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Texas Traffic Safety Report



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Traffic Safety Section

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55 MPH SPEED LIMIT ON TRIAL NATIONAL TASK FORCE TAKES TESTIMONY ON COMPLIANCE

(AUSTIN) A national task force heard almost two days of testimony from Texas legislators officials, and private industry representatives on the pros and cons of the 55 mph speed limit.

The task force, composed of eight members of the presidentially appointed National Highway Safety Advisory Committee, visited Texas and will visit several other states to gather a report to submit to the Secretary of Transportation. "Can the national 55 mph speed limit achieve its goals? If so, what price must society pay? These are but two of the questions we on the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee hope to answer," said Sheila Sidles, head of the committee.

The task force heard comments from state officials, including Governor Clements,

Lieutenant Governor Hobby, and Speaker of the House Clayton. "Texas is deeply concerned about this problem and we are well aware of the gas-saving and life-saving advantages of slower driving," said Clements.

"Texans have always accepted a challenge, and we will continue to lead the way toward efficient energy use and the promotion of life-saving measures."

Testimony was also given by

representatives of the Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT), the trucking industry, the Texas Safety Association, **See 55 Hearing, Page 3**

HOLIDAY DWI PROGRAMS STAGED By LAURA BURNS

Texas Commission on Alcoholism

Two Texas counties have just completed campaigns designed to alleviate the problem of drinking while driving during holidays, and Ross Newby, executive director of the Texas Commission of Alcoholism (TCA), says he hopes other groups will be sponsoring similar campaigns in the future.

The Tarrant Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse conducted, along with other groups and individuals, its fifth Holidays Ahead campaign, while the Austin Council on Alcoholism initiated S.O.B.E.R.



Members of the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee 55 MPH Task Force recently held hearings in Austin. Pictured clockwise are Adele Spielberger, Kaliste Saloom, Sheila Sidles, Oscar Edmonds, Daniel Portis and Boone Darden.

(Slow on the Bottle -- Enjoy the Road).

There is no question about the problem toward which these campaigns are directed -- in 1978, Travis County was seventh in the state for fatal wrecks involving drunk or under-the-influence drivers, while Tarrant County was ninth.

On New Year's Eve, Tarrant County residents were able to call Fort Worth Channel 9 Monitor volunteers for a free ride home. This "taxi service" is provided for persons not in condition to drive home or for those who would otherwise be passengers of intoxicated persons.

Campaigns in both areas included radio, television, newspaper and magazine news

in the form of articles, public service announcements and talk show appearances.

S.O.B.E.R., based on a program first held in Philadelphia in 1973 and now operative in 14 states, kicked off in Austin with a non-alcoholic "Happier Hour" co-sponsored by the Shoal Creek Hospital Renaissance Program and the Austin Council on Alcoholism. Mayor Carole McClellan and County Judge Mike Renfro proclaimed December "S.O.B.E.R. Month" in Austin and Travis County, respectively. With the police chief and sheriff they put the first S.O.B.E.R. bumper stickers on city and county patrol cars.

"Holidays Ahead" also began with a party -- a model

"Responsible Office Party" "Holidays Ahead" has become a household word in



Tarrant County, according to Marilyn Anderson, chairperson of the Holidays Ahead Committee, and has made thousands of

Tarrant County residents more aware of what responsible hosting is all about.

According to a 1977 independent research study for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the idea that it was a person's responsibility to stop a drunk friend from driving improved from 55 per cent before the S.O.B.E.R. campaign to 95 per cent after the campaign. Information about the causes of and solutions to drunken driving also increased.

Persons interested in starting similar campaign in their own community may contact the Texas Commission on Alcoholism, 8th floor, Sam Houston Office Building, Austin, Texas 78701 (512) 475-2577.



Austin Mayor Carole McClellan looks on as Austin Police Chief Frank Dyson places a "S.O.B.E.R." bumper sticker on a police car.

AROUND THE STATE

AMARILLO — STEP reports a 9.5 percent decrease in total accidents from 6744 in 1978 to 6134 in 1979.

AUSTIN — The Texas Education Agency trained 13 teachers as driver education supervisors.

IRVING — One police officer completed specialized training in Management of Traffic Safety.

HUNTSVILLE — A one-week Traffic Accident Investigation course was taught to 27 commissioned peace officers.

DALLAS — Eight cities were represented by 26 people at two Signs and Signals Workshops and 45 students attended motorcycle training classes.

BEAUMONT — Two Breath Test Operators' Schools graduated 21 officers.

CORPUS CHRISTI — The City completed their "Safe Routes to School" study which covers all five city school districts. A brochure is available to interested citizens.



Beating Jack Frost On The Road

Carry an emergency storm kit. You can purchase commercially available first aid kits and other emergency equipment. However, you should also have blankets, paper towels, an extra jacket or two, matches and candles, road maps and compass, non-perishable and high caloric food, an empty coffee can (in which to melt snow), a knife, a shovel and a bag of sand, a flashlight or signal light, battery booster cables and chains.

get off the road early than wait until you're trapped in a drift or icy trench.

Select an alternate route just in case. Avoid traveling alone in the car and if possible, arrange to travel along with another vehicle. Drive carefully and defensively, and remember to check the latest weather information on your radio.

Take storms seriously. If driving conditions become severe, seek shelter at once. Better to

If you are marooned, don't fall victim to exposure and overexertion by trying to push your car or shovel heavy drifts. Even

HOUSTON DRIVING JOB TESTS NERVES

By MICHAEL O'CONNOR
Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The act of guiding a car or truck down most of the nation's streets and freeways usually is called driving, but in Houston the practice is affectionately known as Bayou City bumper cars.

There is a courageous, but very nervous, group of people who risk their lives every day for those less fortunate who don't know how to drive but who must learn in order to survive in this miasma of motorists — the driver's education teachers.

"Houston traffic is probably the worst in the nation," said Julius Cario, who runs the Drivers License Preparatory School.

"People don't pay attention to signs or red lights," he said, they just want to get where they're going, and they'll do just about anything to get there as fast as they can."

Carrio said the job of the Houston driver's education teacher has been made even more dangerous by the influx of adults who came to partake of

the city's economic success from places where cars aren't a necessity, like foreign countries or New York City.

"The adults' reflexes are slower than teenagers, and they usually are scared to death of getting behind the wheel and driving," he said. "They grab hold of the steering wheel and hold on for dear life. While they're driving, they'll get excited and step on the gas pedal instead of the brake.

"I've been in more accidents than I can count," Carrio said. "I never holler at them because they're already nervous, but sometimes I feel like taking a club to some of them."

Those who have had a little driving experience are harder to teach than the rank beginners, he said, because they do some incredible things.

"Without batting an eye, they'll make right turns through a lane of traffic or park the car by ramming into a tree or the curb," he said.

Carrio said a lot of women come to him for driving lessons after abortive lessons from their husbands.

"They always end up yelling at each other," he said. "He is nervous. He knows how much the car cost, and he has no control over it. If he yells, or even talks loud, she thinks he's trying to pick a fight."

Margaret Pennington, owner of Texas Driving School, says a lot of people come to her asking if they can buy a license.

"In many countries — India is one — a license can be bought without knowing how to drive," she said. "I've had several people offer me money for a license, and when I say I can't do that, they don't understand and say, 'but I'll give you \$150.'"

She said most motorists will respect the "Caution: Student Driver" sign on top of training cars, but there are always a few who try to scare the driver.

people in seeming good health are heart attack candidates if they overdo it.

Stay in the car. Blowing and drifting snow can quickly confuse and disorient you if you try to walk, even for short distances. You are more likely to be found if you stay inside your vehicle.

Guard against carbon monoxide poisoning and oxygen starvation. Run the engine and heater only sparingly and remember to keep one downwind window open slightly. Otherwise, freezing temperatures and wind driven snow can seal the passenger compartment virtually airtight.

Move around inside the car as much as possible, swinging your arms and legs and clapping your hands periodically.

Click on the dome light at night so that work crews and rescuers can spot you. Take turns with other passengers in watching for help.

Dallas Schools Get Safety Patrol Training

Sequoyah Academy was the scene for two days of intensive training of school safety patrol members for 88 schools in the Dallas Independent School District. About 352 students were on hand for the training, which was sponsored by the American Automobile Association in cooperation with the school district.

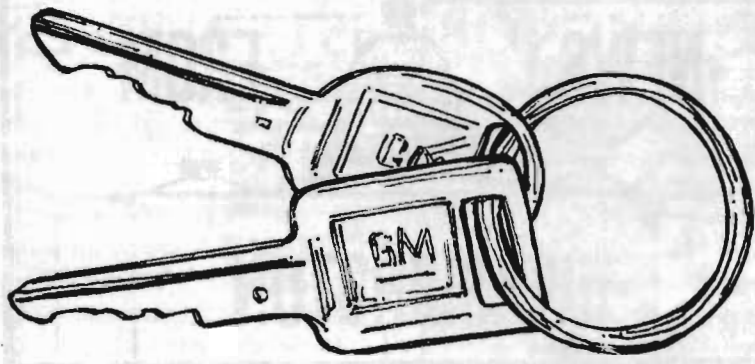
The "street" training was under the direction and supervision of members of the Dallas Police Department. Classroom

sessions were conducted by teachers and educators from the school district. Assistance was provided by members of the PTA, as well as local school teachers and principals.

The students who have participated will be involved in the training of additional safety patrol members in their individual schools. This continuous program will also involve local school officials and members of the Dallas Police Department.



Children throughout Texas are members of school safety patrols. The experience is an educational one as well as a basis for good safety habits.



Lock It Up & Take The Keys

Statistics show that the average American during his lifetime spends more money buying and servicing autos than for any other single item, including his home. And what does he do with this valuable possession? He parks it on the street or in the driveway at night, and expects to find it there the next morning.

Many times, he does not even take the keys with him or lock the doors. It's a fact that in 1978, 80 percent of all stolen cars in Texas had unlocked doors and 40 percent had the keys in the ignition, according to the Texas Crime Prevention Institute.

What can you do to reduce the possibility of having your car stolen? Unfortunately, there are no absolute fail-safe methods, short of guarding the vehicle round-the-clock. But there are ways to deter the average car thief that you should be aware of and practice:

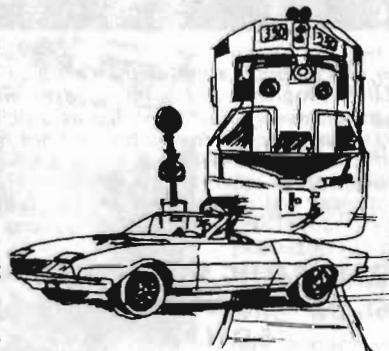
- Always lock your car doors and take the keys with you.
- Don't leave your registration, title, or insurance policy in the glove compartment.

- Don't park at the end of the block. This invites thieves with a tow truck.
- If your car has a steering column lock, park with the wheels cut sharply in either direction. This prevents cars from being towed from the rear.
- Don't park in the same spot every day if you can avoid it.
- Don't use miniature license plate key rings. If they're lost, a thief can track down your car and your home.
- Don't leave keys in a parking lot drop box.
- Don't leave valuables visible — put everything out of sight in the trunk (if you have one) or take it with you.
- Install anti-theft devices. These can be noisemakers or fuel and electrical cut-off systems, or a combination of both.

There is no guarantee that a determined thief still won't steal your car even though you follow all the above common-sense practices. But you can make his job more difficult and time-consuming, therefore decreasing the possibility of theft.

Watch Out For Trains

It takes a passenger train with eight cars 3,500 feet to stop, on the average, if the train is going 60 mph. For a 150-car freight train, traveling only 30 mph, the stopping distance is 3,150 feet. Crossing accidents are often the



with five bullets in the gun.

result of a driver misjudging the train's speed and thinking he'll beat it. The point is, there's no margin of error. Trying to beat a train is like playing Russian roulette

55 HEARING,
Continued From Page 1
and the Texas Transportation Institute.

Speaking for the DPS, Chief Joe Milner, head of traffic law enforcement, cited the importance of voluntary support. "You have to have most drivers believing and obeying a traffic law before it can be effective," said Milner, explaining that the DPS had problems with enforcing the speed limit. "I have only about one patrolman for each 129 miles of Texas highways," he said.

Many of those individuals speaking before the committee expressed concern over the possible loss of highway funds if federal compliance standards are not met. According to the Surface Transportation Act of 1978, states which do not meet a 30 percent compliance with the 55 mph speed limit during



TERRY TOWNSEND, T.M.T.A.

1979 will lose five percent of their federal highway funds. The required compliance increases by 10 percent each year until 1984, when states are expected to have a 90 percent compliance rate. Texas could lose a minimum of approximately eight million dollars a year if these standards are not met.

Speaking on behalf of the organized trucking industry, Terry Townsend, president of the Texas Motor Transportation Association (TMTA), reported that "today, more trucks are equipped for efficient operation at 55. The regulated trucking industry has gone to a great deal of expense converting power equipment to run at 55 miles per hour. Tests repeatedly have shown that truck fuel efficiency is better at 55 than at higher speeds, and lives are saved when everybody slows down," said Townsend.

The committee also received a briefing from the Traffic Safety Section of the SDHPT regarding the 55 MPH Safer Highways Campaign. "Public education is designed to inform

COMMENT

By RAY MARIOTTI
Editor
Austin American - Statesman

EVEN UNPOPULAR LAW MUST BE OBEYED

There is a case of massive civil disobedience in Texas. The law is unpopular, so people defy it. And authorities are hesitant to do anything about it.

I am talking about the 55 mile per hour speed limit.

Put your cruise control on 60 and head out of Austin in any direction on a major highway. Five cars will pass you for every one you pass.

I did the same thing on a Florida vacation the week before last. I noticed that I was going around people consistently at 60 mph. Occasionally a speed demon would whiz by, but not often.

It didn't take long for me to realize what was going on. At almost regular intervals there would be two cars pulled alongside the highway. The man in the uniform would be writing a ticket. I slowed down.

A couple of years ago the governor of Florida said he would spend whatever it took in overtime to enforce the speed limit. He said the death rate had gotten out of hand. And gasoline consumption was excessive, too.

The police suffered from writer's cramp from issuing so many tickets. The motorists fumed. The governor stuck to his guns.

The fatality rate dropped dramatically.

A new governor took office. Priorities changed. The officers went back to regular shifts.

Up went the death toll. Gov. Bob Graham reinstated the crackdown. The tickets began flowing again.

Swift and sure punishment is a deterrent, except when crimes of passion are involved. Driving is not a crime of passion.

In Texas, police are losing the battle to maintain the speed limit. A high official of the Department of Public Safety admitted as much during hearings last week.

Statistics show that two of every three Texans ignore the 55 mph limit. Police officers began to look the other way because of such poor public support of the law. Morale is hurt.

There was plenty of sentiment in the last legislature to abolish the limit. But threats by the feds of a cutoff in road funds kept the bill from passing. No one seems very concerned about the use of additional fuel.

State authorities would be well-advised to give the DPS the necessary money to do the job. Austin police were instructed to step up their speed traps recently. The results have been noticeable.

Two motorcycle cops and one radar gun drag 'em over at the top of a rise on First Street in a 35 mph zone. A good portion of our staff has been nailed. They enter the office grumbling about the sneaky cops, but they're slowing down.

In an era when every kid in the car knows how to operate the radar detector, when the whole family has a CB handle for the Smokey report, it is easy to see why the officers would give up.

Instead, they should be given the resources and the encouragement to get tough. Those who increase the risk to our lives should find the driving expensive.

and influence attitudes. Through this influence and with peer support, more and more drivers would begin to comply with the law," said Susan Bryant, manager of the traffic safety public information and education program.

Members of the 55 Task Force who attended the session in Austin were Sheila Sidles, head of the National

Highway Safety Advisory Committee, from Iowa; Judge Kaliste Saloom, head of the task force, from Louisiana; Judge Frances Goodwin, Dallas; Adele Spielberg, Highway Safety Bureau Chief, Florida; W. "Boone" Darden, Sr., Chief of Police in Riviera Beach, Florida; Oscar H. Edmonds, City Councilman, Memphis, Tennessee; and Daniel F. Portis, Arkansas.

Experience Isn't Everything

You are 15 years old and have been riding a bike since you were seven.

Or, you have accumulated over 40 years of driving experience since you passed your driver's examination.

Logic would lead us to believe that in those two circumstances the chances of a bicycle/motor vehicle accident are slim.

WRONG!

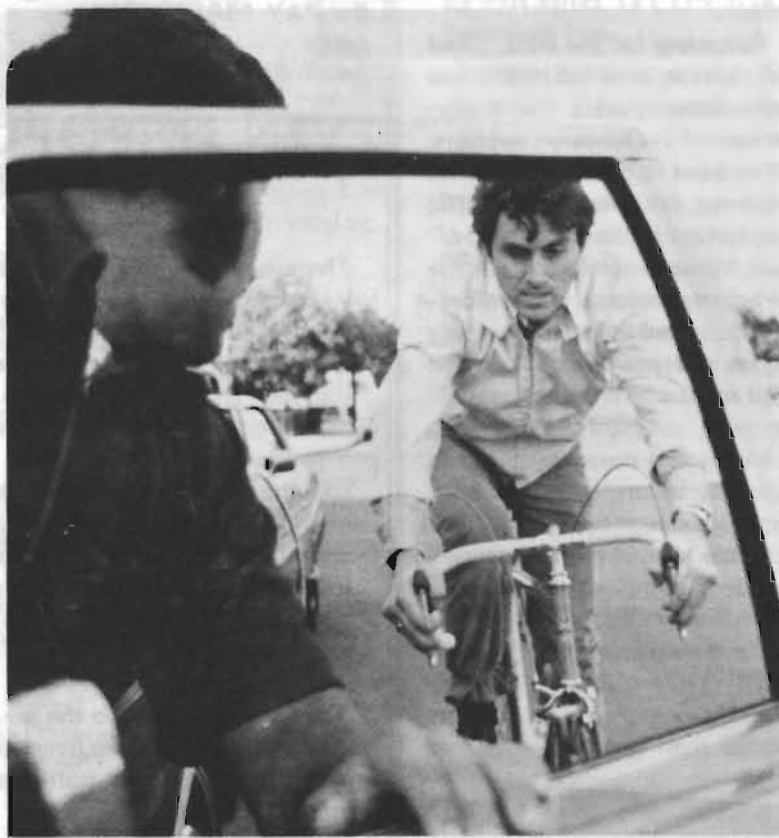
Experience shows that bicyclists between the ages of 12 and 15 have twice as many non-fatal accidents than would normally be expected, and that persons over 60 are involved in more fatal bicycle/motor vehicle accidents than you might estimate.

While experience and familiarity play vital roles in practicing bicycle/motor vehicle safety, they also can be our worst enemies. For when we become too confident we have a tendency to become careless.

Studies of fatal and non-fatal bicycle/motor vehicle accidents examined for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety revealed the majority of bicyclists and drivers had the following characteristics:

1. More than 1 year of operating experience.
2. Skill in operating the bicycle or motor vehicle.
3. Knowledge of laws applying to both bicycles and motor vehicles.

By exercising these positive points of traffic safety, what were the negative points which contributed to the accidents?



An act as simple as opening a car door may mean injury to a bicyclist.

The majority of cases for bicyclists showed defective safety equipment to be a cause in many of the accidents. Not wearing reflectorized clothing at night and not using safety flags or some other means to draw attention during the daytime were the most prevalent causes. In both instances, it seems the bicyclists did not use good judgement.

Many of us have heard that most motor vehicle accidents occur within a 10 mile radius of our home. But, were you aware the statistics report the same findings for bicycle/motor vehicle accidents? In the cases studied, the majority of persons were taking a predetermined

trip in a familiar area. Bicyclists were traveling within 1 mile of their home and motor vehicle operators within a 5 mile radius.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety suggests we should question our methods of defensive traffic safety. It's possible we are concentrating too much on the "other guy" and not enough on ourselves. We are familiar with our surroundings and with our motor vehicles which may cause us to relax our level of awareness, take our skills for granted and become involved in an accident.

To practice traffic safety, remember the 3 A's: Be **AWARE**, Be **ALERT** and Be **ACCIDENT-PROOF**.

Learn The Don'ts Of Efficient Driving

Don't drive with your foot on the brake. It's surprising how many people do this unconsciously. It makes your engine work much harder.



When driving at high speeds, keep your windows up if weather permits. Windows that are rolled down cause aerodynamic drag and a decreased gas mileage. In fact, on long trips lowered windows may cause as much loss as a car air

conditioner.

Don't idle that engine, cars waste about a quart of gas for

Don't drive faster than the speed limit, cars get 21 percent more gas mileage at 55 than cars going at 70. That's two extra gallons in every ten.



Electrical accessories that you normally wouldn't think

about also consume gas indirectly.

Don't gun your engine when starting, jackrabbit starts at intersections eat up gas.



Car roof racks loaded with baggage cause severe wind resistance, which costs up to 17 percent more gas usage. If the rack is necessary, pack your items in a wedge shape, putting the smaller ones up front and the larger ones in the back.

NEWS

FROM

WASHINGTON

DOT LAUNCHES ATTACK ON DRUNK DRIVING

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has developed a program which has been successful in dealing with the problem of drunk driving and is urging officials across the nation to use more of their highway safety funds to attack this problem. Joan Claybrook, head of the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), said the program is based as a coordinated effort by the police, courts, local governments and rehabilitation agencies.

DOT IMPROVES SAFETY IN LIGHT TRUCKS AND VANS

NHTSA issued amendments to increase protection in accidents for the drivers and passengers of light trucks and vans. The amendments will extend three federal motor vehicle safety standards (that will become effective September 1, 1981) to light trucks and vans. The three standards involve improving interior padding to protect occupants, providing steering wheels that absorb energy to cushion the driver's impact in an accident, and limiting the distance the steering assembly can move backwards in order to avoid impact with the driver in a crash.

GOLDSCHMIDT URGES HIGHWAY REPAIRS

DOT Secretary Neil Goldschmidt wants to restructure the federal highway program to use more funds for repair and rehabilitation of the Interstate and other systems. He said the Interstate system is a \$1 trillion asset. "But we don't treat it as an asset...we don't have any method to account for its depreciation or replacement costs." Goldschmidt said he plans to invite state and local officials to Washington to discuss ways of preserving the nation's Interstate highway investment. The conclusions will be drafted into proposed legislation.

NIGHT VISION: It takes your eyes about twenty minutes to readjust to night driving conditions after you've left a brightly lit house or restaurant.



This newsletter is an official publication of the Office of Traffic Safety—Governor's Traffic Safety Program—and is intended to inform the public on the traffic safety programs in Texas. Contributing articles from outside sources are the reflected opinions of the author and not necessarily those of the Office of Traffic Safety. Permission is granted for reproduction of articles or photographs, except where the publication has obtained permission from other sources and provided credit. The Texas Traffic Safety Report is published monthly. Comments or contributions should be sent to:



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