

August 2009

AAMI



CRASHindex

annual road safety index

www.aami.com.au

OUR ROADS OF RAGE



The 2009 AAMI *Crash Index* is the 15th annual road safety index published by AAMI to educate and inform drivers about collisions and why they happen. Over time, the *Index* has evolved to consider the many factors that contribute to crashes, particularly inattention, speed, alcohol and fatigue, which statistics show cause most crashes.

In addition to analysing the role of these factors in crashes, the 2009 AAMI *Crash Index* looks at how aggression leads to dangerous driving – a factor in many collisions that result in injury or death.

Crashes – more likely than not for drivers

Involvement in a crash – either as a driver or a passenger – is something most Australians have experienced. Four in five (80 per cent) have had a crash in their lifetime, with Western Australians the most likely of all (86 per cent), followed by ACT (85 per cent), New South Wales (83 per cent) and Northern Territory (80 per cent) drivers.

South Australians are least likely to have experienced a crash (72 per cent), slightly less than Tasmanian (74 per cent), Queensland (77 per cent) and Victorian drivers (79 per cent).

Inattention causes most crashes

Not paying attention is still the major factor in most car crashes. Almost

half of all drivers nationally (48 per cent) attributed previous crashes to inattention.

ACT drivers are most likely to blame inattention for crashes (55 per cent) followed by Northern Territory (53 per cent), South Australian (52 per cent) and New South Wales and Victorian drivers (49 per cent). Tasmanian drivers are least likely to blame inattention for crashes they have had (41 per cent).

Lead feet play a part

Speed is a factor in crashes for 15 per cent of drivers nationally. However, Western Australia, with its thousands of kilometres of open roads, is home to more drivers who blame speed for their crashes (23 per cent). Queensland comes a close second with 18 per cent of the state's drivers attributing crashes to speed, followed by South Australia

80%
OF DRIVERS
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A CRASH
IN THEIR
LIFETIME

(18 per cent), Tasmania (17 per cent) and the Northern Territory (16 per cent). Victorian drivers are least likely to blame speed for crashes (12 per cent), just ahead of ACT (13 per cent) and New South Wales drivers (14 per cent).

Drowsy drivers continue to crash

For one in 10 drivers nationally, drowsiness has been a factor in crashes they have had. For them, getting to their destination faster far outweighs the common sense of taking a break and arriving safely.

Victorian and Northern Territory drivers are most likely to blame fatigue for crashes they have had (11 per cent), followed by Queensland and New South Wales drivers (10 per cent). ACT drivers are least likely to have crashed because of fatigue (six per cent), just ahead of South Australians (seven per cent), Tasmanians (eight per cent) and Western Australians (nine per cent).

Driven to drink

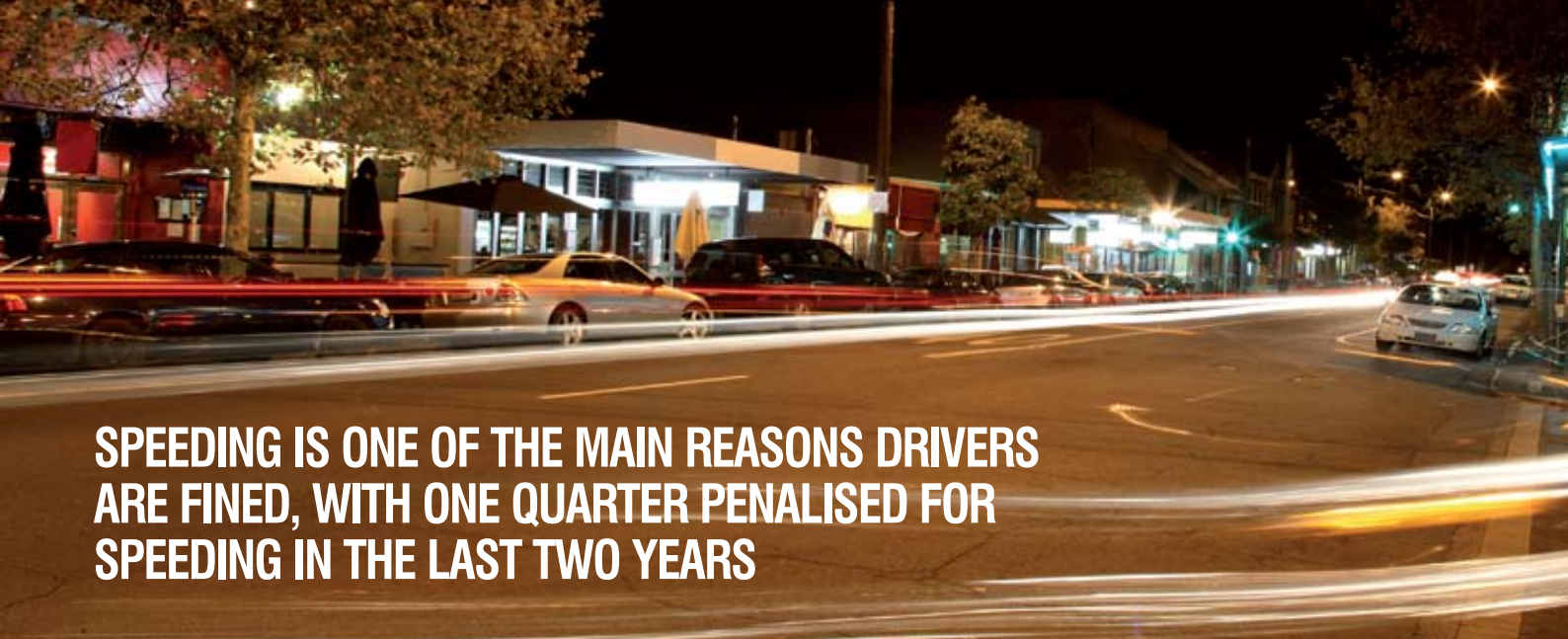
While declining, alcohol remains a factor in far too many crashes. One in 12 drivers nationally (eight per cent) say alcohol was a factor in a crash they have had.

Alcohol appears to be a considerable problem for Northern Territory drivers, 15 per cent of whom blame alcohol for crashes they have had. This is followed by Queensland and South Australian drivers (10 per cent), Victorian and Western Australian drivers (nine per cent), and Tasmanian drivers (eight per cent).

ACT drivers are least likely to have had a crash involving alcohol (five per cent),

KEY NATIONAL FINDINGS

- Most Australians (80 per cent) have **experienced a car crash** as a driver or passenger in their lifetime.
- Drivers are more likely to blame **not paying attention for crashes** they have had (48 per cent) than they are speeding (15 per cent), fatigue (10 per cent) and alcohol (eight per cent).
- **Speeding is the norm** – just 16 per cent of drivers say they never speed.
- Drivers increasingly say travelling **just over the speed limit isn't really speeding** (29 per cent). Many are confused about the limit (33 per cent) because of the abundance of varying speed zones.
- Knowingly driving while **over .05** is something one-third of drivers nationally (33 per cent) have done – despite alcohol being a factor in eight per cent of crashes.
- Three in five drivers worry about being the **victim of a road rage attack**. Of these, 17 per cent worry 'a lot'.



SPEEDING IS ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS DRIVERS ARE FINED, WITH ONE QUARTER PENALISED FOR SPEEDING IN THE LAST TWO YEARS

just behind drivers in bordering New South Wales (six per cent).

Most drivers openly speed

Breaking the speed limit is common for most with just one in six drivers nationally (16 per cent) saying they never speed. Two-thirds of drivers (66 per cent) say they speed some of the time and one in eight say they speed half of the time (12 per cent). More concerning is the seven per cent of drivers who say they speed most of the time.

ACT drivers are the worst culprits with just 12 per cent saying they never speed and the same amount saying they speed all of the time. In contrast, 22 per cent of Victorian and Tasmanian drivers say they never speed, which is considerably better than the national average (16 per cent).

Confusion over speeding

Confusion is rife among drivers about what constitutes speeding and what the speed limit is. Almost one-third of drivers nationally (29 per cent) say going five or 10 kilometres over the

speed limit isn't really speeding and three-quarters (77 per cent) are unsure how fast they can travel because speed zones vary so much.

Speed zone confusion is reasonably consistent across the country, however there is considerable variation about whether exceeding the speed limit by a small amount constitutes speeding. Almost half of ACT drivers (44 per cent) say travelling 5-10 kilometres over the limit isn't speeding compared to just 16 per cent of South Australian drivers.

Driver contempt for speed zones

The prevalence of restricted speed zones may explain some of the confusion about how fast drivers can travel, however this is no excuse for speeding. One-third of drivers say there are too many speed restrictions around schools and shopping centres. New South Wales drivers are most frustrated with restricted speed zones with two in five (41 per cent) saying there are too many, followed by Victorian (34 per cent) and Western Australian drivers (29 per cent).

84%
OF DRIVERS
ADMIT TO
BREAKING THE
SPEED LIMIT

More concerning is that one in 10 drivers (11 per cent) say they ignore limits in restricted speed zones, posing grave dangers for the students, shoppers and pedestrians the zones aim to protect. New South Wales drivers are most likely to ignore restricted speed zones (13 per cent) followed by Queensland (12 per cent) and Victorian and ACT drivers (11 per cent).

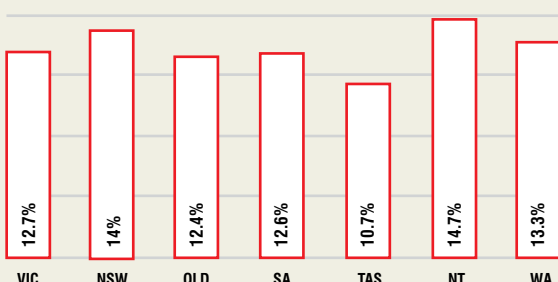
Hip pocket pain greatest speed deterrent

The risk of a fine is the greatest deterrent to speeding – hardly surprising at a time when money is tight. One-third of drivers nationally (34 per cent) say they stick to the speed limit out of fear of getting a fine, with drivers in Western Australia (39 per cent) and South Australia (38 per cent) most concerned about this. Three in 10 drivers nationally say they refrain from speeding because it's the law, with 36 per cent of Northern Territory drivers citing this as their reason for not speeding.

The loss of demerit points appears to be a small deterrent against speeding with just 10 per cent of drivers across the

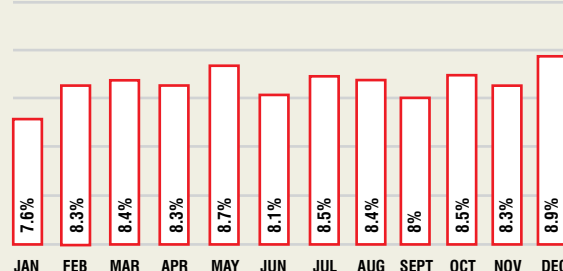
CLAIMS INCIDENCE RATE

Policyholders per 100 who have had accidents in 2008



Source: 2008 AAMI Claims Data

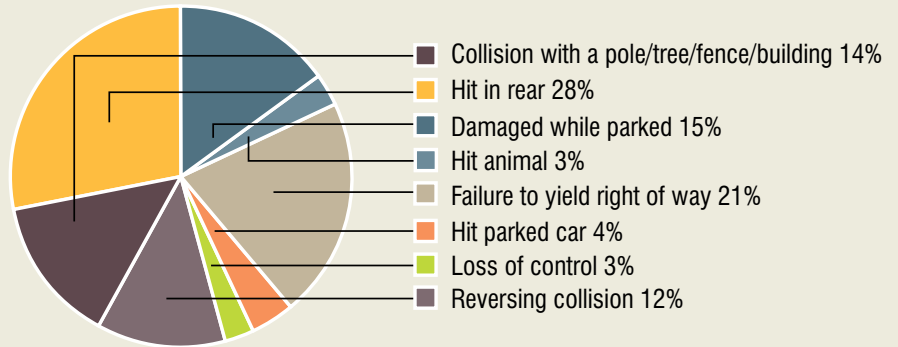
CRASH CLAIMS BY MONTH



Source: 2008 AAMI Claims Data



HOW CRASHES HAPPEN



Source: 2008 AAMI Claims Data

country saying they don't speed to avoid losing points. The exception to this is New South Wales where double demerit point losses are a probable factor in 15 per cent of drivers observing speed limits to avoid losing points.

High speed causes most infringements

Speeding remains one of the main reasons drivers are issued with infringement notices, with one-quarter (23 per cent) penalised for speeding in the last two years. Western Australians are more likely than drivers in other states to have been fined for speeding (31 per cent) with ACT drivers the least likely (16 per cent).

Red lights and stop signs were a problem for five per cent of drivers nationally who were fined for failing to stop in the last two years. Victorian drivers are most prone to running red lights and stop signs with eight per cent fined for this. Tasmanian and ACT drivers are least likely to have received a penalty for this.

Despite one-third of drivers admitting to driving when their blood alcohol content was probably over .05, remarkably few have received a penalty for drink-driving. Just one per cent of drivers have received a drink-driving infringement in the last two years, with Tasmanian drivers three times higher than the national average to have been penalised for this offence (three per cent).

Drugs + alcohol + driving = poor combination

Despite governments and motoring authorities spending millions of dollars warning drivers about the dangers of mixing driving with substance abuse, many openly admit to driving after using drugs and alcohol. One-third admit driving when they were probably over .05 and nine per cent say they have driven after using marijuana, speed or cocaine.

Northern Territory drivers were most likely to have driven despite being over .05 (45 per cent) followed by those in Western Australia and the ACT (43 per cent) and South Australia (36 per

33%
ADMIT TO DRIVING WHEN THEY WERE PROBABLY OVER .05

cent). Northern Territory and Western Australian drivers were most likely to have driven after using illicit drugs (14 per cent) followed by Queensland and ACT drivers (10 per cent).

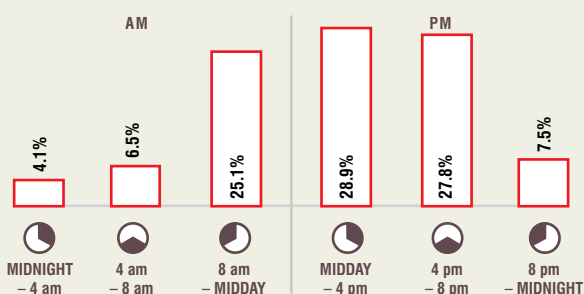
New South Wales drivers were least likely to drive when they were probably over .05 and drivers from South Australia were least likely to drive after using illicit drugs.

Prescription for trouble

Taking prescription drugs and driving has come under the spotlight with more people using prescribed medication for ongoing conditions. Many of these drugs have side effects that impair driving ability so it is concerning that one-fifth of drivers nationally (21 per cent) admit to driving after taking prescription medications that carry warnings against operating a motor vehicle.

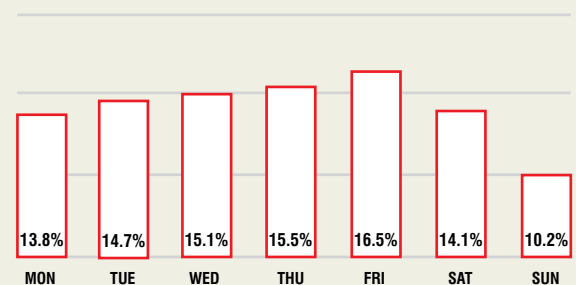
Drivers in Western Australia fared worst on this measure with 26 per cent admitting to driving after using prescription drugs. Queensland and South Australia were a close second (25 per cent), followed by drivers in Victoria (21 per cent) and New South Wales (18 per cent).

CRASH CLAIMS BY TIME OF DAY



Source: 2008 AAMI Claims Data

CRASH CLAIMS BY DAY OF WEEK



Source: 2008 AAMI Claims Data

OUR DRIVING SHAME: SPOTLIGHT ON AGGRESSION

The phrase 'road rage' was entrenched in the Australian vernacular when the AAMI *Crash Index* first reported on driver attitude and behaviour in 1996. Then, AAMI found 57 per cent of drivers thought the roads were 'like a battlefield', 47 per cent 'often got mad' at other drivers, 22 per cent made 'angry' gestures, and six per cent resorted to 'chasing' other cars.

Almost 15 years on, the AAMI *Crash Index* continues to be a barometer on driver attitude and behaviour, especially the less flattering and outright dangerous things drivers do.

Sadly, things are getting worse. This year, nine in 10 drivers (91 per cent) say motorists are becoming more aggressive, continuing a trend that has steadily worsened since AAMI began canvassing motorists about their aggression.

Conditions are now so bad that 60 per cent of drivers worry about being a victim of road rage. Of those, 17 per cent worry 'a lot'. Among the aggressive behaviours drivers admit to, 56 per cent gesture rudely at others in response to behaviour they don't agree with, while 58 per cent respond to other drivers with yelling or swearing of their own, and 22 per cent have become so angry with another driver they have tailgated them – almost four times higher than 1996 (six per cent).

Considering the types of road rage most drivers have experienced from other drivers, it is little wonder so many worry about becoming a victim. Rude gestures (79 per cent), verbal abuse (64 per cent) and tailgating (65 per cent) are experiences common to most. However, the numbers who have experienced personal confrontation are alarming: three in 10 drivers (29 per cent) have been followed, one in eight (12 per cent) has been forced off the road, one in 14 (seven per cent) has had their car wilfully damaged and two per cent have been physically assaulted by a road raging motorist.

Sadly, when it comes to evaluating their own behavior, most drivers see these

91%
**SAID MOTORISTS
ARE BECOMING
INCREASINGLY
AGGRESSIVE**

types of actions as acceptable. Four in five (83 per cent) say yelling, swearing and gesturing rudely is a justifiable response to road rage from other drivers. Worse still, two thirds (63 per cent) say tailgating other drivers in response to their aggression is justified.

Congestion the major factor in our aggression

The causes of road rage have long been a source of conversation and debate, but AAMI's research shows traffic congestion is the major source of aggression on our roads.

Since 2005, the AAMI *Crash Index* has seen the number of drivers who say it takes them 30 minutes or more to drive to work, triple – from eight per cent in 2005 to 30 per cent in 2009. This is significant evidence that increased traffic congestion is a reality for many drivers.

Over the same period, the *Index* has recorded an 18 per cent increase in the number of drivers who attribute aggression and road rage to traffic congestion, from 70 per cent in 2005 to a high of 88 per cent in 2009. This clearly shows the frustration drivers are experiencing with increasingly clogged and cluttered roads, with motorists all-too-often bearing the brunt of others' anger.



AVOIDING AGGRESSION

The best way to avoid being a victim of road rage is to avoid provoking other drivers:

GESTURES: obscene or offensive gestures irritate other drivers. Be aware that any gesture may be misinterpreted by another driver.

EYE CONTACT: if a motorist tries to pick a fight, do not make eye contact. Get out of the way without acknowledging the other motorist. If the driver follows you, do not go home. Go to a police station or location where you can get help and there will be witnesses.

AGGRESSIVE TAILGATING: riding the bumper of the vehicle in front of you is both annoying and unsafe.

AGGRESSIVE HORN USE: leaning on the horn to express your anger is aggravating.

AGGRESSIVE HEADLIGHT USE: flashing headlights to denote irritation is rude and unsafe.

Use common courtesy to avoid provoking aggression from others:

LANE BLOCKING: don't block the passing lane on multiple lane highways. Allow vehicles to pass you.

TAILGATING: maintain a safe distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you.

INDICATOR USE: don't change lanes without using your indicator, and make sure you can change lanes without cutting another driver off.

HORN USE: use your horn sparingly. Noise is shown to be a contributor to stress.

ROAD RAGE REACHES NEW HIGH

AAMI EXECUTIVE GENERAL MANAGER ANTHONY DURAKOVIC



ANTHONY DURAKOVIC

Driver aggression shows little sign of abating; if anything, the trends suggest drivers are even angrier and increasingly confrontational in venting their rage and aggression.

This is the disturbing reality of the 2009 AAMI *Crash Index*.

When AAMI released its first *Crash Index* report, little did we anticipate that the *Index* would become a benchmark for driver attitude and behaviour. That first report focussed on variations in crash-related insurance claims, painting an interesting picture of the role of many factors in vehicle collisions – age, gender, time and location of crash, and even the age of the car.

Of concern then was the sharp increase in the Crash Claims Incidence Rate¹ in the three years after the recession of the early 1990s – the rate of claims rose 15 per cent over those years. As the *Index* reported then, Australians were literally crashing their way out of recession.

Fast forward 15 years and little has changed. The Crash Claims Incident Rate has remained steady which shows Australian drivers are crashing at roughly the same rate as they were then.

What has changed – and for the worse – are drivers' experiences of aggression and road rage. AAMI started researching the road rage phenomenon with its second *Crash Index*. That *Index* showed a majority of drivers thought the roads were like a battlefield, almost half of drivers surveyed got mad at others, one in five gestured rudely at other drivers when angered and five per cent resorted to tailgating.

Disturbingly, the 2009 AAMI *Crash Index* proves that not only are drivers still angry, they are prepared to take that anger from the cocoon of their car to a personally confrontational situation with the driver that angered them.

The statistics show:

- Drivers are now five times as likely to follow or pursue a driver they thought did something stupid as they were in 1996
- They are now four times as likely to tailgate drivers who angered them as they were in 1996. Since 2005, this has increased by eight per cent

- The ability of drivers to justify this appalling and dangerous behaviour has similarly increased. Just over half of drivers in 2005 said tailgating was justifiable compared to almost two-thirds today

Police, governments and other authorities have tried hard and spent millions to improve conditions on our roads, and in many respects they have been successful with the rate of injury and road tolls on the decline. However, the aggressive behaviours shown in this and previous AAMI *Crash Indexes* is something drivers need to take responsibility for.

By exposing this aggression – and its frequency – AAMI hopes to convince drivers that suppressing their anger is far more beneficial than the consequences of responding *to* road rage *with* road rage.

Ultimately, drivers are responsible for their actions. On this count, we hope they're paying attention.

¹ Crashes per 100 policyholders

The 2009 AAMI *Crash Index* is based on an independent national telephone and internet survey of 2500 licensed drivers in every state and territory. The survey is conducted by Sweeney Research, one of the largest and most respected research consultancies in Australia. The survey was conducted in the following locations around Australia:

- Adelaide
- Ballarat, Bendigo

- and Shepparton
- Batemans Bay, Bega and Ulludulla
- Brisbane
- Canberra
- Central Queensland
- Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie
- Darwin
- Geelong
- Gold Coast
- Hobart
- Launceston
- Melbourne
- Newcastle and Gosford

- North Queensland
- Perth
- Regional South Australia
- Regional Western Australia
- Sunshine Coast
- Sydney
- Tamworth
- Toowoomba and the Darling Downs
- Wagga Wagga and Griffith
- Wollongong and Nowra

Once collected, data is carefully weighted to ensure the results are representative of the Australian community by

gender, age and location. The data is weighted in line with population statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics for statistical validity. Weighting allows AAMI to generalise its data to the entire population. Except where stated the survey explored respondents' experiences over their lifetime. AAMI's research may differ from government and police agencies whose research is typically limited to a 12-month period. Also, smaller or

unreported incidents may be captured in AAMI's research but not by others. The confidence interval for the sample size is plus or minus two per cent, which means that for the survey sample of 2500, if the observed result is 50 per cent, the chances are 95 in 100 that the range (48-52 per cent) included the true percentage for the population.