

**SWINDON & DISTRICT GROUP OF ADVANCED MOTORISTS**  
**www.swindondrivers.com**  
**07050 682842**  
**Newsletter**  
**November 2003**

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**Disclaimer**

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The Swindon & District Group of Advanced Motorists retains the names and addresses of all group members on computer for mailing and administrative purposes.

## WHO'S WHO IN YOUR GROUP?

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## CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

Welcome to the November edition of our newsletter.

The September Group night was our AGM, and election of your Committee, seeing Kirsty Newland and Dave Abbott stand down and Maggie Brewer, Angus Osborne-White and Alistair Johnson elected.

Kirsty has served our Group for a number of years in the positions of Secretary and Associate Rep. Dave, although only with the Committee for one year this time, has previously assisted in the Events Team. We thank them for their contribution.

Maggie is taking over as Treasurer (Thank-you Maggie!), with Angus and Alistair joining in the positions of Associate and Alpha 1 Rep respectively, injecting some much needed youth into the Committee. Alistair will also join Debbie on the Events Team. Welcome to you all, your contribution is much appreciated. A thank-you also to all Committee members and Observers without whose voluntary commitment the Group could not continue.

Over the coming month your new Committee will consider the future direction of the group, ensuring it is increasingly aligned with our members' interests and the advancement of road safety.

After the 2002 AGM, I announced a number of objectives, including the development of a theory course for Associate Members. The purpose of the course is to ensure that Associates arriving with their Observer for their observed runs are more adequately prepared.

During the year a small team, chaired by Chris Gleed, Senior Observer, has developed the package, the first session of which was delivered on 7th October this year.

A total of 32 participants, comprising associates, recent members, and Observers, packed a room at WHS Greenbridge to receive the first 2 modules of 8. After a slow start (sub-optimal room, projector problems etc.), a healthy discussion on aspirations and concerns for the course ensued!

Particular thanks to Kirsty Newland and Les Brown, who were pivotal in setting up the course, and to the presenters who, over the period of the four-week course, made it happen.

A number of you may recall that a student of Cardiff University studying occupational psychology approached our Group. Her research in the area of situation awareness resulted in a thesis on the effect of working memory distracters on novice and experienced drivers. A synopsis of her thesis for our Newsletter, "Don't Distract the Driver!", is published in this edition (see page 21).

You will see that our events team have been active, and I can commend to you the events planned for November and December.

We are always looking for assistance on the Committee - you don't have to wait until the AGM. As a full member you can be co-opted, the more hands, the more we can achieve. Remember, we are your Committee. Your views are important to us - without them we are losing out on our opportunities to develop as a Group.

***Mark Simpson***

## **MEMBERS NEWS**

We would like to remind all full members who have not yet renewed their membership of the Swindon Group since September, that they only have until 31st December 2003 to do so. After that date, their names will be removed from our newsletter circulation and membership lists.

A quick reminder to our newer members, that although you can be a member of the IAM nationally without joining a local Group, you cannot be a member of a local Group without also being a fully paid up member of the IAM. Please remember to complete and return your IAM Membership Renewal Form when you receive it from IAM Headquarters.

Your group membership renewal form and accompanying cheque should be returned to our Secretary, Derek Shel Drake at the address shown on the form. Our treasurer will then send you your Group Membership Card.

Please remember that we do rely on members renewing their membership for the Group to continue to exist and to give new associates the same opportunities as you have had to pass their Advanced Driving Test.

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## Associate Representative's Role

As many of you will know, I took over from Kirsty Newland at the September AGM as the new Associate Representative on the committee. Kirsty filled this role for a number of years; and having only recently become an Advanced Motorist, I know that I have a lot to live up to.

For those of you that don't know me, I currently live in Faringdon and am a student at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham, reading for a degree in Computer Systems Engineering. I was first introduced to the IAM by my step-father who is a "Motorway Observer" for the Worcester group ; this involves taking newly qualified drivers or drivers who have not had the confidence to venture onto our motorways and giving them some guidance - this not only makes motorway driving that little bit safer, but also introduces a range of people to the IAM that would otherwise have not approached the Institute.

As Associate Representative, it is my duty to bridge the gap between the new associate members and the observers, to make introductions and to chase up the stragglers. I am present at most group nights so please feel free to approach me if you have any queries.

*Angus Osborne-White*

## Alpha 1

The September AGM also saw **Alistair Johnson** assume the role of the Group's Alpha 1 Representative. Alpha 1 represents the interests of members under 30 in the IAM's Region 1. The region covers IAM groups in the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Isles of Scilly, Mid Glamorgan, Somerset, South Glamorgan, West Glamorgan and Wiltshire including the English unitary authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, Bournemouth, Bristol, North Somerset, Plymouth, Poole, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, & Torbay.

## **TEST PASSES**

We congratulate the following members who have recently passed their Advanced Driving Test :-

<b>Name</b>	<b>Observer</b>
<b>Nigel Allerton</b>	<b>Derek Sheldrake</b>
<b>Emma Caudwell</b>	<b>Les Brown</b>
<b>Peter Clothier</b>	<b>Derek Sheldrake</b>
<b>Stuart Devon</b>	<b>Bob McVay</b>
<b>Anthony Hand</b>	<b>Dave Abbott</b>
<b>James Osborne-White</b>	<b>Mike Newman</b>
<b>Alan Percival</b>	<b>Kirsty Newland</b>
<b>Derrick Pike</b>	<b>Dave Abbott</b>
<b>Paul Sewell</b>	<b>Cynthia Howard</b>
<b>Mark Stafford</b>	<b>Dave Hewitt</b>
<b>Peter Thomson</b>	<b>Dave Abbott</b>
<b>Jonathan Tuck</b>	<b>Derek Sheldrake</b>
<b>Siobhan Vinall</b>	<b>Derek Sheldrake</b>

Thanks are due to their observers.

## **NEW MEMBERS**

We welcome the following new members to the Group :-

**Christopher Clifford, James Durrant, Philip Pomeroy,  
Paul Southward, Alma Welby.**

We also welcome **Tim Hurr**, who joins us from another Group.

## On the Subject of the Test!

Just to linger a while to mention those who have passed their Test. It does seem as though we still have some Associates who we never see, they join the Group, are allocated an Observer, enjoy the experience and eventually pass the test.

The Certificate then becomes available, they are notified by the Secretary that it is available for presentation at the group meeting, the Certificate is available for 2, 3 or even 4 meetings but there is no one to collect it! It is eventually forwarded on to the Associate.

I do understand that some people find it difficult to attend due to other commitments but it never ceases to amaze me that some people **NEVER** attend the group or show support whilst undergoing their Observed Runs. Are we just a convenient means to an end? How do they know what the group is about, it's functions, it's committed members who regularly attend and the Committee who run the group.

I know that if my Certificate was available for me I would arrange my commitments to coincide with that aim. Even if working nights, I would take a nights holiday to present myself at the meeting, receive my Certificate and propose my thanks to all concerned for their hard work on my behalf.

There was a time not too long ago when people who collected their Certificates did stand up and say 'Thank You' in front of the group. Not all people can do this readily but if you are grateful enough it is so easy.

So please think a little more about the group and let us meet you sometime!

As always these sort of scenarios are a 'Bone of Contention' to me and you may think, "It's Chris on his high horse again", but I say to you, **Show me a person with mine and the Committee's type of commitment and I'll show you someone who is dedicated!**

*Chris Gleed (Chief Observer)*

## WINTER DRIVING

Winter is close by!

Oh well! Summer is gone by and we 'Look Forward' to Winter. I think not!!!

We have to face it I suppose, but I for one do not relish the fact but by thinking about it I 'mentally' prepare myself and of course my vehicle.

A decent coat of wax for protection! Check the wiper blades! Check the tyres, including the spare! Have they adequate tread depth!

Check the hoses, Anti-freeze etc, is the battery up to it!!!

Top up those 'Levels'!

Make sure that the interior of the windscreen is clean. It's surprising how much difference that it makes to your vision, (your lights seem so much brighter!)

Are your lights correctly adjusted!

Plan your journey:

Is it essential! Check Local forecasts! Local radio! Tell someone what time you expect to arrive! Take warm clothes, food, torch, mobile phone, boots, torch and if 'Snowy', take a spade! Clean windows and carry a scraper and de-icer.

On the Motorway if you have any problems, use the emergency telephone, it makes it easier to locate you. Make sure you know your location from the numbers on the marker posts on the side of the Hard Shoulder .Stay with your vehicle until help arrives but do not sit in it!

Adjust your driving to suit the conditions.

Hail, heavy snow and rain reduce visibility, use 'dipped' headlights and reduce your speed.

## **Icy Conditions**

Compared with a nice dry road, it can take up to 10 times longer to stop under icy conditions so allow that extra safety zone.

Use the highest possible gear to avoid wheel spin.

Manoeuvre gently. Avoid harsh braking and acceleration. Change down in good time but be careful with the accelerator and clutch, particularly in slippery conditions These can cause skids too!! The most likely fault is the 'Driver'!

## **Fog**

Use fog lights if visibility is seriously reduced but switch them off when visibility improves! Don't follow too closely! Don't speed up too quickly if it seems to clear, it can be a welcome respite but it can reappear quickly.

At junctions, wind those windows down and listen!! Consider the horn use!

If the fog is very thick and you can see the lights of the vehicle in front of you, you are most likely travelling too close to stop in an emergency.

## **Floods**

Stop and assess how deep. (Get the 'Mother in Law' to wade through!) If shallow, drive through slowly but keep the engine speed high and steady by slipping the clutch. When you are through, check your brakes.

Don't forget, 'Mirrors' first. If the brakes seem inadequate drive slowly whilst pressing the left foot lightly on the brake pedal, this will assist in drying them out.

If it is likely that the road has a 'camber' then use a central position route through the flood which will be the shallowest area. Beware of oncoming traffic though!

If you are lucky it could be just 'Surface Water' towards the nearside. Do not drive through without considering pedestrians within that area. If you soak me....I carry a 'Waterproof Pen' and notebook!!!

## **Taking the IAM Test under Winter Conditions:**

If you are about to take the Test, discuss some of these items with your Observer.

- Maybe have an Observed Night Run.
- Consider the difficulties of night driving.

Shadows under street lighting! People in dark clothing! Pubs and Restaurant areas, more people and probably intoxicated!

The bigger the Hazard the more 'Cat's Eyes'! The use of reflective studs! Information from other peoples lights.

The sweep of the headlights of vehicles ahead can indicate the sharpness of a bend that they are approaching.

Brake lights tell you...Reduce speed!!

Lots of other things can happen so just remember!

**Advanced Driving is no Accident!!**

Prepare Well! That 'Skill for Life', to be 'Obtained' and 'Maintained'

Show that 'Dedication and Commitment' to the Volunteers who assist you.

We do not work for nothing! We work for your safety on the road and hope that your families and you reap the reward!

Be safe

'Roll on Spring'!

Take care and drive safely!

***Chris Gleed (Chief Observer)***

## **The Wiltshire & Swindon Road Safety Partnership**

- aims to influence driver behaviour through an education programme that minimises the need for enforcement.

- operates a proactive public awareness programme through printed promotional material, radio advertising and a website.

- manages safety cameras within the unitary Swindon Borough as well as the Wiltshire County areas.

**Saira Khan**, the Partnership's Communications Officer, will be the guest speaker at our December meeting. Come along to the Blunsdon House Hotel on the 3rd December and hear how the Partnership's work will help contribute towards the Government's target of a 40% reduction in road casualties by 2010.

### **QUICK-LEE CLEANERS**

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## Do M4 Drivers Need SPECS?

A new traffic information system is now live on the M4 between Junction 12 - Theale, and J14 Hungerford, just east of Membury Service station. It was switched on officially, by a transport minister, for a '6-month trial 'period' on Tuesday 7 October 2003.

There has been much speculation that this system has already been equipped with the SPECS system to enforce speed limits. This speculation has prompted the Highways Agency to issue a bulletin saying that there are currently no SPEC systems in place on the M4. At present the system is only for disseminating information about traffic conditions to drivers.

Whether or not SPECS has been installed it is still a hot topic of conversation within the motoring community. Research from the world wide web has produced some interesting speculation about the system.

It is likely to be set at 78mph real road speed! No human intervention is required in issuing speeding tickets, so a very large numbers can be issued automatically.

PS. The cameras are mounted on the overhead information signs, (pairs of tiny cameras). They **DO NOT FLASH**, so you won't know you are likely to 'cop' a ticket at the time.

## What is SPECS?

It is the only approved automatic digital speed enforcement using average speed measurement in the UK. The system is deterrent based with the ultimate deterrent being enforcement.

The digital speed camera developed by Speed Check Services Ltd (SPECS) obtained Home Office type approval in 2000. The camera is a major technological development over previous speed cameras and has proved successful in improving road safety and reducing casualties. SPECS cameras work in pairs and calculate the average speed of a car over a length that can be between 250m and 10km.

## **Is there any similar technology currently in operation?**

No. SPECS is a unique product.

Although conventional automatic speed enforcement systems are in operation, none currently can enforce speeds over a distance - except SPECS.

## **How does it work?**

SPECS works using automatic average speed digital technology. A pair of cameras creates a speed controlled zone and groups of cameras can be linked to create a speed controlled network. As vehicles pass between the cameras pairs they are digitally recorded. The time it takes for the vehicle to travel between both points is used to calculate the average speed.

If the vehicle speed is above a speed threshold, a speeding violation record is automatically generated. This includes images of the registration plate, a colour image of the vehicle and text data including the time, date, location and average speed travelling between both locations.

Violation records are stored on large storage capacity discs. This system functions 24 hours a day and can be interfaced with existing ticket processing systems.

## **How will motorists know what to look out for?**

Motorists will need to look out for cameras erected on tall blue coloured distinctive columns in the verge and central reservation. The cameras do not flash and all the data is digitally stored so that there is no need for film. Speed Camera Signs will be erected explaining to motorists that speed enforcement will be taking place.

## **What are SPECS and SVDD?**

SPECS is the brand name for the system. This stands for **SPEEd Check Enforcement System**.

SVDD stands for **Speed Violation Detection Deterrent**. It is the name given to the unique technology the SPECS system is based upon which has gained **Home Office Type Approval (HOTA)**.

## **What is Home Office Type Approval (HOTA) testing and why is it significant?**

Home Office Approval testing is in place to ensure that equipment meets the highest standards and any information provided from HOTA approved equipment can be considered as providing admissible evidence in UK courts.

**ACPO** (Association of Chief Police Officers) approved the system and supported its application for Home Office Type Approval. Two Police Forces, Kent and Leicestershire, championed the trials testing on the M1 and M20 Roadworks.

The **PSDB** (Police Scientific and Development Branch of the Home Office) undertook scientific evaluation as a necessary part of the HOTA process. This evaluation included test track trials at an independent test site. The evaluation was successful and verified the SVDD technology used in SPECS as 100% accurate.

HOTA is significant because it empowers UK Police Forces to use the SPECS technology to bring charges against speeding offenders, confident in the knowledge that they can present irrefutable supporting evidence.

In addition, UK Home Office Type Approved products are regarded internationally as meeting external high standards of quality and Integrity.

## **Where is the system in operation?**

The accuracy of this information cannot be guaranteed but permanent SPECS systems are thought to be operating in Nottingham, Northampton and Gloucester:

A616 Stocksbridge Bypass in South Yorkshire

Nottingham Phase 1 - A610 & Ring Road

Nottingham Phase 2 - Extension of Nuttall Rd A610

Nottingham Phase 3 - Extension of Western Boulevard South, Ring Rd

Nottingham Phase 4 - Extension of Western Boulevard North, Ring Rd

A43 Lumbertubs Way, Northampton

Linden & Podsmead, Gloucester - Residential area

Temporary roadworks throughout the country currently using the SPECS system include :-

M62 J7 -9 Roadworks, Warrington

M6 Thelwall Viaduct, Cheshire

M62 J7 - 9 Roadworks, Cheshire

M6 J6 Spaghetti Junction Roadworks, Birmingham

## **Is the data legally enforceable?**

The HOTA enables the SPECS violation records to be presented as admissible evidence in UK courts.

## **Apart from its use as a speeding deterrent, are there any other benefits?**

Yes. There are many other longer term benefits which will be possible once the SPECS systems are installed including increasing road safety and decreasing speed profiles, more accurate journey time information and other performance data and speed management benefits.

## IN CAR DIGITAL RADIO

The 23rd of October saw the opening of the BBC DAB (Digital Radio) multiplex from the Blunsdon transmitter site (situated off Lady Lane). The new multiplex ensures reliable DAB reception of all the BBC Radio Stations (National Programming & BBC Radio Swindon) for 240,000 people in the Swindon area. It complements an existing multiplex opened at the same site last spring by commercial operator Digital One which carries many other popular stations including Classic FM. The Blunsdon site is the twelfth new DAB transmitter to go live as part of the BBC's coverage expansion plan that will increase BBC DAB digital radio coverage to 85% of the UK population by mid 2004.

More and more people are now listening to DAB radio as prices of DAB portables and hi-fi tuners have fallen to around £100. They are enjoying the benefits of greatly increased programme choice and more reliable reception that digital radio brings. There will soon be many DAB sets available which can be installed inside a vehicle.

Last spring Ford threw its weight behind in-car DAB Digital Radio with the announcement that UK dealers would be selling vehicles fitted with in-car DAB receivers. Ford is offering the **Blaupunkt Woodstock DAB 52** digital radio as an option with new cars as well as an after-fit in all its UK models and can also install a DAB receiver in most makes of car. Ford had initially said it would take this step in 2004, but brought its plans forward by a year. The World DAB Forum said: "Ford's commitment to DAB Digital Radio is a major milestone in the widespread proliferation and adoption of the DAB system. The in-car market is critical to the success of DAB Digital Radio. Ford was the first manufacturer in the UK to offer availability of DAB digital in-car radios and we are confident that others will follow its lead".

Many Ford dealers have a demonstration car fitted with the Blaupunkt Woodstock DAB 52 radio delivering AM/FM and DAB radio, as well as CD and MP3 functionality. Blaupunkt have also recently introduced a new model to the range, the **Woodstock DAB 53**.

Another unit currently available is the **Goodmans GCE7007DAB** - the world's first in-car DAB Digital Radio that operates using existing car aerials.

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Uniquely, this means that this unit can be installed without the need for specialist equipment or the inconvenience and expense of fitting an additional DAB-specific aerial. Unlike other models on the market, upgrading your car to the benefits of DAB technology can now be a simple 5-minute job, courtesy of easy, push-fit industry-standard ISO connections. There's no need to drill holes in the bodywork to install a DAB aerial or run new aerial cabling through the car.

In-car DAB is certainly advantageous in terms of road safety as it is not necessary to retune as you drive around, and the system works smarter than the FM RDS system that we are used to. What's more the system provides all the features that you would expect, the Goodmans unit for example also includes a CD Player, 3 band FM/MW/LW RDS "old technology" analogue radio with Traffic Announcement System, and 30 Station Pre-sets. a display panel gives you useful information about the song, artist, competitions, radio station and other digital broadcasting information. There's also a detachable front panel with carry case and an anti-theft LED indicator. Having access to analogue networks means that you will still be able to use the radio even if you are driving in an area not yet covered by DAB.

### **The Bit Rate Issue**

Most DAB radio broadcasts are not at the maximum available "bit rate" of which the medium is theoretically capable, compromising quality slightly. This is a consequence of having to share out the overall bit rate capacity to accommodate the large number of stations that are broadcast on each multiplex. The same compromise has to be made made in all areas of digital media such as digital satellite and DVD. It is a minor drawback that will be more noticeable in a domestic environment with the broadcast compared to analogue FM reception of the same broadcast station under ideal conditions. In any event such a perfect environment is a rare commodity.

For mobile reception DAB is designed to be far better than that achievable on FM so although the audio quality of some stations is lower than it might be the radio should sound better overall and in any case the audio quality issue is not usually such a significant factor in vehicles because of road and engine noise.

## EATING ON THE MOVE - KNOW THE RISKS

A survey by insurance company Direct Line has shown that two in every five drivers admit to snacking while on the move, despite the vast majority acknowledging the fact that it causes a lapse in concentration.

Direct Line believes that the hazard posed by in-car consumption is greatly underestimated and drivers must be more aware of the danger of distraction that results from eating and drinking at the wheel.

Close to a quarter (23 per cent) of drivers who juggle food and drink at the wheel only do so when in a rush and, one in 20 regularly trades in the dining table for the dashboard to munch their way through the equivalent of a three-course meal.

The Direct Line research also revealed the bad habits some drivers have got into:

- A third (34 per cent) of motorists cruise along with one hand on the wheel, holding food and drinks in the other hand.
- A fifth (21 per cent) place items on the passenger seat between mouthfuls, glancing from the road to the car's interior.
- Over 2 per cent of UK drivers steer with their knees to eat with both hands.
- A further 1 per cent will allow a passenger to take control of the wheel while they sneak a bite or a few mouthfuls of drink.

Emma Holyer, road safety manager at Direct Line said:

"Direct Line urges motorists to take a break and eat at the roadside, rather than push on with their journeys and risk the dangerous distraction food and drink represents."

## AMBULANCES TURN YELLOW FOR EUROPE

For many years, Britain's civilian ambulances have been exclusively painted white: marking them out as clean, clinical, and ultra-visible.

This is all about to change with the emergency vehicles being resprayed bright yellow. The move is part of a plan to introduce uniform ambulances throughout Europe to improve safety and ensure that they are instantly recognisable.

The vehicles will be painted "Euro Yellow RAL 1016".

At present, countries operate different coloured ambulances - Germany's are salmon pink, Denmark's are Euro yellow, and France's road traffic accident ambulances are red and it's claimed that the differences have led to confusion.

In Britain, the ubiquity of the white van has also meant that, despite their distinctive sirens, ambulances are not always instantly recognisable.

The colour change is a recommendation of a working group on the European committee of standardisation, which has been considering how to make ambulances as instantly recognisable as possible throughout the continent.

Drawing on research it commissioned, the group found that the human eye's response to a particular hue reaches a peak with the colour "Euro Yellow RAL 1016". The colour is also distinctive since it is rarely used for other vehicles.

Keith Nuttall, chief executive of the Royal Berkshire ambulance NHS trust, confirmed that the changes - which also include paramedics wearing the British uniform of a green squad suit and green and yellow high visibility jacket - would go ahead - and the British Standards Institute also says that it will adopt the new standards on behalf of the UK. He added: "I truly hope they accept them because it's a major step forward in improving the safety of ambulances, not just in the UK but across the whole of Europe."

"If you're on a motorway and you see a white van in the distance driving very fast, you don't know if it's an ambulance until it's quite close to you.

"But if it's painted this colour, Euro Yellow RAL 1016, you'll know it's an ambulance long before it gets near you or you hear it.

"The new yellow base colour also enhances the safety of emergency staff who spend most of their working lives in the hostile environment of our busy, dangerous and congested roads. It's all about safety and conspicuousness."

It is likely that yellow ambulances will be in use throughout Europe by April 2004.

## REMEMBER - FOR ALL THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT THE GROUP

**Swindon & District  
Group of Advanced Motorists**

Group No. 2158

**Welcome to Our Website**

The Swindon & District Group of Advanced Motorists offers guidance to those who want to improve their driving skills. We cater for everyone on four wheels. Most members take and pass the Advanced Driving Test and become full members of the Institute of Advanced Motorists. We also have a wide ranging social programme open to full members and associates, including a regular monthly meeting at the Chansdon House Hotel - [click here](#) for details and directions.

Use the Navigation Buttons to find out more.

We hope that you find our site useful and invite you to contact us - [click here](#) for details.

**NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS**

*Our next meeting is on Wednesday 12th November (not the 5th).  
Click [here](#) for details.*

*The next edition of the Newsletter will be available at the meeting.*

*Articles for publication welcome - click [here](#) to email.*

**2003**

Last Updated  
29/10/2003

Swindon & District Group of Advanced Motorists  
Registered Charity No. 1050397

Don't forget to visit our website  
<http://www.swindondrivers.com>

## **DON'T DISTRACT THE DRIVER!**

### **Investigating Expert & Novice Drivers' Hazard Perception**

Every year within the UK, 50,000 deaths are caused by accidents on the roads. Ninety-five per cent of these accidents can be attributed to human behaviour. As human beings we seem to develop an over-confidence in our own skill, especially in such a domain as driving, where we are all guilty of forgetting what danger lies in our hands when we are in charge of the wheel. In order to make people realise the potential dangers, we need to understand the human mind in greater depth.

Only by knowing the limitations of our processing abilities, can we begin to understand why so many accidents can be attributed to human error.

Researchers in psychology believe that when learning a skill such as driving, the operator's perception of different items changes as they gain more experience.

For example, although a novice driver may understand that a "children crossing" sign would obviously mean that children may be crossing the road, the expert driver would use this knowledge to anticipate future events, which in turn would make the expert driver slow down greatly in order to prepare for a child unexpectedly running into the road. With respect to this, it has been suggested That expert and novice drivers can be distinguished by their ability to ticipate hazards.

To correctly anticipate what is likely to happen on the road requires an amount of expertise. The operator must be able to understand the whole scenario, predict the numerous possibilities which may take place and choose the correct action which will ensure that safety maintained. Studies which have researched this have found that differences in hazard perception ability can be seen in not just between expert and novice drivers, but the ability can also distinguish vanced police drivers from adult drivers who have been driving for twenty years.

So what processes are used when we are interpreting the driving world?

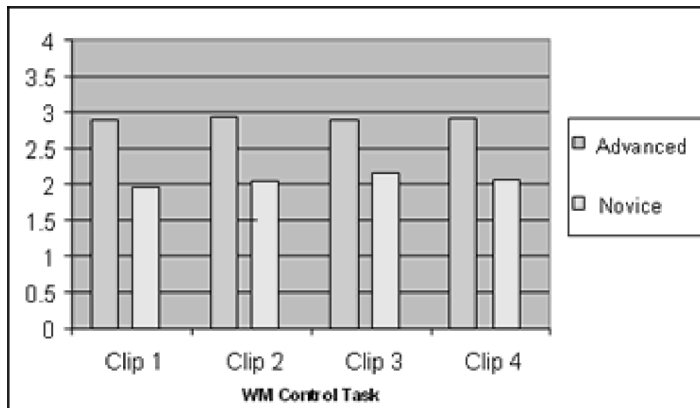
Although many researchers have different views of thought processes, “working memory” as it is called within psychology, one view distinguishes between “spatial” working memory and “verbal” working memory. The part of the brain which is responsible for spatial memory interprets incoming information as a visual and spatial (the “inner eye”), whereas verbal working memory interprets information in a linguistic form, such as speech (the “inner ear”). Spatial working memory has been shown to be important in tasks such as driving, and is used when we plan our journey in our heads, or remember the location of other cars around us. In contrast, verbal working memory may hold a vital role in learning language.

In this study, I not only hoped to support the idea that there may be differences between the time taken for novice drivers and expert drivers to perceive road hazards, but I also wanted to find out whether the same processes were used by these two groups of drivers recognising hazards. To research this, I devised tasks which were known to distract people’s attention, and chose tasks which were either verbal or spatial in nature. If participants were able to perform a driving task competently when given a verbal distraction task to complete, yet their hazard perception deteriorated when given a spatial task to complete, then this would support the view that the skill of driving uses up spatial working memory

The two groups of drivers were selected by the criteria that “experts” have completed a recognised advanced driving certificate, and the sample was made up of volunteers from Swindon IAM Group members and driving instructors. “Novices” were required to have passed their driving test within the last year. The two groups were both given a video to watch on a laptop which showed scenes from a forward view of a moving vehicle, taken from the South Wales Police Force. Volunteers then had to move a mouse around the computer screen, and click on anything that they perceived as a hazard as quickly as possible.

While completing this task, half of the volunteers from each group were also given distracting tasks which they had to complete at the same time as the video.

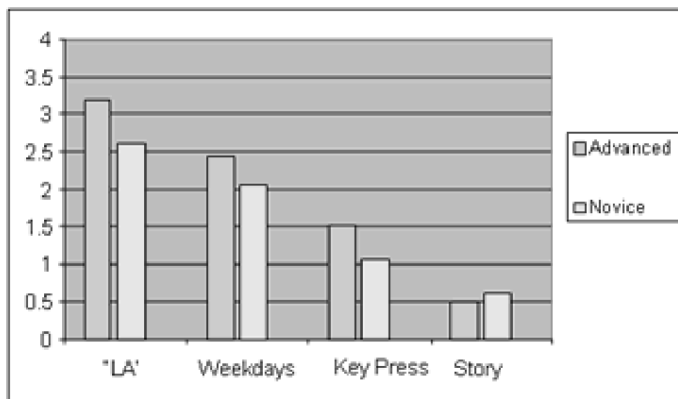
Volunteers in this Dual-Task condition had four different distraction tasks - repeating the word “La”; naming aloud the days of the week in a random order; pressing 12 keys in a rectangular sequence without looking at their hand; and retelling a news story they had listened to in as much detail as they could remember. They completed one distraction task during five minutes of video footage, then stopped and began the next five minutes of footage with a different distraction task, until all four tasks had been completed.



**Figure 1:-** Advanced drivers’ and novice drivers’ SAVTE performance in single-task conditions (Group A: without distraction tasks).

Figure 1 shows that without distractions, the Advanced Drivers’ performance were significantly faster at anticipating the hazards than the novice drivers. This is even more notable when considering the age difference between the two groups (20.5yrs V’s 46.5yrs). Many of the older volunteers expressed a concern about the age difference between the groups, however this shows that experience cannot be outdone by youthful agility!! Furthermore, when faced with such hazards in reality, it must be noted that not only would the advanced drivers have an advantage over the novice drivers in anticipating the hazard, but they are also likely to be better prepared in such a situation due to such experience. Thus it is not surprising that young inexperienced drivers are likely to be involved in considerably more accidents.

However, when faced with the distraction tasks this advantage shown by the advanced drivers was greatly reduced. Although the verbal tasks (repeating "La" and days of the week) were not found to significantly impair volunteer's hazard perception ability, in contrast, in the more complex condition where volunteers were asked to remember a news story, performance in the hazard perception task was severely impaired - so much so that experts and novice drivers performed in a similar manner! This result was due to the limitations of human concentration - it does not matter how much of an expert we become at a task, we are still restricted by the capabilities of our working memory. We are simply not able to perform two concurrent complex tasks successfully.



**Figure 2:-** Advanced drivers' and novice drivers' SAVTE performance in dual-task conditions (Group B: with distraction tasks).

The last distraction condition provided the most interesting result of all. The results of the Key Press task showed that both expert and novice drivers' hazard anticipation ability was halved when they were asked to perform a fairly simple task of pressing twelve keys in a rectangular sequence. This result was not due to the fact that the Key Pressing task itself was difficult, as prior to the experiment I had asked friends to judge the difficulty of the distraction tasks alone. They had concluded that although the story was the most difficult, naming the days of the week in a random order was the second most difficult task because it was so confusing. The key pressing task however, was judged to be fairly straightforward and simple.

So why did the volunteers find that the simple task interfered so much with their hazard perception ability? The task of driving relies heavily on spatial working memory, likewise the key pressing task also relied on this spatial working memory. As both these tasks relied on the same component, the human brain could not manage to perform the two spatial tasks together regardless of driving expertise. Participants' spatial working memory had been overloaded by the key pressing task and so performance in the Hazard Perception task was severely affected.

The results of this study have shown that although advanced drivers have superior hazard anticipatory skills than novice drivers, both groups of drivers were affected similarly by the different distraction tasks. Both of the verbal distraction tasks did not significantly impair drivers' hazard perception ability, however the story task seriously impaired volunteers' hazard perception, and the spatial key pressing task halved the amount of time taken for novice and expert volunteers' to anticipate hazards.

Although it may appear obvious that any complex task which is likely to require a lot of concentration will impair one's driving ability, this study has shown that even tasks judged to be fairly simple can disrupt driving ability. So it seems that regardless of expertise, all drivers should be made aware that even simple tasks may be detrimental to their driving performance if the task interferes with spatial working memory which is used during driving. Such an effect would mean that even if a driver was using a hands-free mobile phone, then the simple task of entering the telephone number, or searching through the phonebook, would be a similar task to the one used in the current study, and would be likely to severely overload spatial working memory. In conclusion the study has drawn some interesting results which should be researched further in order to provide an insight to human processing abilities and to aid safety on the roads.

*Louise S. Onslow*

**With many thanks to the volunteers of Swindon Group IAM, The Safeway Driving School, The Amos School of Driving and Wootton Bassett School for their kindness in helping me with this research.**

## WEB LINKS

This time, we focus on one of the Advanced Motorist's favourite haunts - the M25 motorway, starting with a virtual video tour courtesy of the BBC London website. Start your tour at :-

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/travel/features/m25\\_tours.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/travel/features/m25_tours.shtml)

You have the option of taking the whole tour in one go, or if you are pushed for time or want to pick out a favourite stretch first you may take the tour in sections in which case your options are :-

- Buckinghamshire Section in Two Minutes
- Hertfordshire Section in Seven Minutes
- Essex Section in Six Minutes
- Kent Section in Four Minutes
- Surrey Section in Seven Minutes
- Berkshire Section in One Minute

A new book "*London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25*" by Iain Sinclair gets a 5 star rating on [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk). The book highlights the features of the towns and countryside around the motorway, covering ground in stretches similar to those of the web tour - from Waltham Abbey to Shenley, Abbots Langley to Staines, Staines to Epsom and Epsom to Westerham before going on to Dartford, the river and Carfax before arriving back at Waltham Abbey. At only £6.39 for 592 pages this book seems to be something of a bargain.

Quotes : "*London Orbital gets under the skin. What looks at first like a dull and deeply unappealing journey is actually a multi-layered, lyrical, ugly, mythical, engaged and engaging excursion from the present into the past and back again*" - Review on [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

'*The writing is lucid, accessible, inventive and witty. Get your hiking boots...if only for a walk...to the bookshop*' - The Independent

## **MEMBERS DISCOUNTS**

A range of discounts exclusive to all members of the group are available. Discounts currently available are as follows :-

**Central Tyre Ltd**, Newport Street, Old Town - 10% discount on tyres, batteries, brakes, oil and filter changes and shock absorbers, 15% discount on exhausts.

Tel: 01793 528493

**MotorWay Tyre and Autocentres Ltd**, Hawkesworth Trading Estate, North Star - 10% discount on tyres, batteries and related services.

Tel: 01793 525525

**Quick-Lee Cleaners Ltd**, 15 Borough Fields Shopping Centre, Wootton Bassett - 10% discount on dry cleaning services.

Tel: 01793 848859

**Car & Truck Services (Swindon) Ltd**, Transfer Bridge Ind Estate - 10-40% Discount dependent on the product purchased.

Tel : 01793 616151

**To obtain your discount you will need to produce your current, valid group membership card when obtaining a quote or before any work is started.**

In addition to the above FULL members of the IAM are eligible for a range of additional benefits, details of which can usually be found in the current edition of "Advanced Driving" magazine.

## **FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

**19th November 2003**

**"Shock Tactics" presentation by  
Martin Lloyd of Wiltshire Fire Brigade.**

This presentation is used to educate drivers who have committed traffic offences. They attend the presentation in lieu of receiving a standard penalty.

Please note that the presentation includes graphic content which some may find upsetting.

This is a special meeting to be held at **Westlea Fire Station** commencing at **7:30pm**.

**3rd December 2003**

**Saira Khan, Communications Officer of the  
Wiltshire & Swindon Road Safety Partnership**

Come and hear all about the deployment of GATSO safety cameras in the area.

Venue : **Blunsdon House Hotel** commencing at **7:30pm**.

**Next Year**

As usual , the first meeting of the new year will be held on the first Wednesday in February. Have a Happy Christmas and we'll see you on **4th February 2004**.