

We need to eliminate the bad driving habits

THE candid camera-style tactics adopted by Central North Island police to some may seem an underhanded method to enforce road safety but it is an inspired strategy to make us all look at how we drive.



Human Nature

by Grant McLachlan

Driving on our rural roads says more about our personalities than possibly any other form of social interaction.

The police are trialing the scheme to target poor driving habits – such as crossing the double-yellow centerline on the Manawatu Gorge. But what are often overlooked are the other types of behaviour that cause collisions.

I congratulate the CNI police for realizing that how we drive contributes as much to crashes than other factors. The combined speed of oncoming vehicles is 200km/h. It takes a vehicle to leave a lane that often results in a fatal collision.

I am ashamed to admit it but there is a noticeable deterioration in the standard of driving east of the Manawatu Gorge. Between Woodville and Waipukurau is not as winding as other parts of the country but there is a convergence of through traffic with local, rural and primary industrial traffic. The road toll in this area is literally a collision between the two groups.

Two of my close friends were killed in separate crashes on the

result, how many other cars try to overtake when the lanes merge?

I've recently experienced a scary trend of vehicles crossing the centerline when being overtaken. If people react that way to the "distraction" of another vehicle on the road, I would hate to think how they deal with other distractions.

We seem to feel bullet proof and detached from others we share the road with. But we aren't invincible and we are more likely to hit another vehicle than leave the road.

When seatbelts were made compulsory in the United States, the number of fatal car crashes soared as people felt safer so drove faster. Here, we drive on roads not too dissimilar to 30 years ago. Vehicles today, however, have traction control, ABS braking, numerous safety features and more powerful engines.

Are we more discourteous to other drivers we don't know or do we gain confidence behind the anonymity of our tinted windows?

I prefer to drive rather than fly around the North Island. It is more convenient to drive from Wellington to Auckland than face the delays and taxi charges associated with flying. But recently I have started to avoid the black spots on SH1 by using SH4. I just don't have the stomach of seeing so many impatient drivers having near misses when overtaking.

The CNI police realise that road safety is a community effort. Police hiding in bushes with speed cameras or patrolling passing lanes brought into question police motives. Isn't it better that a police officer hides in a bush with a video camera instead?

But the police can only do so much. I applaud trucking companies who have fitted dashboard cameras to record traffic incidents.

It is ironic that many trucks have 0800 numbers asking for comments about driving practices.

I recently followed a boyracer who would brake heavily on the corners and accelerated to ridiculous speeds on the straights. He obviously had problems maintaining control of his vehicle as the vehicle had aerodynamic and suspension modifications.

Fortunately, his vehicle was "for sale" and his phone number was on the back window (a ruse for street racing). So I rang the *555 service and gave the police his number.

That was one unsafe driver (and car) off the road. What about the rest?

We all need to take ownership of this issue before we become victims.

• Grant McLachlan is a planning law specialist

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Takapau Plains Straight. In another, an old school friend killed a mother and her child. Two of my neighbour's kids were involved in a boyracer-crash that killed four. In one year, two fellow students were killed in separate crashes. Overall, more than a dozen people I know have been killed on Hawke's Bay roads.

All these deaths were avoidable. They were all caused by social flaws – peer pressure to do stupid things behind the wheel.

The way we drive says a lot about ourselves. And there are many bad habits we have to eliminate.

For a start, a leading cause of accidents is the overtaking of slow vehicles. Rather than just target the over-taker, how hard is it to pull over when one sees a queue behind? Or, when pulling out from a side road, why not accelerate so other vehicles don't need to brake heavily?

Also, why do so many vehicles accelerate at passing lanes when they are being overtaken? Conversely, is there anything more annoying than the one car that uses up the whole passing lane to pass one vehicle? As a

Carr's Toon

with John Carr



"I've got an elusive replacement in mind but I'm not sure if she's got a New Zealand passport"

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Letters to the editor

Servicing debt in NZ dairy industry

The dairy industry in New Zealand is constantly touted as a wealth producing asset for our country, and as our biggest income earner overseas.

The truth is that any profits made are disappearing in interest payments for both Fonterra itself and for a large fraction of individual farmers.

Fonterra's total worth is \$17 billion (\$17,000 million) and their debt level is \$5-60 per cent, making their debt approximately \$10 billion (\$10,000 million).

Paying 7-10 per cent interest on this debt makes interest payments of around \$1 billion (\$1,000 million) per year.

Now since there are about 10,000 dairy farmers in New Zealand, most of whom supply Fonterra, dividing Fonterra's interest payments of \$1 billion (\$1,000 million) by 10,000 farmers,

we get \$100,000 per supplier. So before Fonterra pays each supplier for the year, it must deduct \$100,000 for interest repayments on its own debt, or borrow more itself.

After Fonterra has deducted its interest repayments, and the farmer receives his payout for the year, he then has his own borrowings to service. Three quarters of dairy farmers have debt averaging \$500,000 so they must take around \$50,000 in interest from their payout, but the remaining quarter, about 2500 farmers, have debts averaging several millions.

Banks are now the major sector obtaining wealth from the New Zealand dairy industry and they largely repatriate their profits to Australia.

The total annual bank profit from lending to the New Zealand dairy industry is around \$1 billion – this is \$1000 million which is taken to Australia every year from the New Zealand dairy industry profits before any New Zealand farmers or Fonterra take their profits

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