



NATIONAL MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed 6am, Thursday 23 August, 2007

All about me: selfishness sets drivers on crash course

Australian drivers are increasingly selfish and aggressive on our roads, new research shows.

AAMI National Public Affairs Manager Geoff Hughes said the 2007 *AAMI Crash Index*¹ paints an alarming picture of what constitutes normal and acceptable behaviour on our roads, with more than nine in 10 (91 per cent) Australian drivers saying drivers are becoming more aggressive.

“What is worse is the high level of driver tolerance for their own questionable behaviour. It is ironic that many of the drivers who say their own selfish and aggressive antics are justified also say it is inappropriate to mirror the response of an aggressive driver,” Mr Hughes said.

More than half (57 per cent) of the Australian drivers who participated in the research admitted gesturing rudely or yelling at another motorist when they have done something dangerous or rude. Of those, 81 per cent thought their actions were justified.

And almost six in 10 (59 per cent) drivers have yelled or sworn at another motorist for doing something dangerous or rude, with 81 per cent of them also able to justify their actions.

This is in stark contrast to how drivers think they should behave on the roads. Only three per cent of drivers say responding aggressively to road rage is appropriate, as against the 12 per cent per cent of drivers who say they would actually respond this way.

While the willingness of drivers to openly swear and gesture rudely at other drivers is of concern, more alarming is the number of drivers who tailgate as a way of expressing their displeasure with another driver's behaviour.

“One driver in five (20 per cent) has become so angry with the actions of another motorist that they resorted to tailgating them, and it is astounding that more than half these drivers (56 per cent) thought this response was justifiable,” he said.

Consulting psychologist John Cheetham said this year's *AAMI Crash Index* shows all motorists have a responsibility to increase their focus while driving.

“Anti-social behaviours like speeding, drink-driving and justifying aggression towards other drivers are reflective of a belief among drivers that ‘my needs are more important than yours’. People are locked in their own little worlds and servicing their own needs – they have lost a sense of social responsibility, putting other road users at risk purely out of their own selfishness.

“These drivers need to get the message that it is not ‘all about me’ but about ‘all of us’. Clearly, there are a significant number of drivers who have yet to learn this lesson.”

Slow down, speed racer

The willingness of drivers to break the law and endanger other road users by speeding is also indicative of an epidemic of selfishness on Australian roads.

“While most Australians (86 per cent) admit exceeding the speed limit at times, more worrying is that one driver in 10 (eight per cent) says they speed *most* of the time,” Mr Hughes said.

¹ The 2007 Crash Index was conducted for AAMI by Sweeney Research and is an independent telephone and internet survey of 2380 Australian drivers in all States and Territories (except WA as AAMI does not operate there).

“Work and home are especially popular places for Australians to speed to with one-third of drivers nationally (33 per cent) admitting they have exceeded the speed limit to reach these destinations faster.”

Drink-drive message not getting through

Perhaps the most selfish drivers on Australian roads are those who think it's OK to drive after drinking if they feel capable of doing so, and those who deliberately seek out alternative roads home to avoid police detection.

“The *AAMI Crash Index* shows a willingness among Australians to drink and drive, with more than one-third (37 per cent) of drivers admitting they have driven despite probably being over the legal limit,” Mr Hughes said.

“Equally disturbing is the number of Australian drivers prepared to risk being caught drink-driving. One driver in 10 (nine per cent) says it's OK to drive after drinking ‘as long as they feel capable of doing so’, and one in six (15 per cent) has tried to avoid police detection after they have been drinking by taking a different route home.”

John Cheetham advocated a number of solutions to reduce driver aggression and foster a better sense of well-being.

“Drivers need to appreciate that all drivers – themselves included – make mistakes. Relax and resist becoming too emotionally fired up. In a few minutes, whatever happened to annoy you and set you off will be forgotten and meaningless in the context of your lifespan.”

Ten Tips for Better Road Safety

- **Don't use your mobile phone whilst driving:** Making or receiving a call, even using a hands-free phone, can distract your attention from driving and could lead to an accident.
- **Belt up in the front and back:** In a collision, an unbelted rear seat passenger can kill or seriously injure the driver or a front seat passenger.
- **Don't drink and drive:** Even a small amount of alcohol can impair your driving, so be safe and don't drink and drive.
- **Slow down:** At 65kph you are twice as likely to seriously injure or kill someone you hit as at 60kph.
- **Children:** Children often act impulsively so take extra care outside schools and parks and near buses and trams when they might be around. Always observe restricted speed zones.
- **Take a break:** Fatigue is a factor in 13 per cent of road accidents. Plan to stop for at least a 15- minute break every two hours on a long journey. Take advantage of Driver Reviver sites on long road trips.
- **Anticipate:** Observe and anticipate other road users, use your mirrors regularly and don't forget to glance into your blind area before altering your course.
- **Watch out for pedestrians:** Slow down in suburban streets – lower travelling speeds on our urban roads have contributed to significant reductions in pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries since 2001.
- **Use a child seat:** Child and baby seats should be fitted properly and checked every trip.
- **Keep your distance:** Always keep a two second gap between you and the car in front.

Ends...

Editor's Note:

The full 2007 *AAMI Crash Index* is available at www.aami.com.au

To arrange an interview, contact:

Geoff Hughes, AAMI, ph 03 8520 1469 or 0413 483 591; or

Brian O'Neil, Public Relations Exchange, ph 03 9607 4500 or 0411 055 284