

Let the pedal off the metal: Speeding risks defy rationalization

Einstein's theories are pretty widely respected, so how come most of us think we're smarter than he was?

Last week we took a look at some of the rationales drivers apply to exempt themselves from following the posted speed limit: everything from “I can’t be late for this meeting” to “the engineer who set this speed limit has obviously never driven an import that handles the road like this baby.”

Getting people to slow down, unfortunately, is a tough sell. Our society associates speed with youth and vitality. TV commercials pitch cars that sprout wings and launch off runways in the dying seconds of the ad. Movies and videos target the impressionable youth audience with squealing tires and high-speed chases, where (naturally) only very deserving bad guys get hurt.

The result? Hey, speeding isn’t that bad! Face it, cars are better designed these days, built to handle the roads, so let’s drive them the way they’re supposed to be driven. After all, the government sets speed limits just so



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they can collect the cash from speeding tickets, right? Admit it, there’s no real risk to speeding!

Sound familiar? Odds are you know someone who feels this way. It might even be you.

Well, I’m telling you there is a real risk to speeding. This is the part where I trot out statistics and that many readers turn the page. Please read this, though, because it’s important.

Albert’s theory

Let’s get inside the car for a moment. Better yet, let’s get inside the car with Albert Einstein. Albert spent a great deal of time working on physics theories that directly impact

(no pun intended) you and your passengers. Since Albert has a pretty good reputation for knowing his stuff, I believe we can trust his judgement.

Albert proved that objects in motion have kinetic energy that must dissipate if the motion suddenly stops. The higher the speed the object is travelling when it is abruptly stopped, the more energy must be released.

What Albert was trying to say is that when your car stops, you don’t. And the faster you were driving, the harder the second crash—the one involving your body—is. As your speed increases so does your risk: a frontal impact at 60 km/h is one-third more violent than one at 50 km/h.

Here’s a few more numbers for you. A 10 per cent increase in highway speed increases your vehicle’s stopping distance by 40 per cent. What does that mean? Say you’re travelling at 100 km/h when you slam on the brakes. For argument’s sake, let’s say you travelled 100 feet

between slamming on the brakes and actually stopping. If you added just 10 km/h on to your speed, and then slammed on the brakes, you would need 140 feet to stop your car.

Double jeopardy

The chance you could be seriously injured or killed doubles for every 15 km/h you tack on over 80 km/h. Please think about that the next time you’re on the open road. If something goes wrong, that little extra on the accelerator doubles your chances of not coming home.

Speed is an immediate risk to your personal safety. Speed increases the distance your vehicle travels while you react to another car, a kid on a bike or a sharp corner. It also increases the distance you need to stop your car, and reduces the effectiveness of your vehicle’s safety features.

Not convinced yet? I can throw in some MPI numbers, too. At least 15 per cent of all crashes in Manitoba are directly related to speed. In 1998,

that translated into 22 fatalities and over 1,500 injuries. Those accidents cost Autopac premium payers—that’s you—\$45 million each year.

If I still have not convinced you to slow down, or at least think about slowing down, there is one more reason I think you should consider.

Obedying the posted speed limit is the law. And if you don’t follow the law, you’re breaking it. Citizens do not have, nor should they have, the right to choose which laws to obey and which to disregard. Period. And that includes laws dictating how fast you drive.

Next week, we’ll be looking at pedestrian safety, which many feel is a contradiction in terms. In the meantime, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.