

SELF EFFICACY, PERCEIVED CRASH RISK AND NORMS ABOUT SPEEDING: DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN MOST DRIVERS AND HABITUAL SPEEDERS

Shari Read & Gary Kirby
Office of Road Safety, WA

Chris Batini
NFO Donovan Research, WA

Abstract

This research was conducted to inform the development of a community education campaign targeting drivers who regularly drive more than 10km/h over the posted speed limit. The study examined the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the ‘well over’ driver in comparison to the ‘at or about’ driver. The research was designed to identify the motivations underlying the behaviour of the ‘well over’ driver and to provide a strategy for the development of a media campaign to target this group. It was found that drivers in the ‘well over’ group were quite defensive in justifying their speeding behaviour and very assertive in judging their own driving skills in relation to others. These drivers were also more likely to view the law as existing for other people rather than themselves. In comparison to those in the ‘at or about’ group, the ‘well over’ drivers had a preference for visual, demonstrative advertising. However, scenarios and ad executions must be credible and leave no room for misinterpretation or incorrect allocation of blame. There was also evidence to suggest that the ‘well over’ drivers would be responsive to increased penalties for speeding and a more visual police presence.

Introduction

Speeding has long been one of the key road safety issues to be addressed through community education campaigns, and remains a priority area for the Road Safety Council and Office of Road Safety. The focus in recent years has been the 17-39 year old male driver and more recently, speeding in residential and built-up areas with campaigns designed to appeal to all drivers to ‘slow down in residential areas’. With legislation now introduced, limiting speeds on local area roads to 50km/h, other areas of the speeding problem can now be addressed.

Road crash statistics show that the majority of fatal road crashes involving speed occur on roads zoned at 60 & 70 km/h (with many of these remaining unaffected by the new local area speed limits), and many of these are single vehicle ‘hit object’ crashes. Therefore, local area metropolitan and country roads zoned 60 & 70 km/h remain an appropriate focus for educational messages, with the emphasis to potentially move more towards those drivers who deliberately choose to speed regularly and speed by excessive amounts (ie. 11+kph over the posted speed limit).

The Continuous Tracking data suggests this group represents around 9% of speeding drivers, thus, whilst relatively small in number, they clearly represent a danger to themselves and other drivers and are behaving against the broader social ‘norm’ (ie. either not deliberately speeding, or limiting speeding to 10kph or less above the posted limit).

Community attitude research shows that the Road Safety Council advertising over the past few years has been able to induce a shift in the attitudes and behaviours of drivers who speed by 1-10 km/h over the limit. However, these same campaigns have had little effect on the 9% of drivers who admit deliberately speeding by at least 11 km/h over the posted speed limit. Given that 91% of the driving community now report driving ‘at or about’ the posted speed limit, there is a desire to reinforce the social norm that most drivers at least try to stick to the speed limit. Reinforcing this behaviour will help to support those drivers who do try to ‘do the right thing’ and to acknowledge them as contributing to the safety of WA roads. On the other hand, the 9% of ‘habitual’ or high-level speeders have been identified as a necessary target for education and enforcement. There is a need for a deeper understanding about the motivations and behaviours of speeding drivers to ensure that community education campaigns are accurately and appropriately targeted.

Therefore, research was required to contribute to the development of a community education campaign about speeding that simultaneously reinforces the social norm of sticking to the limit and distinguishes habitual, high-level speeders as atypical and morally unacceptable.

Research Objectives

The **overall strategic objective** of the research was...*to identify and qualify social norms and general community perceptions of speeding behaviour and develop a psycho-social profile of high-level speeders.*

The **specific information objectives** of this research are to investigate the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of drivers who **generally drive ‘at or about’** the posted speed limit and to examine the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of **habitual, high-level speeders**. Within these objectives, several specific areas were explored including perceptions of **crash risk** associated with speeding (by various amounts); **self efficacy** with regard to speeding (ie. perceived skill & ability to control the vehicle at higher speeds, likelihood of being unable to control the vehicle at higher speeds in an unexpected situation; etc); the perceived **social and personal norms** with regard to speeding; the **motivation and emotion** associated with speeding (by various amounts); the characteristics of **high-level speeding behaviour** (eg. when, where, actual speeds, etc); and the types of **communication messages and mediums** likely to reach and be effective amongst high-level speeders.

The outcomes of the research were used to compare the ‘at or around’ vs. the ‘excessive speed’ driver and were used to determine how to effectively target this secondary group with relevant and meaningful educational messages via the most appropriate media/method.

METHODOLOGY

The overall qualitative methodology consisted of **focus group discussions** with appropriate people within the identified target markets.

The research included a range of vehicle drivers across both Perth metropolitan and regional areas. The primary (17-39 years) and secondary (40-59 years) age groups provide a basis for group segmentation. The groups were structured in this way, again with a bias towards 17-39 year olds. On the basis of the over-representation of male drivers in speed related crashes, the sample consisted of male drivers only.

In broad terms the Tracking data reveals that overall, 35% of the driving population do not deliberately exceed the speed limit, a further 59% drive within 10kph over the limit when they do speed (together forming the ‘at or around’ group), and the remaining 6% are the more frequent, deliberate and excessive speeders (ie. the ‘well over’ group, representing 9% of speeding drivers). The groups were therefore structured using separate ‘at or around’ vs. ‘well over’ groups.

The groups were also structured to reflect the age, working status and distribution of speeding drivers in WA.

Thus, the structure for the **qualitative research** based on the key variables described above was as follows:

Location	Behaviour ('at or about')		Behaviour ('well over')	
	17-39 years	40-59 years	17-39 years	40-59 years
Perth	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Regional	Group 5 (Albany)	Group 6 (Albany)	Group 7 (Bunbury)	Group 8 (Bunbury)

This structure enabled the research to examine the ‘well over’ drivers in some depth with a view to understanding their motivations, attitudes and behaviours. It is important to note that the findings of this study were used to inform campaign development only and will not be used to inform the development of policy or legislative changes or any other use requiring data representative of the entire driving population.

Group Procedure

All groups were drawn from the defined ‘target population’ using a combination of group recruitment databases and ‘cold recruiting’ methodology via random telephone number generation, and were contacted via **telephone**. Recruiting calls were made during **weekday evenings** and **weekends** so as to eliminate any bias against those who work regular ‘office’ hours. Participants were paid \$40 each for their attendance. Fifty-six participants attended across the eight groups.

Summary of Key Findings¹

The ‘at or about’ drivers saw a clear delineation between their own speeding behaviour and that of other drivers, with ‘speeding’ per se generally regarded as a behaviour undertaken by other drivers. It is unrelated to the actual posted speed limit and is defined as speed that is unsuitable for the conditions. Speeding is considered morally undesirable and drivers who speed were strongly criticised by the ‘at or about’ groups. Speeding is considered very dangerous (as opposed to driving over the posted speed limit, which is not even considered mildly risky) because the speeding driver doesn’t take the conditions into account (such as road conditions, weather, presence of pedestrians etc).

On the other hand, driving over the speed limit is a behaviour that this group engage in regularly (the ‘at or about’ groups admitted that they commonly drove at between 6 and 8 kilometres above the posted speed limit). They do so when they are in a hurry, if they are not concentrating or by mistake (there is a perceived lack of speed signage). Driving above the speed limit is a habit that is ingrained and respondents felt that it is quite hard to stick to the speed limit – there is a feeling of being ‘restrained’ when they do so.

‘At or about’ respondents emphasised that there is ‘a time and a place’ when driving over the speed limit is appropriate. These situations include: on the open road if conditions are good (almost unlimited speeds were seen as acceptable in this situation); in built-up areas if the situation warrants (ie. ‘safe speeding’); early in the morning (going to work) or late at night on the freeway (ie. following the ‘descriptive norm’); and in emergencies.

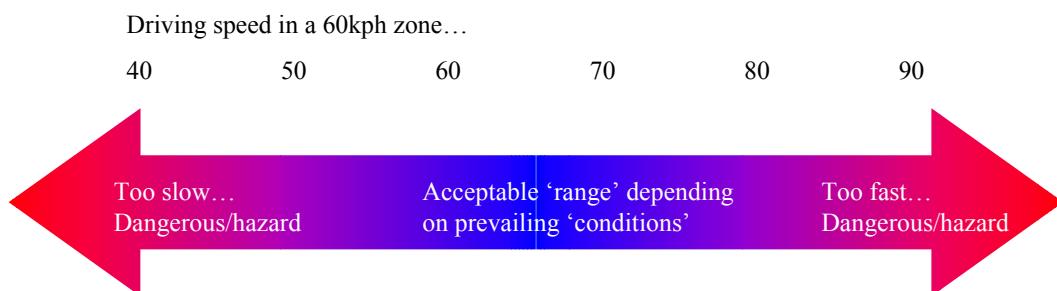
Even though ‘at or about’ participants admitted to driving over the speed limit regularly (in certain situations by large amounts), this was not considered speeding as they would not do it in situations considered unsafe to do so. That is, they drive well within their own perceived abilities.

The ‘Well Over’ Groups produced two definitions of speeding, the ‘technical’ and the ‘experiential’.

Technical definition: Defined as driving at any speed above the posted speed limit. However, the criteria used by Main Roads for setting speed limits were seen to be based on setting a minimum standard, ie... “*Speed limits are set to cater for the lowest common denominator...the poor driver*”. The higher-level speeding driver generally sees speed limits as applying mainly to other drivers, rather than themselves.

Experiential definition: In short, the higher-level speeding driver defines speeding as... “*Whatever speed is deemed unsafe for the prevailing conditions*”. The decision to speed (and the amount to speed by) represents a judgement call based on several factors assessed in combination including: Road conditions (ie. width; verges/footpaths; shops/pedestrians; road quality; amount of other traffic); Environmental conditions (ie. time of day; weather); The ‘Descriptive Norm’ (ie. behaviour of other drivers at the time); and Personal abilities (ie. self-assessed driving experience / skills).

However, there are both upper and lower limits representing speeds at which it would generally be considered unsafe to drive at and between these limits is the ‘range’ considered safe, depending upon the prevailing conditions and subsequent judgement call. For a typical 60kph zone, this can be represented as a continuum and is depicted below:



Thus, between 45kph and 85kph represents the accepted range in a 60kph zone depending on the prevailing conditions and both driving below and above this range is generally seen as unsafe. Exceeding the upper limit is

¹ Note: The results presented in this report differentiate between the ‘at or about’ speeding driver versus the ‘well over’ speeding driver, to provide the comparative difference. In some areas where opinions are consistent between both groups, no specific differentiation is made.

what ‘hoons’ and ‘idiots’ do – the ‘well over’ speeding drivers in the groups consider their speeding behaviour as safe for the prevailing conditions and as not increasing risk to themselves or other drivers / road users.

Higher-level and higher frequency speeding behaviour amongst this group represents a ‘continuous variable’, rather than a ‘binary’ on/off all or nothing behaviour. The amount by which this group chooses to speed varies in degrees from a little over to well over based on fixed judgement criteria.

In this respect, although defined as and referred to as those who drive ‘well over’ the posted speed limit, they are quite different to (and indeed see themselves as quite different to) drivers often referred to as ‘hoons’ – ie. those who speed excessively counter to the prevailing conditions and who are seen to represent a significant danger to themselves and other drivers.

Motivations for Speeding Behaviour

The fundamental characteristic of the ‘at or about’ drivers was that they did not consider their driving behaviour to be speeding. Speeding is acknowledged as a very dangerous behaviour and one they would never engage in. The ‘at or about’ drivers justify their behaviour (which is technically speeding) in a number of ways:

Salience of speeding:

Driving over the speed limit is considered a very low salience issue (except for the problem of ‘hoons’). Issues such as drink driving and general lack of driving skills in the community are considered to be much more dangerous issues that should be addressed.

Descriptive Norms:

There is a prevailing belief that most people drive at about the same speed as the ‘at or about’ group – between the limit and 10kmh over. Most participants felt that the general population drives at about the same speed or slightly faster than they do. Technically, this is a correct assumption based on Tracking data, which suggests 37% drive ‘at’ the speed limit and 52% drive at ‘about’ the speed limit, in total 89% therefore drive ‘at or about’ the speed limit.

There is a general feeling that speed limits were not the ‘actual’ limit and that drivers are almost expected to go up to 10kmh faster than the posted speed limit. Therefore, the posted speed limit is considered the minimum speed, rather than the maximum speed.

Perceived Skills / Abilities:

All the ‘at or about’ participants felt they were both a good enough judge of the conditions to know when speeding was safe and a good enough driver to handle travelling at that speed – even if an unexpected event were to occur.

Participants felt they would be driving too fast if they did not feel in complete control of the vehicle and the situation.

Another important factor is the speed differential compared to the rest of the traffic. If you are travelling much faster or much slower than everyone else then you are also a road hazard.

Four key underlying factors emerged in the ‘Well Over’ group that encompass the underlying motivations for higher-level speeding behaviour:

Self-efficacy / Behavioural control:

Keeping up with the traffic flow and linked to previously described perceptions regarding driving too slow, many argued... “*Am I creating more of a hazard by speeding to keep up with the traffic flow, or by not speeding?*”;

Time constraints / pressure for those involved in long distance driving, work-related driving or when simply running late for work or an appointment, many argue that... “*You have to put the foot down just to make up that bit of extra time*”;

The ‘psyche’ of many higher-level speeding drivers reflects various personality traits. One of the motivations for speeding behaviour is to ‘get one over’ the other driver and is manifested in terms of beating the orange light (to avoid delays), attain the ‘pole position’ at traffic lights (to be first away), or to overtake a driver believed to be less skilled or who exhibits errant driving behaviour. **It seems that the simple process of passing and overtaking other drivers translates into feelings of success, dominance and victory on the roads.**

Newer cars, whereby many claim that they are either not aware of the speed they are driving at due to newer cars being generally easier to speed in (power, comfort and quietness), or for those with access to new cars at work, having a different feel (unfamiliarity).

Personal / Moral Norms:

Evidenced by a distinct lack of moral pressure to not speed, either from friends or family. As mentioned earlier, speed limits are generally regarded as guidelines ‘for other drivers’. There are generally no feelings of regret or moral inappropriateness associated with speeding behaviour.

As discussed, if the ‘conditions’ support it (ie. ‘safe’ speeding), then they will do so, and in doing so will feel quite justified in their decision.

In ‘non-multanova’ areas where a low perceived enforcement risk is evident, speeding will be more likely to occur. Despite many participants having been booked more than once, most felt multanova camera locations to be generally predictable and therefore avoidable.

Descriptive Norms:

Despite speeding decisions being largely self-assessed, the observed behaviour of other drivers does have a role to play. Amongst the higher-level speeder however, there is an increased tendency to focus on other ‘speeders’ rather than the ‘compliers’ (ie. those driving within the speed limit), in essence, most higher-level speeding drivers overestimate the relative proportion of speeding drivers and the amounts by which they speed. Whilst this perception may serve to justify their own behaviour in broad terms, when probed, many eventually admitted that they probably do drive a bit faster than most other drivers on the road.

Circle of friends / social proof:

Most report their behaviour as no different to that of their friends and associates. In addition, and linked to the descriptive norms above, many higher-level speeding drivers use speeding publicity as a means of supporting their claims... “*The fact that they advertise the multanova locations on the TV and Radio proves that everyone speeds...if they didn’t, there wouldn’t be a demand for that type of information*”.

Perceived Skills / Abilities:

Put simply, the higher-level speeding drivers believe themselves to be better drivers in terms of their driving skills, anticipation and reaction times... “*I’m more experienced...I have higher skills...I can handle it*”.

Such high self-rating and assurance does lead to some high-risk behaviour at specific times. The described thrill or rush associated with high driving speeds is sought by many of these drivers in situations such as late night high speed driving on the freeway, often undertaken as a group activity.

Self-efficacy and Behavioural Control

Drivers in the ‘at or about’ groups felt that they would be able to always drive within the posted speed limit if necessary, but it would be difficult. They felt that it would be essential to have cruise control fitted on their car or else they would have to constantly check their speedo. A few participants, notably the younger Perth group, felt that restraining their speed to the posted limit would be frustrating and they also felt that they would lose a lot of efficiency in their day because of it. The underlying attitude was that they didn’t see the point in changing their behaviour, primarily because they view themselves as the safest group of drivers on the road and therefore their behaviour is not a road safety problem. The ‘at or about’ drivers felt that they should be recognised as having the ability to choose an appropriate speed to travel at – they should be ‘trusted’ to know what they are doing. In a similar way to the ‘well over’ groups discussed below, the ‘at or about’ drivers feel that their behaviour is supported and reinforced, both externally by the behaviour of other drivers and internally by their own ability to ‘handle’ the speeds they travel at.

In terms of driving behaviour and speeding, it would appear from the ‘Well Over’ group that the primary barriers to ‘self-efficacy’ and behavioural control derive not from a physical inability to perform the behaviour, but from the perceived ‘social norm’ as well as the psychological motivations and rewards that both encourage, reinforce and reward the behaviour. Most ‘well over’ speeding drivers tend to over-estimate the proportion of speeding drivers, dismissing their own behaviour as no different to most – ie’ justification via claimed ‘social proof’. When probed and upon reflection, many acknowledge that they perhaps do drive a bit faster than other drivers, but technically most other drivers are also believed to be speeding, thereby making the ‘well over’ speeder less inclined to perceive their own behaviour as particularly different.

Amongst the ‘well over’ group, their consistent reference to ‘slow drivers’ (ie. those doing 40kph in a 50kph zone, or those doing 60kph in a 70 kph zone), may simply reflect the differential between their own speed and that of the non-speeding driver (ie. ‘slow’ drivers are most likely actually doing the speed limit). Similar to the pre-50kph qualitative research, those ‘opposed’ to the law (ie. the minority), actually believed themselves to represent the ‘majority’ view. As a consequence of these beliefs, most feel it would be difficult, if not impossible to always drive at the posted speed limit – one possible exception is if you’re... “*low on points, about to lose your licence*”.

However, the key issue remained unstated amongst this group (most likely as it operates at a different level of consciousness), **that issue being that not speeding would conflict directly with the ‘psychological needs / rewards’ that speeding behaviour provides per se.**

Psycho-social Profile

Those who drive ‘at or about’ the speed limit consider themselves to fit in with the majority of drivers, which as discussed earlier is an accurate assumption. They also consider themselves the most well behaved drivers on the roads. The prevailing attitude is that those who drive either faster or slower than them are the ‘bad’ drivers – those that drive faster are not taking account of the conditions and those that drive slower are a ‘hazard’. In terms of psycho-social descriptors, ‘at or about’ drivers were: Adamant that they don’t speed. ‘At or about’ drivers tend to be strongly critical of those who do speed; Very confident in their own abilities (ie. to perceive hazards, to stop in time and to accurately gauge conditions); Concerned for their own and others’ safety. They would never do anything to jeopardise the safety of their own or anyone else’s family; Consider themselves amongst the safest drivers on the road.

The ‘well over’ speeding driver (ie. 7% of the driving population as measured in the Tracking research) is not restricted to any one particular social or demographic group. Participants in the group discussions were characterised as: Generally more **opinionated** regarding issues in general (and speeding behaviour); Quite **defensive** (in justifying their speeding behaviour, both in terms of the reasons for speeding and their judgement in making their speeding as ‘safe’ as possible); Very **assertive** in judging and rating their own driving skills relative to others; Likely to view many laws as ‘**for other people**’ rather than themselves; Likely to have undertaken **high risk** driving behaviours in their youth; Likely to consider WA a ‘**nanny state**’; Likely to view speeding as a largely **safe and victimless crime**; Most interested in the **power, comfort and features** of their vehicles; and more likely to consider speed cameras as **revenue raisers**.

In terms of future advertising, the above provides a ‘checklist’ for ensuring that depictions of the typical ‘well over’ speeding driver can be delivered in a credible manner to which such drivers can relate.

Implications of the Research Findings

A campaign specifically targeting the **high frequency / high level speeding driver** will need to consider the following issues and key message points:

Address misconceptions regarding the ‘**descriptive norm**’ whereby speeding drivers see their behaviour as largely no different from what most drivers do. The fact is, most drivers drive ‘at or about’ the speed limit and the high frequency / high level speeding driver represents the minority of drivers. In this sense, it would be important to challenge or confront such beliefs using for example road surveillance camera footage, main roads speed monitoring results, speed camera statistics, etc to prove this fact.

Address ‘**response efficacy**’ in terms of stressing that the rewards / positive outcomes achievable from choosing not to speed are in fact greater than the perceived benefits of speeding (eg. in terms of less hassle; less stress; no real loss of time; less crash risk; less fuel used; social and moral responsibility; etc). However, a simple direct approach may suffer credibility issues amongst this group, as much of their speeding behaviour addresses internalised psychological needs as opposed to the external material rewards or outcomes mentioned.

Reinforce the **Moral Norm** - tremendous achievements have been observed to date, however this research (and the Tracking data) shows that the high frequency / high level speeding driver lags well behind. It will be necessary to reinforce moral sanctions against speeding, particularly at times where the driver perceives it is safe to do so.

Highlight **enforcement initiatives** - eg. increased penalties for higher speeding infractions; double demerit points at key times; non-multanova speed enforcement; increased detection risk; more enforcement in 50k areas; etc. The high-level speeding driver generally regards speeding punishment as a ‘fair cop’, as they understand they are breaking the law per se, even though they feel morally at ease in doing so. Nonetheless, repeated detection and punishment does deter some drivers from the behaviour, even if only temporarily.

Demonstrate that higher (perceived) or actual driving skills do **not** counter speeding / high risk driving behaviour - consider a demonstration using a well known personality (eg. Peter Brock) to highlight the fact that despite his high driving skills and abilities, even he could not avoid a collision due to an unexpected event whilst travelling at 75kph in a 60kph zone (possible via a ‘controlled experiment’ – Peter Brock vs. the ‘well over’ speeder). It would also be necessary to reinforce why professional drivers actually obey the road rules (and don’t speed).

Reinforce that **the speed limit is actually the limit, not the starting point**, or an expected minimum travel speed! – and that they apply to all drivers, regardless of driving skills.

Reinforce **braking / stopping distances** and the direct link to increased crash risk as a consequence. This is a key issue for the speeding driver – linking increased speed with crash risk per se. However the use of the

Kloeden Crash Risk Curve is not recommended amongst this group. In doing so, it will be important to stress that even in newer cars, the advanced vehicle safety features available today do not counteract speeding behaviour, enhance driver skill or affect the braking distance / crash risk relationship.

To increase the **credibility and believability** of speeding-related information and education messages directed at the ‘well over’ group, it will be important to acknowledge that whilst there are many other factors that contribute to crash risk and crash outcomes, the impact of these factors is minimised by driving within the speed limit.

Executional Style – a mix of educational, demonstrative, consequences and high impact advertising is appropriate for this group. However, the approach used must be even more careful to ensure that any negative outcomes depicted are due solely to the drivers speeding behaviour, otherwise this group may dismiss the claims on the basis of other people or other factors being at fault – concept / campaign pre-testing will play a crucial role here.

Whilst this may seem at odds with the previous point, the purpose of ad executions is to allow the ‘well over’ speeding driver to relate to the depiction (and outcome) shown in the ad in such a way that they believe it could happen to them. The purpose of broader information and education is to acknowledge that whilst there are many other factors that contribute to crash risk and crash outcomes, the impact of these factors is minimised by driving within the speed limit.