

INTRODUCTION:

Enforcement Methodologies:

For decades police have practiced techniques of traffic law enforcement 'bequeathed' to them by generations of traffic law enforcement officers. Criticism of these enforcement techniques, an unacceptable, ever-present toll relating to motor vehicle trauma and public opinion have given rise to the mistaken impression that traffic law enforcement police appear to be concentrating perhaps a little too much on the revenue raising aspect. There are even suggestions that highly motivated traffic law enforcement police only aim to promote road safety only as a secondary concern. Recidivist traffic law violators often state that traffic law enforcement officers are only persecuting them and ought to be employed in other areas of law enforcement catching drug offenders and thieves.

Although some of the activities of traffic law enforcement may appear to be somewhat **remotely** geared to revenue generation the main concern of traffic law enforcement is to address and lower the ever-present level of road related trauma and death as well as the promotion of road safety. The audience that is targeted by traffic law enforcement police are those who have a basic contempt for the road laws and legislatures of the various States. It is unfortunate that some innocent law abiding motorists are caught infringing the law, especially during claimed infrequent, momentary lapses of concentration.

The enforcement techniques in use today appear to be falling short of the expectations of those people who, whilst constantly criticising the unacceptably high road toll and the occurrence of bad driving habits, appear to be somewhat complacent in their attitudes toward offenders and the punitive measures exacted by traffic law enforcement police. Given the fact that the majority of the recidivist traffic offenders are from the 17 to 25 age group and the majority of critics are supporters of those groups, is it any wonder that public opinion and that of certain media personalities is one of basic animosity toward traffic law enforcement officers who are charged with the responsibility of working toward reducing the level of road trauma?

For many years police have had to rely on enforcement techniques that were developed by generations of traffic law enforcement officers. With the advent of modern electronic radar and laser speed detection technology, there appears to have been an upsurge in the number of motorists detected speeding and reduction in the number of speed related motor vehicle crashes and associated road trauma.

The Modern Technological Approach:

The introduction of modern Doppler and Laser radar technology has become an effective tool in addressing higher and higher vehicle speeds. The use of mobile Radar and Lidar (Laser) speed detection equipment has been rather instrumental in reducing motor vehicle speeds. Radar technology is constantly being challenged at court by experts and combined with the persistent and somewhat prodigious use of unlawful radar detectors, appears to be reduced in its overall effectiveness. However, speed still remains high on the priorities of traffic law enforcement police. As technology is making advances we are seeing the advent of **intelligent vehicle systems**. These systems are sophisticated in their application and their ability to provide information on a wide ranging number of options. Options such as global positioning systems and engine management systems are gaining popularity with Transport companies in their quest to improve not only road safety but also the level of traffic law infringement by drivers. Vehicles are now being manufactured with computer systems that monitor not only the engine performance but also the speed at which a vehicle can and will travel at any given time.

Traffic Law Enforcement has also kept pace with modern technology. The design, manufacture and use of modern speed detection equipment has, although not widely accepted by the motoring community, added an effective 'weapon' to the arsenal of equipment that is essential in the everyday enforcement activities of traffic law enforcement police. Static mounted speed cameras have recently been introduced into New South Wales to combat the incidence of high vehicle speeds on some major roads within the metropolitan Sydney as well as a number of country locations. Further advancements in speed detection technology will take place as the twenty first century progresses that, if utilised correctly and effectively, will result in further definitive reductions in road trauma associated with high vehicle speeds.

The introduction of random breath testing in New South Wales in 1982 saw a dramatic reduction in the level of road trauma associated with driving under the influence of alcohol and stationary random breath testing has had a marked effect on the number of people who are drinking and driving. The 1982 introduction of random breath testing saw police utilising methods that were adequate at the time, however it was obvious that the problems associated with drink driving were much more prevalent. This situation saw the introduction of modern

electronic breath testing apparatus which served police in their fight against the incidence of alcohol related motor vehicle crashes and associated road trauma.

AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AND IMPLICATIONS:

Young Drivers, Behavioural Factors and their Implications:

Australia has a recognised problem, as do most of the western block countries, of an over-representation of young drivers, in the 17-25 age group, being involved in both serious driving offences and serious and fatal crashes. There are a number of factors involved, however it proposed to refer to only two in this paper.

As motor vehicles become 'safer', drivers are seemingly becoming more reckless, more aggressive and more over-confident. This over-confidence has seen the birth or maybe better yet, the emergence of a phenomenon that is best described as; **the operation of a motor vehicle in a manner which endangers or is likely to endanger persons or property. Aggressive Driving** is not exactly a new phenomenon in this country, however it is discernible that this type of behaviour is becoming much more prevalent on our roads and is being accepted as normal by a majority of drivers in that 17 to 25 age group.

McDavid and Harari (1974, p237) state; *a certain amount of aggressive behaviour probably results from adaptive responses to frustration – the effort to overcome and remove obstacles that hinder one's pursuit of his/her goals*. This can be seen in driving habits adopted by younger drivers and appears to be ongoing often resulting in **road rage** situations. These behaviours go unchecked due to reluctance on the part of victims to make complaints for fear of retribution and that Police, often hindered by legislative beauracracy, are virtually powerless to act without specific evidence relating to the gravity of the offences committed.

The ever increasing number of motor vehicles and new drivers on our roads combined with youthful exuberance and a certain level of embarrassment at being stopped and spoken to by police add to levels of frustration being endured by young drivers. These increased frustration levels are again adding to occurrence and gravity of aggressive behaviours and the level of road rage being encountered.

New drivers do not have the luxury of 'stored' experience in that they do not have the required knowledge or capacity to scan ahead to see the 'big picture'. They are constantly being subjected to unexpected situations or surprises that they are not equipped to deal with. These situations cause panic and rash decisions are made. Anger and frustration are 'by products' of both the panic and rash decisions made and aggression often results.

In the United States the Federal Highway and Traffic Safety Administration as well as law enforcement agencies have taken steps to address the type of actions that constitute aggressive driving. Guidelines have been drafted to assist motorists to avoid becoming involved in incidents of aggressive driving and quite possibly also becoming victims of a **Road Rage** incident. Some of these incidents have actually resulted in not only vehicles being damaged but also some motorists being assaulted, sometimes seriously.

Another behavioural factor of young drivers is that of the false courage afforded by the consumption of alcohol. The suppressing/depressing effects of alcohol produce a lowering of the level of caution and fear that is normally experienced by young novice drivers. This false courage also lowers and slows hazard perception and reaction times and, combined with inexperience, peer pressure, youthful exuberance and a certain level of aggression can and does lead to serious and/or fatal consequences.

Psychological Factors and Implications:

Some psychologists and psychiatrists are approaching the above issues from an emotional perspective, studying anger control and stress reduction techniques.

McDavid and Harari (1974, p96) state that behaviours and attitudes can be modified simply through the object or experience in question, being compliance with the traffic laws. Conversely it is also stated that there may be no modification due to strongly held cultural beliefs and negative attitudes, hence the recidivist offender. In the case of young and inexperienced drivers, in situations where novice drivers confront the fears and attitudes relating to a negative driving encounter or some aspect of their driving, they may actually accentuate these fears and attitudes rather than diminish or eliminate them.

Traffic congestion, inexperienced and inconsiderate discourteous drivers and fatigue are only some of the psychological factors believed to be responsible for the elevation of anger and stress levels in motor vehicle

drivers. Research into the causes of aggressive driving and road rage is paramount to the effective restraint of this practise. Attitudinal changes will have to take place for any perceived benefits to have effect.

Road Environment Factors and Implications:

As the number of drivers increases, so does the number of vehicles on the road. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the amount of available roadway has not kept pace with the increases in the number of drivers and vehicles. Traffic congestion is considered one factor, which tends to exacerbate aggressive driving behaviors. This congestion also places an increased burden on traffic law enforcement officers attempting to enforce traffic laws. Professionals from various disciplines have begun working to find the answer to this increasing problem.

The Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales and the various road construction companies are involved in a continuing campaign to upgrade the major roads of both the metropolitan and country areas of the state. The Roads and Traffic Authority has also installed **Intelligent Transport Systems** on the major roads and freeways across the state. These systems are designed to not only save motorists time but also save lives, reduce vehicle emissions and keep the motoring public informed of road conditions. These systems are also advantageous to traffic law enforcement officers by assisting them in their efforts to help alleviate the likelihood of road environment being a factor in road trauma.

The Future of Traffic Law Enforcement:

As the twenty first century unfolds the people of the world are being faced with a task that would appear to be insurmountable, that of eradicating road trauma or reducing it to a near zero occurrence. Enforcement of the road rules and regulations is regarded as a necessity and will remain so whilst there are roads, motor vehicles and human beings to control their rate of progress. Rudolf Limpert (1999) provides us with four basic components relating to road traffic accidents, each affecting the other directly. For example, Limpert states that the driver of a motor vehicle determines the speed and direction of the vehicle. However the vehicle itself is acted upon by the force of gravity in most of the actions as dictated by the driver. The road environment and environmental conditions are also factors that influence the drivers' ability to determine the speed and direction of the vehicle. An understanding of the mechanics of a motor vehicle and a basic knowledge of the Newtonian laws of motion may affect a lowering of the level of road trauma associated with traffic crashes. Perhaps a better understanding, by the community, of the role of vehicle speed in the occurrence of serious and fatal crashes would be advantageous. As well, possession of an understanding of the motives of police to the use of electronic speed surveillance equipment may also be of assistance.

The community is vocal in their condemnation of the use of sophisticated electronic traffic enforcement technology as static mounted speed cameras. The general statement is that they do little or nothing toward the reduction of the level of road trauma. This statement, although broad, is somewhat biased as speed cameras **are** having a definitive effect on the number of people exceeding the speed limit at the locations of these instruments. Human behaviour however, dictates that people are not accepting of anything they do not understand or that they are not provided enough background information on.

These speed cameras have also been responsible for a perceived reduction in the level of road trauma occurring in the vicinity of these locations. The community in general will have to accept the installation and use of such equipment if the much higher vehicle speeds being attained and the general reluctance of the motoring community to conform with the traffic laws is going to lead to increases in the levels of road trauma associated with vehicle speed.

Community attitudes and often misguided Civil Liberties interventions are undermining the efforts by traffic law enforcement police to effectively address motor vehicle road trauma. The average motorist is somewhat ignorant of the traffic laws and constant challenges of the statutes in the courts without the proper knowledge or legal representation appears to make a mockery of the legal system, the traffic law enforcement officials and the laws enacted to protect the lives of road users. Public opinion and minority group attitudes are also hampering these efforts and whilst there are opponents of traffic law enforcement, the presence of road related trauma and death will remain unless changes can be effected in community attitudes. As new innovations and technology are being introduced to combat the incidence of road trauma, advancements made in modern motor vehicle engineering and electronics are producing more powerful vehicles thus much higher vehicle speeds. And so therefore police enforcement techniques have to undergo continuous modification to remain effective. It would appear that police traffic enforcement might have its future coming from other means and/or directions.

CONCLUSION:

The way ahead lies in the formation of future partnerships. Stakeholders, such as the Police, Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales, the many and various Local Government organisations, the National Roads and Motorists Association (NRMA), Monash University Accident Research Centre, the Road Accident Research Unit of the University of South Australia, the Australian College of Road Safety, Driver Training organisations and many other organisations are involved in the promotion of road safety. As well groups such as the Parents and Citizens Association and minority splinter groups have a vested interest in the practical application of road safety principles in the enforcement techniques employed by police. These people are interested in the preservation of human life on our roads and they represent the majority of the community and often project the community's interests in road safety and its application.

A more holistic approach with more community involvement will have to ensure that our youth are educated in the correct practice of road safety as well as to accept any mistakes they might make when driving a motor vehicle. Acceptance of their mistakes would also include the use of enforcement techniques as practiced by the many and various traffic enforcement agencies. The general community is not accepting of the level of road trauma and is often critical of the police and their enforcement techniques when fatalities occur. The community as a whole will have to also accept that traffic law enforcement police are a limited resource and cannot be in every place at once. This is often the case when a fatal crash occurs and highlights the need for police to further address their role in the promotion of road safety principles so as to be seen to be doing the task they have been charged with, reducing road trauma.

Is it that we as a nation have to follow the lead of countries such as the United States? Does the community need to form groups such as the U.S. group; Mothers Against Drink Driving (MADD) and have representation in both U.S. State and Federal governments? Action groups in the United States have been successful in having drastic road safety initiatives implemented. Groups such as that above were instrumental in having sobriety tests reviewed and are constantly campaigning actively against drinking and driving by not only adult vehicle driver but also young drivers who drive whilst impaired by alcohol.

The New South Wales Police Service in co-operation with the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales have devised and launched a variety of initiatives to target enforcement of the traffic laws commonly associated with drink driving, speeding and aggressive driving behaviours such as following the vehicle in front too closely, unsafe lane changes, and failure to obey traffic control lights and stop signs. Effective media campaigns are being conducted to increase awareness and educate the motoring public about drink driving, speeding, aggressive driving and basic traffic laws. By focusing enforcement efforts and media attention on infringements of the traffic law commonly associated with these offences and encouraging voluntary compliance with traffic laws in general, the occurrence of road trauma associated with unacceptable driving behaviours may be reduced to an acceptable level if not completely eradicated.

The final answer may lie with the community taking the ultimate responsibility for not only the level of traffic enforcement needed but also the level of road safety education taught to our children, in schools as well as in the family vehicle whilst travelling. The responsibility for the promotion of road safety lies principally with police and the other stakeholders involved and the community ought to be demanding that children be afforded the opportunity to learn about the motor vehicle and the broad principles of road safety. Children are very impressionable and possessing a 'curiosity' for learning will absorb a plethora of information relating to what happens in and around the family motor vehicle. Parents, who are, at best, eager to see their children acquire a good education at whilst at school, ought not to not practice a different set of values when driving a motor vehicle. A majority of the lessons learned by children are those of life and whom do they, the children, take the most notice of, model themselves on as they grow into adulthood?

The foregoing paper, although containing the references as cited below, is the sole work of the author and in no way reflect nor contravene any of the policies or methods of the New South Wales Police Service.

REFERENCES:

- LIMPERT, R. (1999) Motor Vehicle Accident Reconstruction and Cause Analysis
Fifth Ed. – Lexus Publishing, Arlington, Virginia USA. (p3)
- McDAVID, J. W. & HARARI, H. (1974) Psychology and Social Behaviour – Harper and Row, New .
York USA (pp96, 237)