Walking shorter journeys they previously would have driven (34.54%).
- Using public transport more (21.48%).
- Cycling shorter journeys they would previously have driven (19.19%).
- Buying a more fuel-efficient car (18.08%).

Drivers are not keen to give up their cars completely – 74 per cent were against this idea – but more than half said they stick to the speed limit to keep fuel consumption down, and more than 70 per cent check their tyres regularly. Turning off the air-con and emptying the car of unnecessary clutter were also popular methods.

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: “The days of cruising the motorway at eighty, regardless of the cost, are over. With rocketing fuel prices it is clear that drivers are changing their behaviour, which is good for their health and the environment. You don’t need a new car to become a greener driver. You just need to change your driving style.

“For millions of motorists driving is a necessity, not a luxury. Rural drivers especially need their cars for work, socialising and family life. If drivers can reduce their car usage that’s great, but for those who can’t, driving as economically as possible is the answer.”

How to improve your MPG and cut carbon emissions:

- Keep your vehicle moving rather than stopping and starting. Look further ahead and slow down earlier to avoid stopping. Driving at a constant speed is far more fuel efficient than heavy accelerating and braking.
- Check your tyres. Under-inflated tyres have a big impact on fuel economy.
- Put your car on a diet. Remove unnecessary weight, including roof racks, car clutter and heavy items in the boot.
- Try to avoid using air conditioning and climate control at low speeds as they increase fuel consumption. Open a window. But at high speeds, close your windows to maintain the aerodynamics of the car. Use air-con to get the car to a comfortable temperature, and then turn it off to save fuel.
- Clean screens rarely mist up - so you'll use the heater and air-conditioning less.
- Try changing up your gears earlier; for petrol engines at 2,500 rpm (revs per minute), and diesel engines 2,000 rpm
- Reverse into parking bays: manoeuvring with a cold engine uses more fuel, so make the most of having a hot engine.
- It will take most cars at least a couple of miles to warm up and run efficiently. Could you walk or cycle?
- Drive at an even pace over speed humps. Slowing down and speeding up drinks more fuel.
- Stick to the speed limit

## **MOTORISTS DISTRUST SPEED CAMERAS**

Less than a third (29 per cent) of Britain's motorists think that speed cameras are only used at sites with a bad record of crashes and injuries, and 50 per cent think that raising money is their primary aim, according to Public Opinions of Speed Cameras, the latest research report from road safety charity the IAM.

The survey of more than 1,000 respondents also shows that support generally for speed cameras is high at 79 per cent. The highest level of support is in London (85 per cent approval) and the lowest in the North East (67 per cent).

Seventy per cent of motorists agree that speed awareness courses are a better idea than prosecution. The greatest support for this is among 17 to 24 year-olds with 82 per cent in agreement. In contrast, 65 per cent of the over-65s think they are a good replacement for prosecution.

The survey found less support for using the income from these courses to fund cameras – 48 per cent support this, but 34 per cent actively disagree. However, 17 to 24 year-olds are once again the most likely to support the proposal.

Eighty-one per cent of all respondents think that speed cameras contributed to falling road death rates over the past decade and nearly half of all respondents think that road deaths and serious injuries would increase if cameras were turned off.

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: "Support for cameras is strong as is support for speed awareness training rather than fines or points. Prosecuting and fining drivers does not improve driving skills or awareness of the hazards of excessive speed. Training would reduce the number of casualties and prosecutions. That so many young people want this is very positive. Many motorists are still cynical about the aims and deployment of speed cameras and much more work needs to be done to dispel their negative perceptions. In times of cut-backs to police budgets, speed cameras are an essential part of the policing tool kit, but it's clear that the public need reassuring about their purpose and funding."

## **CARS ARE GETTING GREENER**

Today's cars generate 14 per cent of all CO2 emissions in the UK, marginally less than in 2000, despite an increase of 4 million cars on the road according to Energy use and CO2 emissions, the latest motoring facts report from road safety charity the IAM.

While carbon emissions from all forms of road transport continue to rise, the rate from cars fell from 196 grams of CO2 per km in 1997 to 174 grams CO2 per km in 2008. Total UK emissions are forecast to increase but those from cars are set to continue falling.

The report also finds that:

- People's perception is that cars and aircraft are the two biggest carbon polluters, when in fact the top two are power stations and industry.
- Since 1997 the overall fuel economy of new cars has improved by a quarter, mostly in the last ten years.
- Average new car fuel consumption for petrol cars fell from 8.28 litres per 100km in 1997 to 6.93 litres per 100km in 2008.

- Households produce as much CO2 as cars.
- The biggest single consumer is the energy generating industry itself when it converts one form of energy into another (for example oil to electricity) and through energy lost in distribution.

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: "Despite what many green experts may say, Britain's drivers and the motoring industry are doing their bit to reduce carbon emissions. Drivers are shifting to greener engines and have embraced incentives like cheaper vehicle excise duty for more fuel efficient models. Manufacturers should also take credit for producing models across the range that are cleaner and greener. But driving style is crucial - the best fuel-saver is a light right foot and anticipation of the road ahead."

## **MEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN WOMEN ON THE ROADS**

Men are more likely than women to be involved in crashes because of bad driving habits such as driving too fast and drink-driving, according to the IAM's latest research report "Licensed to skill: Contributory factors in road accidents".

When comparing men and women, men are nearly twice as likely to be involved in a collision due to being careless, reckless or in a hurry. They are also more likely to crash because of poor behaviour or inexperience.

The main differences highlighted in the report are:

- Careless, reckless or in a hurry is recorded more frequently for men (ten per cent) than women (six per cent).
- Travelling too fast for the conditions is recorded more frequently for men (seven per cent) than women (four per cent).
- Poor driving behaviour or inexperience is recorded more frequently for men (14 per cent) than women (ten per cent).

However recent research by the IAM shows that women and men aren't so different when it comes to driving behaviour and attitudes. Most men and women enjoy driving, and rate themselves to be confident, considerate and safe.

But almost twice as many men as women claim to be "very confident" drivers. IAM chief executive Simon Best said: "These results show that we need to look at the psychology of male drivers to reduce risky behaviour and over-confidence, but for both sexes accidents could be easily reduced by improving driver skills and lives could be saved. The government is moving towards this by introducing driver training for careless driving offences but all drivers should consider training. Driving is a life-long skill that requires life-long learning."

## **DRIVERS WANT TRAINING NOT FINES, SAYS IAM POLL**

Only 15 per cent of drivers think that fixed penalty notices are the most effective way to tackle careless driving, according to a poll of 1900 people by road safety charity the IAM.

Forty per cent of people think that careless drivers should take compulsory driver training, while 33 per cent think it should be tackled with verbal advice from a police officer. Ninety per cent of drivers think that there should be a choice between paying for driver improvement training and penalty points.

Seventy-seven per cent of respondents think that serious offenders should have their vehicles seized and 59 per cent that all disqualified drivers should be made to retake their driving test.

IAM chief executive Simon Best said: "This poll shows broad support for the government's road safety strategy, but that fixed penalty notices are not popular. The vast majority of crashes are caused by driver error, they are not deliberate - fining drivers is punitive and does not improve driving skills. Driver quality is the key issue in improving road safety. This poll recognises that driving is a skill that needs refreshing and updating. More courses to address poor driving will make our roads safer."

## **IS 80 THE NEW 70?**

More than 70 per cent of drivers and riders think that the UK motorway speed limit should be increased by at least ten mph according to an IAM poll of over 2000 people.

Not only do people feel that the limit should be higher, almost 60 per cent say they would be more likely to stick to an 80mph limit than they are to the current limit of 70mph.

Nearly 60 per cent of people also admitted to travelling above 70 mph when traffic is free-flowing and uncongested, with 20 per cent of those travelling at 80 mph or faster. The survey reflects the latest DfT research of free-flowing motorway speeds, which found that 52 per cent of cars exceeded the 70 mph speed limit and 16 per cent travel at 80 mph or faster.

IAM director of policy and research Neil Greig said: "Even though motorways are the safest roads, increasing the motorway speed limit is a controversial subject. This is why we want to see a trial to test its impact on road safety, fuel consumption and driver behaviour. A new 80 miles per hour limit would need to be properly enforced to make sure that it does not become an excuse to drive at 90. Shortening journey times for people travelling at quieter times, as transport secretary Philip Hammond suggests, is a good idea, providing it doesn't have a negative effect on safety."

## **2020 VISION – IAM TO CHANGE DRIVER BEHAVIOUR TO REDUCE ROAD DEATHS**

Road safety charity the IAM launched its ten-year road safety strategy earlier this summer, which proposes that the road safety industry should aim to reduce road deaths on UK roads to 1,000 a year by 2020, saving 1,000 lives over the period. The strategy supports the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020.

With the vast majority of crashes caused by human error and lapses in concentration, the IAM believes that tackling driver and rider behaviour is the key to cutting road deaths. Cars don't cause crashes, drivers do.

The key focus of the strategy is to target those drivers at highest risk:

- young drivers
- older drivers
- motorcyclists
- business users
- cyclists

For its part the IAM is developing products, such as Momentum for young drivers and DriveCheck 55 for older drivers, as well as promoting advanced driver, motorcycling and cycling training. These are proven to improve road safety.

The IAM also want to see driving on rural roads - the most dangerous – to be part of the driving test and a new post-test training system for young drivers which builds on the success achieved in Austria. There, further training in the first 12 months after passing the test has reduced young male fatalities by nearly 30 per cent.

The IAM's driver training company, IAM Drive & Survive, will be working with businesses to train their company drivers and will encourage these companies to only use suppliers who make sure their employees are trained as well.

IAM chief executive Simon Best said: "We want to see five-star drivers in five-star cars on five-star roads. Cars and roads are getting safer so it's time to concentrate on the driver by improving their skills and behaviour. Over the decade we will work with around 200,000 road users through education and coaching on driving, riding, cycling and commercial driving. That's 20,000 people a year who will be safer. As the government looks to publish its road safety strategy we believe that over 1,000 lives can be saved in the next decade by continued partnership between government, local authorities, enforcement agencies and education bodies. This also means a cost saving to the UK economy of £1.8 billion over the period, with each fatal accident costing society £1.8 million. But 1000 deaths is still a tragically high figure. Everybody needs to work together to reduce it further. For example, insurers should offer discounts to young drivers who have taken more training after their test. Equally every individual has to take responsibility for their own road risk, whether that is taking the initiative to improve their driving through further training, or simply taking a bit more care."

## **RAIN ON THEIR PARADE?**

Road safety charity the IAM is offering weekly motoring tips from Britain's top advanced driver, Peter Rodger.

The IAM is advising drivers on how to deal with sudden heavy rain showers, following weeks of dry weather. IAM chief examiner Peter Rodger said: "Rain after a long period of dry weather makes the road surface extremely slippery. A combination of oil, loose gravel and dried rubber all prevent the tyres working efficiently."

Rodger offers the following tips on driving carefully in the wet:

- Visibility will be reduced. If you encounter a sudden downpour, slow down to the point where you can stop within the distance you can see to be clear.
- Stopping distances will also be far longer than on dry roads. Allow at least twice as much time as usual to stop - at least four seconds. Make sure you have plenty of tread on your tyres for optimum grip.
- Think about replacing those dodgy windscreen wipers that have been smearing for a while – fresh wipers will help you cope with unexpected showers. It's also worth trying one of the products that remove rain from the windscreen which extend the life of the wipers.
- Keep your windscreen bottle topped up with water and an appropriate screen wash – don't use washing up liquid, which causes needless smears. Dead flies on the windscreen are a particular issue over the warmer months, and also smear horribly when wipers are used. Clean the inside and outside of the screen regularly and you won't get caught out if it suddenly rains.
- And if the weather is causing flash floods, do you really need to make the journey right now?

## **GIVE YOUNG DRIVERS LIFE-SAVING SKILLS**

The IAM will continue to work with the government to introduce a new system of post-test driver training to reduce the rate of serious road accidents involving young people.

In 2009 young car drivers accounted for 27 per cent of all car driver fatalities, and 2,026 young car drivers were killed or seriously injured. And with driver and rider error behind the top three causes of fatal and serious crashes, the message is clear – young drivers need more experience and training.

IAM chief executive Simon Best said: "The government is right to prioritise saving young drivers' lives in its new ten-year road safety strategy. Having analysed systems of post-test training from other countries, we know that the best examples have reduced young male deaths by almost 30 per cent."

The IAM wants to see accredited training offered to young drivers in the first 12 to 18 months after passing the basic driving test. This would include:

- Training by qualified instructors.
- An initial on-road assessment to gain knowledge of their experience and to highlight any deficiencies.
- Off-road practice in handling in the wet, speed into corners and the impact of speed on stopping distances.
- Benefits such as cheaper insurance for young drivers who complete the training.

Best said: “The first year as a car driver is important for building up the driving experience necessary to reduce the risk of crashes. Post-test training with in-depth coaching on driving techniques, and extra hours behind the wheel – with an experienced instructor – will prevent accidents. We offer our full support to the government to develop life-saving training for young drivers.”

### **MY OTHER CAR IS A SPACE SHUTTLE**

*(with thanks to Jeremy Taylor, Daily Telegraph)*

When the final Space Shuttle blasted off from the Kennedy Space Centre on July 21, astronauts waved goodbye to 17,300mph travel and a journey strapped to a 526,000-gallon fuel tank.

After 12 days, 18 hours, 28 minutes and 50 seconds - not to mention 200 orbits around Earth during a journey of 5,284,862 miles - Atlantis landed safely, marking the end of the Shuttle programme.

More than 600 men and woman have rocketed into orbit since the first Shuttle launch in 1981. But how do they get the same adrenalin rush here on Earth? Astronauts might push the boundaries of performance and speed in space, but if you think they all drive Porsche 911s at full warp, you would be mistaken.

Mission specialist Michael Reed Barratt has spent 199 days in space and was a crew member on one of the last missions in 2010. “Flying in the Shuttle is the ultimate experience but back on Earth, many of us drive low-emission cars. I have a Toyota Prius hybrid and you will find most astronauts are environmentally friendly guys too. I am one of the lucky few who have looked at Earth from space and seen how incredibly beautiful and fragile the atmosphere is. The message I try to bring back with me is you’ve got to drive more environmentally aware and protect your planet. It’s the only one we have.”

Captain Mark Kelly is a Shuttle veteran of three missions. He is married to US Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot in the head in a shooting spree in Arizona in January, and he has strong views on the environment. “I drive a Ford Fusion hybrid because I have seen how delicate our planet’s atmosphere looks from space. When you are 250 miles up, it’s a wonderful sight. It’s also very worrying to see how thin that atmosphere has become. Flying the Shuttle is a major rush – it’s like taking control of a runaway train travelling at 17,000mph. The vibrations on lift-off are incredible and you just hang on. There’s nothing like it and I guess that’s one of the thrills.”

During the early days of the Space Race in the Sixties, Nasa astronauts were supplied with a fleet of head-turning Chevrolet Corvettes, even though they were not supposed to make product endorsements.

Navy pilot Alan Shepard was the first American in space in 1961. He was also the original "Astrovette" and became a figurehead for the brand (above, centre). So much so that one of his original cars is on permanent display, parked next to the Saturn V rocket at Kennedy Space Centre Visitor Complex.

Scientist Roger Crouch was a payload specialist on two missions in 1997. "If the Shuttle was a car it would be a Lamborghini – it's an incredible piece of machinery that isn't very practical for many of the chores it is asked to do. "When I left college I did drive a Corvette for a couple of years but got way too many speeding tickets. I now have an old Honda CR-V and a Toyota RAV4 but I wouldn't consider a hybrid just yet. What has impacted my thoughts most after looking down on this planet is the melting of the ice caps through global warming."

Astronaut Susan Kilrain flew two Shuttle missions in the Nineties. "I think we Americans need to rethink the way we get around and start promoting rail systems more. We really have to get away from the petrol cars which are clogging up our roads. The coolest car I ever drove was a Corvette ZR1 that my father gave to me. "I drive a Ford Escalade at the moment because I have four kids but if there was a hybrid vehicle that carried six people, I'd buy one."

Not all astronauts can kick the speed habit, though. Astronaut Dr Thomas D Jones drives a Chrysler Sebring Convertible, Col Robert Springer has just swapped his Porsche 911 Turbo for a Lexus SUV, while Captain Jon McBride has a 2003 Corvette.

Al Worden was the command module pilot for Apollo 15 and is one of only 24 people to have flown to the Moon. "I drive a Porsche 911 cabriolet because it's a very hi-tech car and a joy to own. I don't like big cars that cover the chassis with lots of sheet metal. I like them compact, with great performance, driveability and fantastic finish and fit. If the Space Shuttle was a road vehicle it would just be a truck, carrying items to and from the Space Station. The Apollo rocket I flew was a real sports car. It got us to the Moon and was very manoeuvrable and fast."

There remains one out-of-this-world car that every astronaut longed to own but only six actually drove: the famous Lunar Rover Vehicle (LRV). It was nicknamed the "Moon Buggy" and went in to space with Apollo missions 15, 16 and 17. Three examples of this battery-powered two-seater bounced over the Moon's surface, ferrying equipment and samples back to the lunar module. Manufactured by General Motors, it featured Velcro safety belts and an antenna shaped like an upside down umbrella.

If you want to see one, a test version is on display at the Kennedy Space Centre Visitor Complex ([www.kennedyspacecenter.com](http://www.kennedyspacecenter.com)). Otherwise, book a seat for the first commercial Moon flight, where the original three are parked, silently gathering space dust.

## THE FACTS:

### SPACE SHUTTLE

Price: £1 billion

Length: 184ft 2in

Seats: Seven

Engine and fuel: Three Rocketdyne units powered by liquid hydrogen/oxygen mix

Max power: 400,000lb of thrust per engine at lift-off

Max speed: 17,320mph

0-17,300mph: 8.5 minutes

Fuel consumption: 290 gallons of oxygen and 775 gallons of hydrogen per second

Standard equipment: Suction toilet; remote manipulator arm for spacewalks; exercise equipment

### TOYOTA PRIUS

Price: From £20,845

Length: 14ft 6in

Seats: Five

Engine and fuel: 1.8-litre petrol-electric hybrid

Max power: 134bhp

Max speed: 112mph

0-62mph: 10.4 seconds

Fuel consumption: 72mpg

Optional extras: Solar glass "moonroof"; satellite navigation

## NOW IT'S STRICTLY COME PARKING

*(with thanks to Chris Russon, drivingforce.uk.net)*



It's a manoeuvre feared by many a driver but former Tory MP Ann Widdecombe discovered there's now an easier way to park your car.

The popular contestant in the recent Strictly Come Dancing series took up a 'Strictly Come Parking' challenge featuring the active parking system now available on the latest Ford Focus. The exercise put the one time Shadow Home Secretary's reverse parking skills to the test as a panel of judges scored her technique, spatial judgement and finesse. Then she tried the same manoeuvre using Ford's Active Park Assist, which controls the steering of the car into a parallel parking space, while the driver concentrates on the accelerator and brake. "It is any woman's parking dream," she said.

According to a recent survey commissioned by Ford, 39 per cent of UK drivers need more than one attempt to park their car at the roadside.

The auto park system uses 10 ultrasonic sensors mounted around the vehicle to identify a space big enough to park in and then completes the manoeuvre with the driver having only to select gear, operate the accelerator and brake. All the steering is carried out automatically and the system is clever enough to keep the car far enough away from the kerb to avoid tyre and wheel damage. Park assist was introduced by Ford on the C-MAX and Grand C-MAX models last year and the system is now available as a £500 option on the latest Focus hatch and estate cars. Automatic park devices are becoming increasingly popular on new cars and are now being fitted by a number of brands including Lexus and Volkswagen as well as Ford.

### **WHY 20MPH LIMITS HELP SAVE LIVES**

*(with thanks to David Williams, Daily Telegraph)*

New research shows that young people have difficulty with judging a car's speed, but are blanket 20mph zones the solution?



Remember walking to school on your own for the first time? The journey no doubt began with a mixture of elation and fear; there was a busy road to cross and you weren't sure when to launch yourself into the roaring maelstrom. But you took the plunge – and somehow survived.

Every year, however, hundreds of children get it horribly wrong. Last year, 26 child pedestrians died on British roads, and 1,620 were seriously injured, according to the latest Department for Transport figures. New research is beginning to explain why some children get it so wrong, with important implications not just for parents and children, but motorists, too.

Scientists at the Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, have discovered that primary-age schoolchildren cannot accurately see, or judge, the speed of vehicles travelling above 25mph. In fact, six- to 11-year-olds might sometimes not be able to tell that a vehicle is approaching owing to a trick of the mind that also affects adults, although it is far more pronounced in children.

As Professor John Wann, a 55-year-old driver, cyclist and motorcyclist who led the research, explains: "It's not a matter of children not paying attention but a problem related to low-level visual detection mechanisms. Even when children are paying very close attention they may fail to detect a fast-approaching vehicle."

The speed illusion works like this: everyone gauges the speed of an approaching object by assessing how quickly its image gets larger, its "looming rate", and everyone has a threshold in their ability to detect it.

But, alarmingly, the faster a car is going, the lower its "looming" rate can appear, with the phenomenon especially acute if you're under 11 or over 75. While adults can make reasonably accurate judgements for a car travelling at up to 50mph, the judgement of primary-age children becomes unreliable once the speed rises above 25mph.

Prof Wann believes that the answer lies in traffic regulation – and that means more controversial 20mph zones. "Children make risky crossing judgements when vehicles are travelling at 30mph or 40mph," he says. "Worse, the vehicles they are more likely to step in front of are the faster vehicles that are more likely to hurt them. So putting 20mph speed limits in sensitive areas such as outside schools, when motorists can see a reason for them, would remove that threat."

Prof Wann is persuasive about the benefits: "Travelling one mile through a residential area at 20mph versus 30mph only adds 60 seconds to your journey time, far less than negotiating a junction or stopping at a traffic light."

However, he cautions against imposing too many 20mph zones. "The majority of drivers apply some level of conformity to speed limits," he says. "They might not all drop to right below 20mph but most get close and that makes a big difference. You have to be particularly nonconformist not to drop your speed at all when you enter a lower-speed zone. No one wants a child on their bonnet."

Prof Wann thinks too many 20mph zones can dilute their effectiveness, as motorists fail to recognise they are in a "high-risk area" and are less likely to comply. Peter Rodger, chief examiner of the Institute of Advanced Motorists, agrees. "Most motorists back 20mph in the right place," he says. "But if they are introduced where it feels wrong – where there are good sight lines and wide roads – it brings 20mph zones into disrepute. Blanket go-slow zones will not help."

Prof Wann says the argument extends to enforcing zones with humps or speed cameras. There are areas where they may be warranted, but ultimately, a nationwide solution lies in most drivers recognising that 20mph signage is in place because there is an elevated risk in the zone they are entering.

Prof Wann's study of more than 100 children found little difference between the ability of those aged six, seven, eight or nine to discern looming but it began to improve for 10- to 11-year-olds. However, the neural mechanisms don't fully develop until adulthood.

Worryingly, if an oncoming vehicle is even slightly outside a child's main field of vision, or if the child is also moving, their detection levels plummet even further. "Our findings have important implications for road-safety policy," says Prof Wann. "They converge with evidence that the risk of pedestrian accidents involving children is nearly three times higher in places where mean speeds exceed 25mph compared with

places with lower speeds.”

Not all motorists will like it but the research underlines work by the Department for Transport in 1999, which showed that reducing traffic speed to 20mph led to a 50 per cent drop in the number of six- to 11-year-olds killed or seriously injured. That’s partly due to the speed of impact, because pedestrians have a 90 per cent chance of surviving being hit by a car at under 20mph but a less than 50 per cent chance of surviving at 28mph or higher.

“It seems clear-cut,” says Prof Wann. “Driving in excess of 20mph in a residential or school area not only increases the potential severity of any impact with a pedestrian, but also increases the risk that a child will injudiciously cross in front of your car.”

## **NEW ROAD SIGN MAKES A HOLE LOT OF SENSE FOR MOTORISTS**

*(with thanks to David Williams, Daily Telegraph)*

When councils don’t fix potentially lethal potholes, should they signpost them instead? One website thinks so. What do you think?



A new sign warning road users about dangerous potholes on the highway ahead has been unveiled. A traditional triangular, red-bordered sign, containing an image of a car with one wheel down a hole, it was commissioned by price comparison website Confused.com.

The website is now petitioning the Department for Transport to introduce the sign across the UK, following the severe winter during which the number of potholes mushroomed. It might be welcomed by cyclists and motorcyclists to whom potholes present a particularly lethal hazard.

Confused.com launched the sign after research showed that even with sufficient budgets it would take councils around 11 years to repair the UK’s damaged roads, because there is such a large backlog.

“Although repairing these roads is obviously the long term solution, something needs to be done now,” said Mike Hoban, chief marketing officer at Confused.com. “Currently the UK’s road signs include warnings for wild horses, wild animals, cattle and even toads but potholes aren’t considered worthy enough. A pothole road sign is a vital step in preventing accidents and reducing insurance claims.”

The sign design was inspired by pothole campaigner Ted Relf, a plumber from Kent, who made headlines in April 2010 when his home-made pothole warning sign was

removed by the local council. "It is great to be a part of this awareness campaign. We all moan about potholes but we're powerless to do anything, well now is our chance," said Mr Relf. "I created a make-do pothole sign because I was concerned for the safety of drivers. I'm fully behind the campaign to see this sign introduced and urge the nation to sign the petition at [Confused.com](http://Confused.com)."

However, the AA isn't so sure. "We should not be campaigning for a sign, we should be campaigning for the potholes to be fixed," said head of transport policy, Paul Watters. "It costs up to £100 to put up a sign but £50-£60 to fix a pothole."

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