

## **SAFER, SMARTER DRIVERS; A Reminder of Speeding's Dangers**

You're driving on a busy, four lane roadway, caught up in the flow of traffic, when you suddenly realize that you are traveling 75 miles per hour – or 15 miles per hour over the posted speed limit. Now, how did that happen?

We've all found ourselves driving faster than our intentions and good sense might dictate, and there can be many reasons for it: We might be influenced by drivers around us, we ignore our better judgment, or we simply neglect the dangers of speeding. Remember, even if you have wisely chosen a safer and smarter vehicle, your most important choice is made every time you get behind the wheel: to drive responsibly.

A quick review of the perils that accompany excessive vehicular speed point to one fact: No excuse for speeding is a good one. For starters, check out these statistics from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Highway Transportation Association (NHTSA):

- ❖ In the years 1983- 2002, fatal car crashes were more likely to be caused by speeding than any other factor.
  
- ❖ In 2004, speeding contributed to 30 percent of all fatal crashes and 13,192 lives were lost.
  
- ❖ The total cost of crashes was estimated at \$230.6 billion in 2000, and the cost of speeding-related crashes was estimated to be \$40.4 billion.

### **Speed Limits Are Established For Motor Vehicle Safety**

It's not only on four-lane roadways that we find ourselves speeding. As it happens, the interstates actually have the best safety record of all our roads – and the lowest fatality rate per mile traveled. Almost 50 percent of speeding-related fatalities occur on lower-speed “collectors” (low or medium capacity thoroughfares) and local roads where speed limits are typically between 35 and 55 miles per hour.

Research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) found that when speed limits were raised by many states in 1996, travel speeds increased and motor vehicle fatalities went up 15 to 20 percent on interstate highways. In states that raised rural speed limits, more than 400 lives are lost each year because of higher limits.

Bottom line: Speed limits tell us how fast we can safely drive given the nature of the roadway and its environment on all roads.

## **An Effective – but Controversial – Deterrent**

Many of us are familiar with the most common speed deterrents, such as a strategically placed police officer with a radar gun. The problem with this approach is that it is fairly random, and only a small percentage of speeders are ticketed.

Technology called photo radar had been used with considerable success for more than 20 years in several countries, including Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and Taiwan. With this technology, cameras placed in undisclosed locations take photos of speeding vehicles as they pass by. Law enforcement is then provided with photographs along with dates, times, places, and vehicle speeds.

Despite these impressive statistics, photo radar has not yet caught on in America. There's stiff resistance because many Americans believe the cameras represent an invasion of privacy. In Virginia, however, where photo radar is employed, more than 50 percent of motorists support the technology, and 54 percent of all motorists surveyed in a 2004 IIHS report favored this approach to curbing speeding.

## **It's Up to You and Me**

Whether the deterrent to speeding is hi-tech photo radar or simply a police car hiding in the bushes, the best measure is self-imposed: choosing to drive responsibly. Don't get caught up in the "everyone else is doing it" mentality. We have a duty to ourselves, our family, our friends, and to society to drive within the limits of the law. So the next time a glance at your speedometer startles you, ease off the gas. This nugget of common sense will make you even safer and smarter.