



12th February, 2011

For the attention of the Environment Scrutiny Panel

Dear Sir / Madam,

I cannot understand why there is a perceived need to change the island's speed limits and suspect a political or popularity motive. I cannot further understand how one parish can impose a total limit of 30 mph when persons from all parishes can drive along those roads. Was that the result of the vociferous few being noticed when the majority were quite happy with the previous limits? However, since a change is being considered I feel that there is a need for fewer zones and this would be an opportunity to remove some of the clutter of urbanising signs which spoil our beautiful environment. In addition I think it would be a good time to review the ideology behind displayed speed signs and change their purpose to a recommendation rather than an obligation. This would possibly be a bold move, but would not be a signal to allow increased speeds and incidents.

I think the 15 mph Green Lanes were a brilliant innovation and quite a unique initiative to protect the needs of pedestrians, horse riders and strollers. It would be a huge shame to change those to a higher limit. 15 mph is not too slow, unless I suppose you live on one of those lanes! There is no difficulty whatsoever in keeping a vehicle to this speed. Motorists do not have to use those roads. It is enjoyable to drive at that speed occasionally to appreciate our rural delights. This must be a huge promotional advantage for out visiting tourists.

I think imposing speed limits on faster roads removes the responsibility from drivers. There is a concept of "safe driving speed" which necessitates the driver being aware of a sensible speed. There seems to be a trend to criminalise drivers who exceed a speed limit although it might be perfectly safe to do so. I feel that speed is the responsibility of a driver taking account of all kinds of factors such as experience, time of day, light conditions, hazards, obstructions, weather conditions, time of year, blind spots, etc. I don't think that enough emphasis is given to the psychology of driving in the driving test and perhaps there should be a

second compulsory course after the simple ability to control a vehicle has been acquired. The emphasis needs to be driver responsibility.

Speed itself is well down in the list of things which cause accidents. The slogan "a crash is not an accident" is absolutely true. The biggest cause of accidents is human error. The ability to anticipate and predict what others might do is the best guide for safety – people do not do unpredictable things if all the possibilities are considered! Driving along a 30 mph road at night, when deserted is a safe situation as the possibilities are limited, but when pedestrians, children, cyclists, dogs or other animals and other vehicles are around then it is necessary to be alert to all the possibilities. An alertness to road width, parked vehicles, junctions, oil spills, possible ice, leaves, mud, sand, gravel, wind, rain, etc. is far more important than seeing a speed limit sign and believing that to be the safe limit. I really feel that speed limits are a bit of a nonsense for a responsible driver who is constantly assessing the road situation. Driving should be an enjoyable pursuit without the need to constantly monitor the speedometer in case the obligatory limit is exceeded.

I certainly would be totally against a points system on a driver's licence. Why do we slavishly have to follow the UK? If money is going to be spent on a penalty system then I would prefer it to be spent on educating drivers about the whole safe psychology of being behind a wheel. This obviously cannot be part of the present driving test. However we allow those who have passed the "controlling a car type test" to drive without any further road education. The majority of accidents involve youngish people. Older drivers are sometimes thought to be a problem but usually that is because they are cautious and probably too cautious because they do not drive regularly, but speed limits are not going to change that. I really feel that criminalising drivers who drive beyond an arbitrary limit is the wrong policy. Speed is rarely the cause of accidents, and this was shown by a Top Gear survey in the last few years. It was well down in the list of "causes".

Modern cars have very good brakes and relatively good stopping distances. People who drive fast generally have faster reactions. Most accidents are caused by people being unaware of, or not alert to the possibilities. I think our police need to focus on poor drivers such as the huge number who fail to use indicators, and those who leave it too late before they start journeys and who take more risks by going too fast for the situation in order to make up time. Drivers should make their intentions obvious in adequate time. Awareness can be raised by better road education. I really don't think that imposing slower limits will make it safer. If the limit is too slow most will ignore it anyway, and it does not mean that they are being more dangerous.

The faster you drive the more alert and aware you have to be. If it were not the case there would not be any accidents at the lower speeds. Faster driving is not always more dangerous driving. There seems a trend in society to demonise cars and speed. When I see police traps at times when roads are deserted I usually feel that police would be better engaged in solving real crimes such as vandalism, hooliganism and violence. Anyone who has an accident driving below the speed limit was probably still driving too fast and not being responsible because they were unable to predict the circumstances.

I feel that a 30 mph guide or "speed recommendation" is a sensible speed for built up areas, and in very busy streets in the town, a 20mph "recommendation" is adequate. Our attitude to speed signs should not be "Oh, if I go any faster I might get caught and added to a list of criminals!" The signs should be a guide only. It adds anxiety to driving and driving should be a pleasurable experience. I feel that all speed limit signs should be "recommendations". If someone has an accident in a 30mph zone and they were still going too fast at 25mph then it is that driver's fault for not reading the situation. If going along that same road at 35mph when the road is deserted the driver is made into a criminal. To impose limits takes the responsibility from the driver.

There has also been the idea of lowering the all island limit to 35mph a reason for which I cannot comprehend. We must not let non-motorists and anti-motorists decide issues which affect everyone. I feel that our present system is acceptable but could possibly be simplified by having far fewer ugly signs everywhere and less insistence on keeping within limits which are not always realistic as "safe road speed" varies with the circumstances.

Yours faithfully,

Alan Le Rossignol
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