

RAC Report on Motoring 2007 Driving Safely?

About this Report

The focus of this year's RAC Report on Motoring is on driving and safety.

The Report is based on an extensive programme of specially-commissioned research amongst Britain's motorists carried out for RAC by Quadrangle. A total of 2,029 face-to-face interviews were conducted with drivers in their homes and nine focus group discussions were held amongst particular interest groups. (Details of the research are included as the Appendix to the Report.)

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Foreword

Dr Stephen Ladyman MP Minister of State for Transport

Since we published the first Road Safety Strategy in 2000, we have reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads by 33%, and nearly reached our target to reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured by 50% by 2010.

We are seeing some tough new measures come into force through the Road Safety Act. For example, if you are now caught driving whilst using a hand held mobile phone you will receive three penalty points and a £60 fine. The change in penalties has been backed up by strong police enforcement and a dedicated publicity campaign.

But as our recent Three Year Review of the Road Safety Strategy showed, although we have made significant progress there is more to be done.

That is why we continue to spend millions each year on the THINK! campaign which aims to reduce dangerous behaviour such as speeding and drink and drug driving.

Being able to master a car can only ever be part of the equation. It is just as important to have the right attitude when driving, and treat others with respect. So we are looking at how young people in particular form their attitudes before they get behind the wheel, and how we can use training and testing to equip them with the skills they need to drive safely throughout their lives.

We face challenges if we are to get the best out of our roads. It is not only the devastating toll that deaths and injuries take, but rising congestion which has its own costs, both for the economy and motorists.

That is why we have an integrated roads strategy, providing new road capacity where it is needed and ensuring roads are managed more effectively through the use of Highways Agency Traffic Officers.

We are also using Active Traffic Management, such as variable speed limits, and making better use of roads information through a network of regional traffic control centres.

We are getting the legislative framework right too, as can be seen with the recently published draft Local Transport Bill. It is intended to give local authorities greater scope to take local action to tackle local congestion where it is a problem, or soon will be.

The way our roads work affects us all. By improving road safety, tackling congestion and its negative consequences, and anticipating the role that emerging technology can play in the management of our roads, we will help to create a road network that can take us through the 21st century.



Dr Stephen Ladyman MP
Minister of State for Transport

Introduction

Debbie Hewitt

Managing Director, RAC

I am pleased to introduce the 2007 RAC Report on Motoring, the 19th of our annual in-depth research reports into the views of Britain's motorists.

As usual, we have explored the really key issues facing drivers – congestion, the environment, taxation, and we have focused on the one that Britain's drivers have said is utmost in their minds – safety.

Our research found that despite increases in the cost of motoring and scepticism about the use of motoring revenues, motorists remain wedded to their cars. Nearly one in ten now confess to never walking anywhere!


Whilst tackling congestion is a vital component of the Government's transport strategy and is of real interest to motorists, it is clear that road safety and the reduction of casualties and fatalities on our roads features higher on the list of priorities of Britain's motorists. The passing of the Road Safety Act in 2006, targeted safety campaigns and the forthcoming review of how learner drivers are trained are welcomed.

Whilst motorists acknowledge that our roads have become safer due to government initiatives and not because of their own driving, with nearly nine people still dying on our roads every day, motorists feel that we need to re-examine the approach to reduce the number of deaths and injuries.

Today, motorists place the blame on 'other drivers' for dangerous and unsafe behaviour on the road. They do not feel that their own actions have an influence, claiming they are law-abiding and therefore also safe – yet, on occasion, they admit to speeding, running red lights, not wearing a seatbelt and using a hand-held mobile phone while driving. Furthermore, nearly one-third believes they would fail the driving test if they had to take it today.

The real challenge will be to get motorists to take responsibility for their own actions and thus their own safety. Over the next 51 pages, this Report considers whether motorists might accept harder measures to address unsafe driving, what new initiatives could be introduced to improve driving skills throughout our lives and what messages around driving safely need to be communicated to make a difference.

I hope that this Report on Motoring continues, in the tradition of previous Reports, to contribute to the debate and future thinking on the safety on our roads. It is in all of our interests to make drivers and roads safer.



Debbie Hewitt
Managing Director, RAC

Executive Summary

RAC Report on Motoring

Last year's Report on Motoring found that motorists were prepared to do a deal on road pricing. In 2007, the Report examines whether this is still on the table; explores what other deals might be brokered and reflects on what motorists really think about the key issues facing them today. The Report also demonstrates what motorists think about safety on our roads and what might be done to improve driver behaviour.

Car dependency

- Motoring remains as fundamental a part of people's lives as ever.
- Four out of five drivers would find it very difficult to adjust their lifestyle to being without a car and 8% of drivers say they never walk anywhere.
- This is despite a view that over two-thirds (71%) consider the quality of roads to be noticeably worse and a strong belief that the cost of motoring is increasing at a rapid rate.

Motoring and the environment

- Support and understanding of the 'green' agenda is growing among motorists but this is not yet being translated into action.
- Only 37% of motorists take CO₂ emissions into account when it comes to buying a new car and 45% will only take account of environmental issues once they see more people doing the same.
- The Government needs to seize the initiative, with 66% of motorists claiming they would buy a more environmentally friendly car if the tax incentives were better.

Motoring Revenues

- Revenues from motoring offences should be used to fund safe driving initiatives for all motorists.
- Motorists are generally sceptical about the Government's use of motoring revenues. Nearly three out of four (73%) believe that most driving offences are only there to generate money for the Treasury, rather than improve road safety.

Reducing Traffic

- The majority of motorists (57%) believe tougher steps should be taken to tackle congestion. However, there is a big difference between recognising the problem and achieving a solution.
- Opposition to road pricing is high, with only 30% of drivers supporting the principle whilst 75% believe it to be ineffective at reducing traffic – it merely shifts the problem elsewhere.
- But the deal highlighted in last year's Report is still on the table and support for it is growing... 73% (compared to 68% in 2006) of drivers believe that to make road pricing acceptable they would want to see immediate evidence of investment in public transport.

Drivers' concerns about motoring

- Ahead of congestion, the cost of motoring, the number of cars on the road and the environment, driving and safety is by far the greatest area of concern for the vast majority of motorists.
- The concerns motorists have about driving safely are overwhelmingly about the behaviours of other motorists. Their biggest concern is other motorists driving under the influence of illegal drugs.
- British motorists say cars and authorities have made roads safer – not motorists themselves.

Safety and technology

- 86% of motorists believe more safety features on cars (such as airbags, seatbelts, ABS) have had the single biggest impact on road safety.
- Motorists are very confident that they know how to check the car they drive is safe – around 90% say they can perform basic safety checks.
- Although most drivers (58%) believe in-car technology makes driving safer, 71% believe that the complexity of modern cars means motorists need to be shown how to use safety features for them to have any impact.
- There is a sense that in-car technology might have the opposite effect of what was intended with 50% of motorists believing too much reliance on technology makes people less safe drivers.

Feeling safe

- Virtually all (98%) motorists say they are a safe driver but only 81% feel safe while driving.
- Feeling safe noticeably declines with age with only 35% of drivers aged 65 and over feeling very safe driving today, compared with 48% of 17-24 year olds.
- Men feel noticeably safer than women, with 48% of men and 34% of women feeling very safe.
- Drivers who live in cities are more likely to feel very safe (47%), especially when compared to motorists in suburbs (38%).
- Drivers who say they feel very safe driving are more likely to be habitual speeders and have speeding penalties.
- Whilst there is a clear hierarchy of seriousness in unsafe behaviours, the overall message is that all unsafe behaviours are very serious.

Speeding

- Britain's drivers need constant reminders of the risks of driving at an inappropriate speed.
- Speeding is the most common unsafe driving behaviour, with around half of motorists admitting that they sometimes speed, even though it is regarded as unsafe behaviour.
- It also represents the most common motoring offence – 16% of those surveyed have been convicted of a speeding offence in the last five years.

Familiar dangers

- Drivers need to be helped to understand the inherent risk in how they drive – new language and ways to engage them are required.
- Motorists underestimate the risk of everyday distractions, such as in-car instruments and systems, children and eating or drinking.
- The Report questions whether we are now driving in cocoons – removed from the perception of danger and well within our comfort zone.
- The most common distraction for motorists was found to be radio/CD controls (82%) followed by heating/air-conditioning controls (44%).

Personal Responsibility

- The primary focus of future strategy to improve driving safety must be on drivers themselves.
- Drivers differentiate between unsafe behaviours that are deliberate (e.g. drugs or drink, dangerous driving, insurance) and unintended (e.g. distraction, tiredness, carelessness).
- Deliberately unsafe behaviours are seen as deeply irresponsible, whereas unintended behaviours are seen as 'only human' and forgivable.
- 94% of drivers consider themselves to be law-abiding and they place the blame for unsafe driving on 'other drivers'. But, we are all 'other drivers' to everyone else on the road.

Improving Driving Safety

- Britain needs a more prominent and integrated system for people to learn what they need to drive safely throughout their lives.
- Young people are at far greater risk – a third of all car drivers killed or seriously injured and half of all car passengers are under 25 years old.
- Young people acknowledge the need to be better prepared before they are allowed to drive. Their priorities are:
 - more education about safe driving at school (58%)
 - more emphasis on 'teaching to drive safely' (37%)
 - better preparation for 'modern driving' (30%)
- As a whole, motorists are interested in helping young people to improve their driving skills. For example, 88% would like to see training on night driving.
- There is an emergent view amongst the authorities of a need to adopt a 'lifelong learning' approach to driving.
- 42% of motorists agree with 'making all drivers re-take the driving test periodically'.
- 51% of motorists agree with 'making drivers re-take the driving test at 65 – and periodically thereafter.
- 79% of motorists agree with 'having regular medical checks for elderly people'.
- However, nearly a third (29%) of drivers believe they would not pass their driving test if they were to take it tomorrow.
- The most acceptable safety initiative is to design cars so that they minimise injury to pedestrians – 88% of motorists supported this. This is closely followed by greater emphasis on teaching and testing road safety in the driving test – this is supported by 84% of those surveyed.

Harder policies and tougher penalties

- National road safety targets should be unpacked into specific localised targets that reflect local concerns and priorities.
- There is a deep-rooted willingness to accept limited constraints in order to improve road safety and 59% of drivers think deaths should be cut by at least half.
- 56% support a goal of zero fatalities although this is tempered by scepticism about how realistic such a policy might be.
- Harder policies on drink-driving and drug-driving are supported. Over two-thirds of motorists back random breath testing, reducing the UK drink-drive limit to be in line with Europe, naming and shaming convicted drink/drug drivers and the use of alcolocks.

The great British motorist

There are about 46.5m people in Britain eligible for a driving licence, i.e. aged 17 or over. 72% hold a full driving licence, which is 81% of men and 63% of women, giving a total of 33.3m motorists.

There are now 27.8m licensed cars on Britain's roads. This number has increased by c.25% in the last 10 years.

In round terms, there are:

- about 6 cars on the road for every 10 adults in Britain.
- over 8 cars on the road for every 10 drivers in Britain.

75% of all households have access to a car, and 32% have access to 2 or more cars.

43% of 5-10 years olds now go to school by car compared to 38% 10 years ago.

313,061,320,000 vehicle-miles are driven each year, with cars accounting for 79%.

Roughly a fifth of this is on motorways, a third on minor roads and the remainder on A roads.

The average person makes 1,044 trips per year and travels 7,208 miles per year:

- 2 out of every 3 trips are by car: 42% as a driver; 23% as a passenger.
- 4 out of every 5 miles travelled are by car: 51% as a driver; 29% as a passenger.

The average motorist drives 3685 miles a year:

- 39% commuting or on business
- 30% leisure
- 12% shopping
- 8% personal business
- 2% education/ school runs
- 9% ferrying people about e.g. children, friends, older people

The driving population is ageing:

- the proportion of older drivers is increasing: from 38% of drivers in 1995 to 51% in 2005.
- the proportion of younger drivers is reducing: from 43% of drivers in 1995 to 32% in 2005.

Sources: Transport Statistics, Department for Transport.



'I think there are too many cars on the road. And yet, I'm not going to be the person to give my car up. That's really selfish but, I mean, you need a car...'

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

Chapter 1

Motoring in 2007

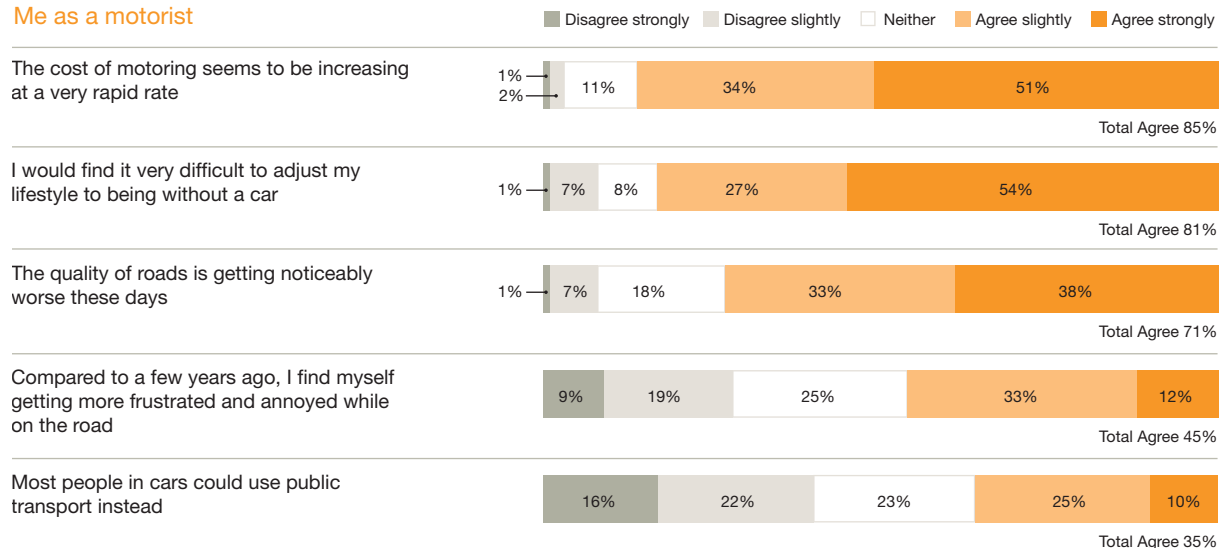
Setting the wider context for the Report with an overview of drivers' views on motoring in 2007.

1.1 General attitudes

In 2007, driving remains as fundamental a part of everyday life in Britain as it ever was.

Despite the fact that 85% agree the costs of motoring are increasing at a very rapid rate, British motorists are hugely dependent on their cars.

Me as a motorist



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

Four out of every five drivers (81%) say they would find it 'very difficult to adjust my lifestyle to being without a car', slightly down on last year's figure of 87%. There is also a core of people who are totally dependent on their car, with 8% of all drivers now saying they never walk anywhere.

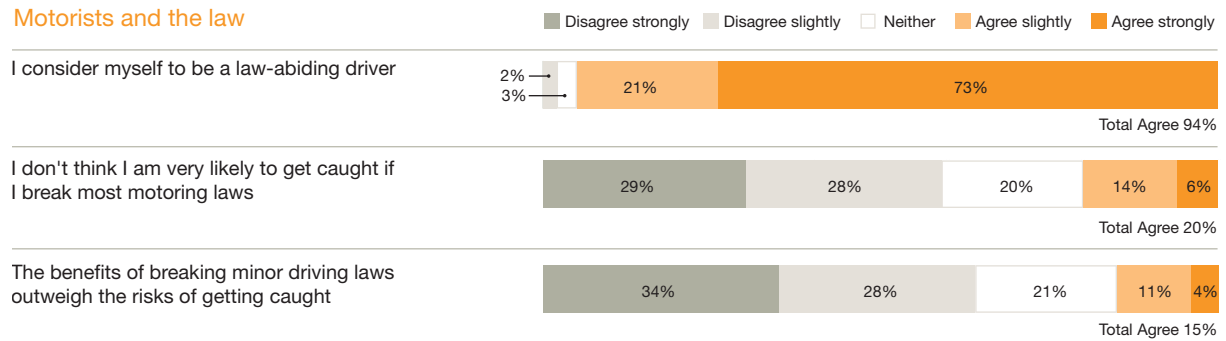
¹ This sense that the cost of motoring is increasing at a rapid rate was also found in 2006 and is borne out by the facts: the latest RAC Cost of Motoring Index (October 2006) calculated the cost of car ownership had risen by £539 over the previous 12 months.

The level of aversion that drivers have to using public transport is unchanged from 2006. Just one in three (35%) motorists agree that 'most people in cars could use public transport instead', whilst 38% actively disagree. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of drivers (85%) agree the costs of motoring are 'increasing at a very rapid rate'¹.

Along with the high cost of motoring, road quality is also a significant issue for motorists, with 71% thinking that the 'quality of roads is getting noticeably worse'. The good news, though, is that despite this, fewer drivers in 2007 (45%) say that 'compared to a few years ago, I find myself getting more frustrated and annoyed whilst on the road' than in 2006 (59%).

Through the research for this year's RAC Report on Motoring it has become very clear that the vast majority of drivers see themselves as well-behaved and responsible citizens on the road. That number is growing – from 84% in 2006 to 94% in 2007.

Motorists and the law



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

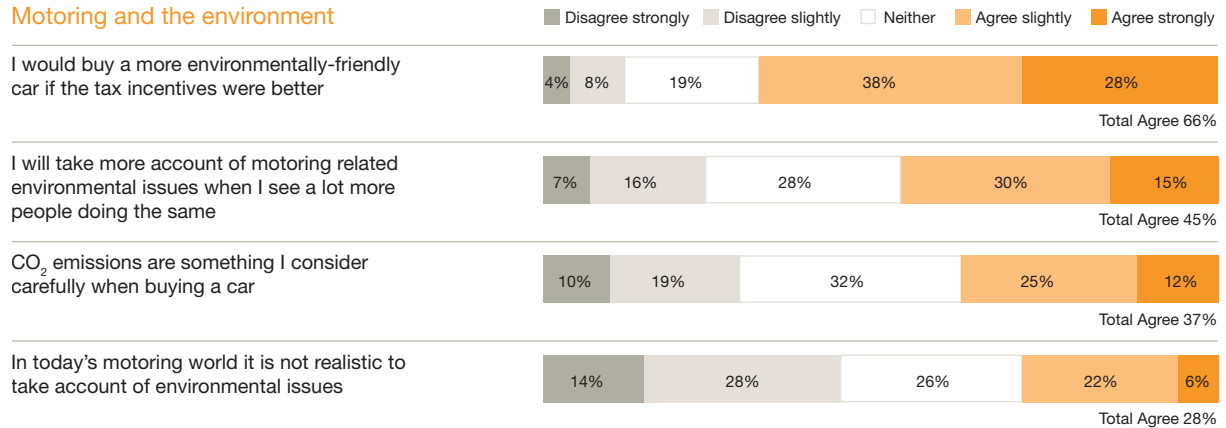
At the same time, drivers acknowledge there are good, pragmatic reasons to be law-abiding and these come through strongly as well. Most drivers (62%) are of the view that any benefits of breaking the law are outweighed by the risk of getting caught, with only 15% thinking it worth the risk.

Most drivers (57%) also think there is a real possibility they would get caught if they broke 'most motoring laws', with only one in five (20%) thinking it very unlikely they would get caught.

1.2 Motoring and the environment

In 2007, the 'green' motoring agenda is generally supported by Britain's motorists, though there is a sense that something more is needed to convert this support into action.

Motoring and the environment



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

Today, less than a third (28%) of all drivers agree that 'in today's motoring world it is not realistic to take account of environmental issues'. This is a slight improvement on 2006 (33%) and suggests that support for the 'green' agenda continues to grow amongst Britain's motorists.

The problem remains, however, that this support is not yet being translated into action.

In the 12 months since the last RAC Report on Motoring, global warming and climate change have often dominated the headlines through, for example, the publication of the Eddington Report and the Stern Review². Yet there has been little change in drivers' views on specific environmental aspects of motoring since 2006. Indeed, the number of drivers who say they take CO₂ emissions into account when buying a car has actually decreased slightly – from 41% last year to 37% in 2007³.

The sense that emerges from listening to motorists is of an impasse waiting to be broken, with nearly half (45%) of all drivers saying 'I will take more account of environmental issues when I see a lot more people doing the same'. Balancing this, however, the research also suggests that, given the right impetus, a real breakthrough is possible. For example, 66% of all Britain's motorists say they 'would buy a more environmentally friendly car – if the tax incentives were better'.

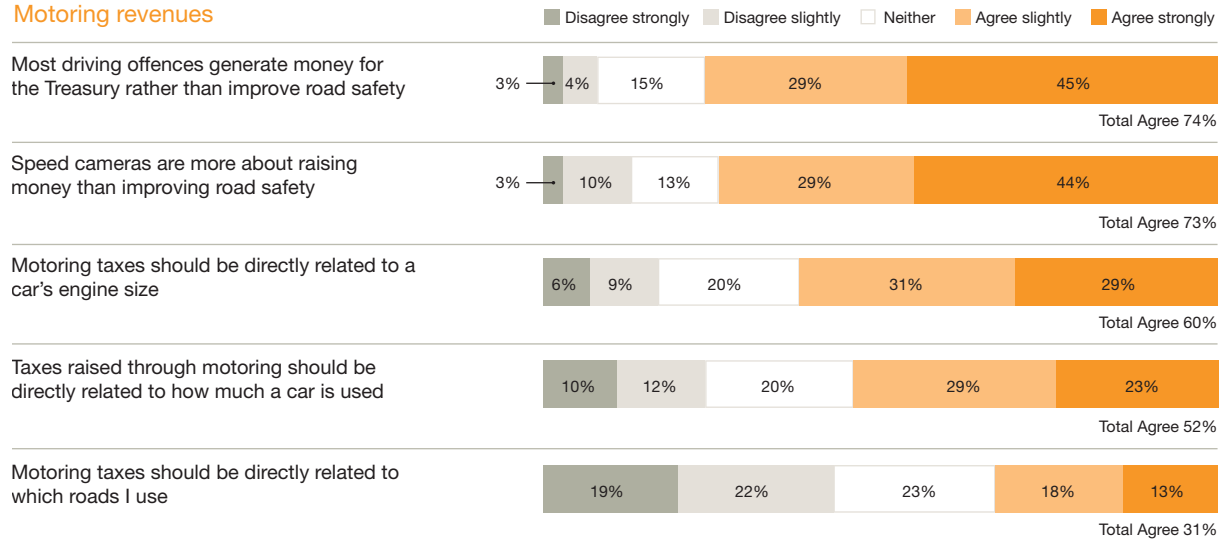
Overall, the impression in 2007 is of Britain's motorists waiting for a lead to be given on the 'green' agenda.

1.3 Motoring revenues

In 2007 – as in 2006 – motorists are, generally, sceptical about Government's use of motoring revenues and would prefer any taxes on motoring to be based on engine size.

² The Eddington Transport Study (December 2006) and the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (December 2006).

³ It is worth noting that since last year's Report, Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) rates for cars with the lowest emissions (Band A) have been reduced to zero. At the other end of the scale, a new band (G) was created for the most polluting vehicles (those with emissions above 225g/km), registered after March 2006. Further changes were announced in this year's Budget (March 2007).

Motoring revenues

Today, nearly three out of every four drivers (73%) believe that 'speed cameras are more about raising money than improving road safety', a slight increase on 2006 (69%).

This belief – and, particularly, the cynicism it creates amongst drivers – is not helpful to any serious effort to promote safer driving. Indeed, the same number of drivers (73%) now believes that 'most driving offences' are there to 'generate money for the Treasury rather than improve road safety'.

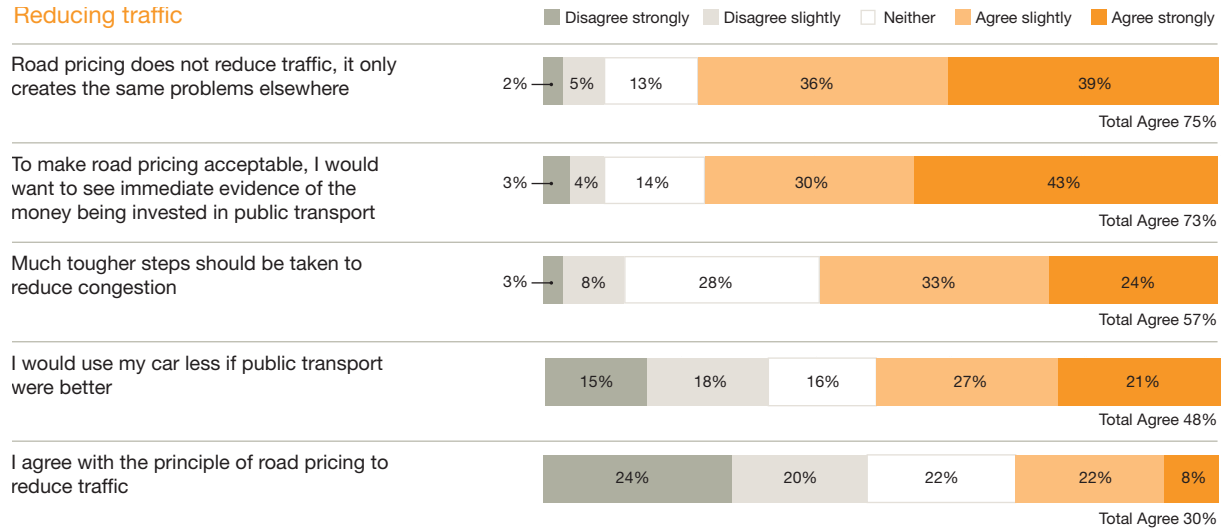
Britain's motorists understand that driving will always be viewed by Government as a prime source of revenue – their focus is on the level of taxes and how they are applied. In terms of taxing motoring itself (as opposed to taxes on car purchase or ownership), their preference is for taxes 'to be related to a car's engine size' (60%) rather than on car usage (53%) or which roads are used (31%). With the exception of the decline in support for taxing road usage (46% in 2006), this is broadly similar to what was found last year.

Their preference for taxing engine size – and, by extension, fuel efficiency and/ or emissions – is again apparent when drivers are asked where taxes to reduce CO₂ emissions should be levied. The majority of drivers (55%) think there should be 'higher taxes on vehicles that use more fuel per mile of driving'. This is well above the level of support for other tax options, such as 'reducing maximum speed limits' (25%), across the board 'higher taxes on fuel' (8%) or 'charging for road usage' (7%).

1.4 Reducing traffic

In 2007, motorists agree much tougher steps should be taken to reduce traffic but do not necessarily support measures to 'manage' road usage. Instead, they see improving public transport as key.

Reducing traffic



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

A majority of drivers (57%) agrees that 'much tougher steps should be taken to reduce congestion'.

There is, however, a big difference between recognising the problem and achieving a solution.

In terms of possible solutions, there are two front runners: road pricing and/ or improved public transport. Overall, road pricing is not supported by Britain's motorists – less than a third (30%) of drivers agree with it in principle, whilst nearly half (44%) are against it. More fundamentally, they do not regard it as an effective solution, with three out of every four drivers (75%) believing that 'road pricing does not reduce traffic, it only creates the same problems elsewhere'.

As this suggests, in itself road pricing does not make journeys any less necessary. Rather, it has the potential to make driving more expensive or, in some way, less convenient. The other possibility is that road pricing pushes drivers towards the alternative – public transport.



From the motorists' perspective, the real issue is the pivotal role that improving public transport has to play in both reducing congestion and changing driver behaviour – in its own right and, potentially, in conjunction with road pricing.

Already, about half of Britain's motorists (48%) say 'I would use my car less if public transport were better'. Over and above this, the research for this year's Report on Motoring suggests that drivers would find road pricing schemes much more acceptable – and, by extension, credible – if their introduction were directly linked to achieved improvements in public transport.

‘If they’re going to do it, they’ve got to do a lot more than just charge people for driving in. They’ve got to provide other ways of getting in.’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

This suggests that improving public transport in conjunction with introducing road pricing can form the basis of a long-term ‘carrot and stick’ strategy that would not only be effective in reducing traffic but, crucially, would also be acceptable to Britain’s motorists.

1.5 Road pricing – an update

Last year’s RAC Report on Motoring concluded that ‘motorists are prepared to do a deal on road pricing’ and below we provide a brief update.

National road pricing is unlikely to be introduced before the middle of the next decade.

In the shorter term, local schemes are being developed with help from the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF)⁴. Here, the key challenge for Government is to find a way to enable schemes to be developed against highly specific local needs, whilst avoiding a piecemeal approach across the country. This is particularly important since these TIF-funded initiatives will inform the development of a possible national scheme.

It is worth noting that motorists were notably more positive about congestion charging in 2006 than they are about road pricing in 2007⁵. This highlights an important difference. Congestion charging is viewed as a very specific local solution for a local problem and it has been seen to work, i.e. in London.

By contrast, motorists think of road pricing more in terms of a Government initiative but, as yet, do not really know what it would involve – consequently, they fear the worst and are unable to support it. They start from a position of believing that the costs of motoring are increasing and a degree of scepticism about the use of motoring revenues. All of which starts to explain exactly why Britain’s motorists will need a lot of convincing about the benefits of road pricing.

Much greater clarity is needed from Government on how any national road pricing scheme would work and the benefits it would bring. Similarly, a very high level of transparency is necessary, so drivers see the ‘immediate evidence’ they are asking for – that monies raised from road pricing are being spent on improving public transport.

As this implies, for road pricing to work there will need to be some ‘guarantee’ that the revenues raised are matched by expenditure to improve public transport and a ‘mechanic’ to both ensure and show this. This is important, since the overall imbalance between revenues raised from and monies spent on motoring mean Government is, generally, not well trusted on motoring finances by drivers.

⁴ In the July 2004 White Paper, ‘The Future of Transport’, the Secretary of State for Transport announced the creation of the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF). The Fund will support:

- the costs of smarter, innovative local transport packages that combine demand management measures, such as road pricing, with measures to encourage modal shift, and better bus services;
- local mechanisms which raise new funding for transport schemes; and
- regional, inter-regional and local schemes that are beneficial to national productivity.

⁵ This may reflect the higher profile achieved by the anti-road pricing lobby over the last 12 months. For example, the e-petition on the 10 Downing Street website (supported by 1.8 million people) was very much in the news at the time the research was undertaken.

More fundamentally, it unlocks the acceptability of road pricing to drivers. Last year, 69% said that 'to make road pricing acceptable, I would want to see immediate evidence of the money being invested in public transport⁶. In 2007 that number has increased further to 73%.

The deal is not only still on the table, but support for it amongst motorists is growing.

Driving and Safety

Every year, well over a quarter of a million people are killed or injured on Britain's roads. Although the trend is downwards, the rate of decline is now slowing.

The most recent official statistics show 271,017 casualties in 2005:

- 3,201 deaths
- 28,954 serious injuries
- 238,862 slight casualties.

Of these casualties:

- 66% were car drivers or passengers
- 15% motorbikes or cyclists
- 12% pedestrians
- 7% other road users.

Of the 32,155 deaths and serious injuries:

- 46% were car drivers or passengers
- 27% motorbikes or cyclists
- 22% pedestrians
- 5% other road users.

A third of the 33,281 pedestrians injured were children.

A third of the 7,129 pedestrians killed or seriously injured were children.

Two-thirds of the people killed or seriously injured in cars are drivers and one-third is passengers.

29% of all car drivers killed or seriously injured are under 25 years old.

52% of all car passengers killed or seriously injured are under 25 years old:

- 36% are 17-24 years old
- 16% are under 17 years old.

Death or serious injury accounts for:

- 1 in 10 of all car casualties
- 1 in 5 of all pedestrian casualties
- 1 in 4 of all motorcycle casualties.

Car drivers over the alcohol limit were involved in 6% of all casualties and 17% of all deaths. This killed or seriously injured 2,660 people and injured a further 12,740.

Two-thirds of all accidents are on 30 mph roads and 4% are on motorways.

Source: Road Casualties in Great Britain 2005, Department for Transport

⁶ Last year, the RAC Report on Motoring also confirmed that drivers expect any deal to be tax-neutral: if road pricing is introduced, there should be a commensurate reduction in road and/or fuel tax.



‘It’s not you – it’s the other people on the road you need to worry about.’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

Chapter 2

Attitudes towards driving and safety

What Britain's motorists think about safety on our roads.

⁷ Previous research has shown drivers to feel strongly about a 'core' set of motoring concerns. This year's research used these 'core' concerns to draw up a comprehensive listing of 'issues that might or might not be of concern to motorists today'. The list was shown to drivers, who were asked to say whether each issue was of 'most concern', 'less concern' or 'no concern' to them.

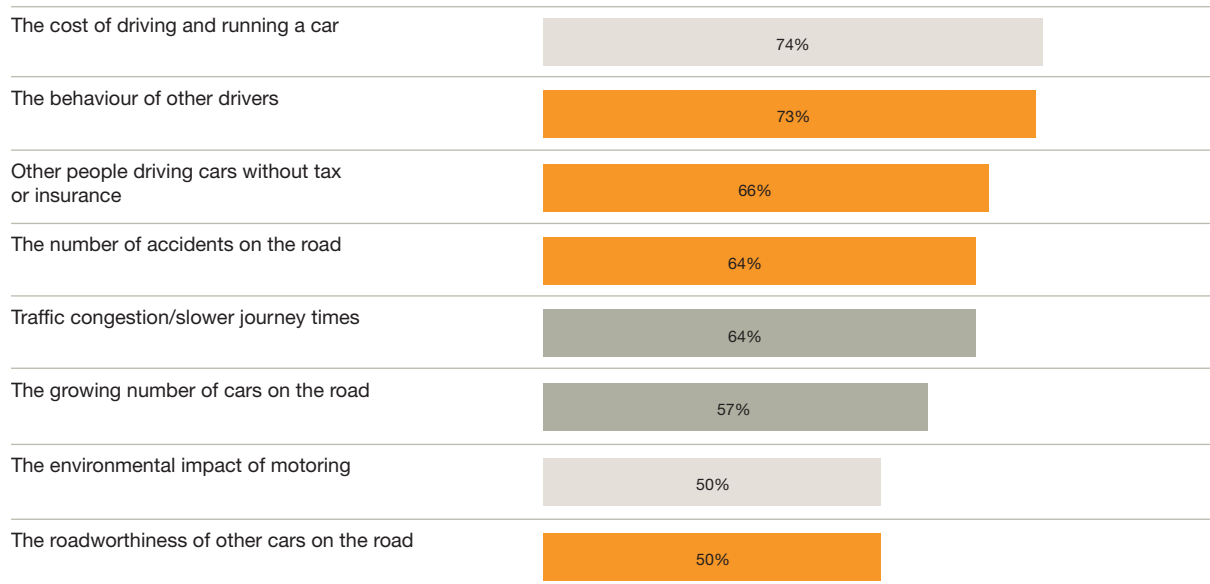
2.1 Drivers' concerns about motoring in 2007

Over the years, RAC's Report on Motoring has shown that motorists are concerned about a broad range of issues to do with driving. In looking at attitudes to safety, therefore, the obvious start point was to ask them where safety sits amongst these concerns⁷.

There are eight issues of 'most concern' for at least half of all drivers. As in previous years, the 'cost of driving and running a car' tops the list of concerns, with three-quarters of all of drivers (74%) saying this is an issue of 'most concern' to them.

Issues of concern to motorists

Percentage saying this is of most concern



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)



But whilst cost is 'top', reviewing the whole list tells a different story. There is a similar level of concern about 'the behaviour of other drivers' (73%) as about cost (74%). Even more strikingly, however, looked at as a whole, half of their worries are about driving safety (those in orange), with half of the remaining concerns (those in dark grey) directly impacting on driving safety.

As this makes starkly clear, drivers' concerns about motoring are dominated by safety issues. This reality is further brought home by the fact that a full 90% of Britain's drivers say they are 'most concerned' by at least one of the main safety fears (orange); this rises to 95% when those impacting on safety (dark grey) are added.

In short – ahead of cost, congestion, the number of cars on the road and the environment – driving and safety is by far the greatest area of concern for the vast majority of motorists in 2007.

2.2 Concerns about driving and safety

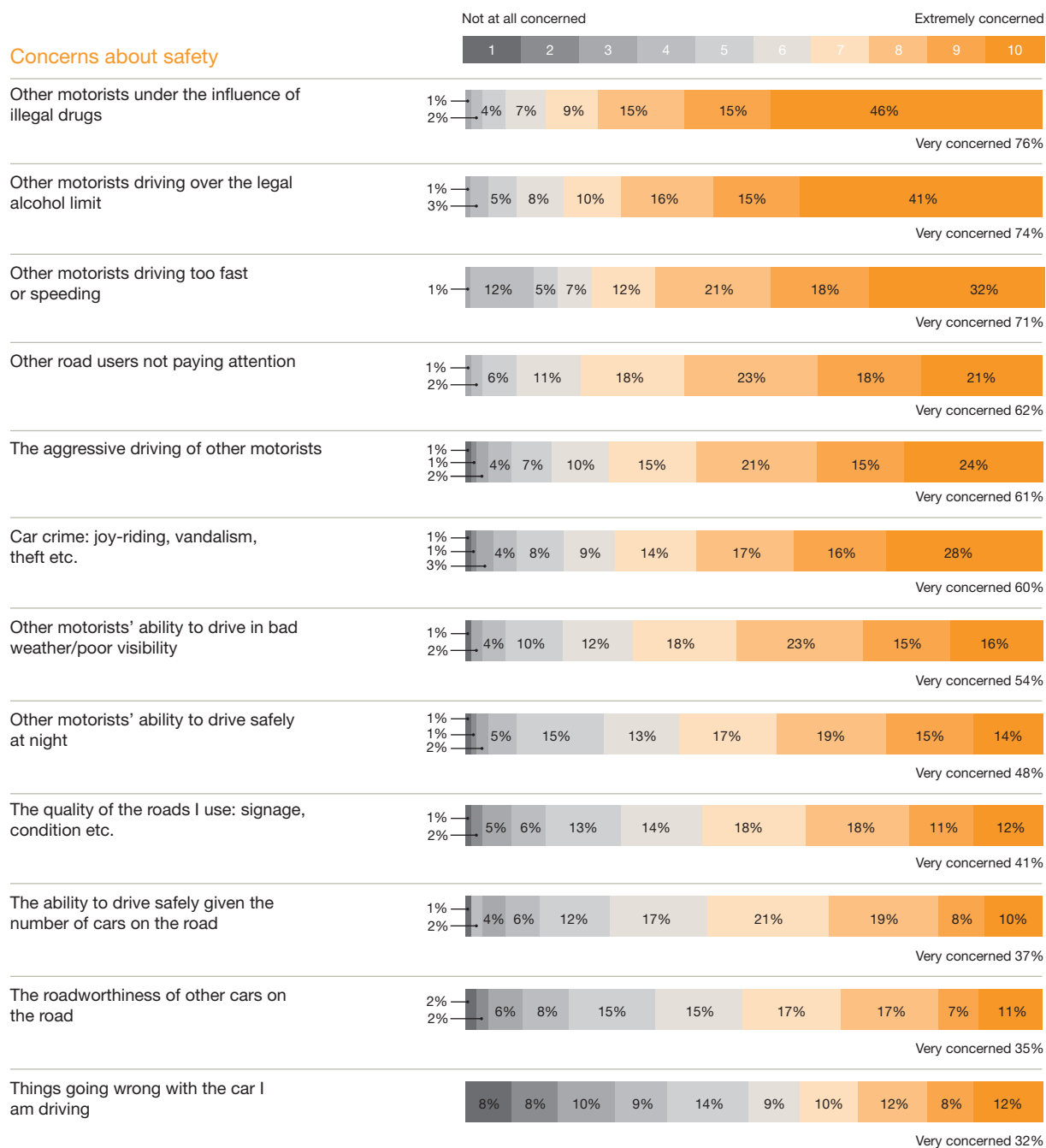
The concerns motorists have about driving safety are not general or abstract, but highly specific and – overwhelmingly – about the behaviours of other motorists.

Just taking those issues which at least half of Britain's motorists say they are 'very concerned' about, every single one of these is about how other road users behave:

1. other motorists driving under the influence of illegal drugs: 76%
2. other motorists driving over the legal alcohol limit: 74%
3. other motorists driving too fast or speeding: 71%
4. other road users not paying attention: 62%
5. other motorists' aggressive driving: 61%
6. car crime: joy-riding, vandalism, theft, etc.: 60%
7. other motorists' ability to drive in bad weather/ poor visibility: 54%

Much more than simply reinforcing the earlier finding that 'the behaviour of other drivers' is of 'most concern' to three out of four motorists, what this reveals is the real, deep and near-universal fear of 'other drivers' that sits behind it.

Concerns about safety



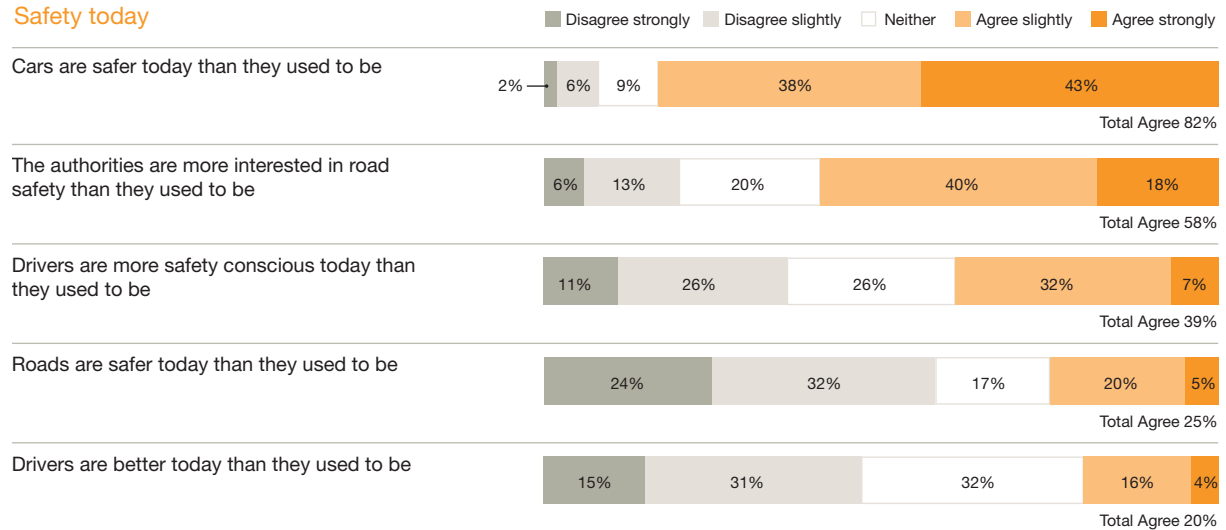
Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

NB: Values of less than 1% in the boxes above, are not shown

2.3 Is driving safer?

A key question for this year's Report was whether drivers felt some aspects of motoring were safer than in the past. Here, the picture that comes through is somewhat mixed.

Safety today



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

The majority of motorists (56%) clearly believe that roads are now less safe than they used to be. From the focus groups however, it is apparent that, by this drivers primarily mean there is too much traffic on the roads. They then link over-crowded roads to safety for both rational and emotional reasons.

Rationally, the more cars on the roads, the greater the likelihood of an 'unsafe' incident (not necessarily an accident). Emotionally, the more 'other drivers' there are on the roads, then the greater the risk from and reason to worry about their unsafe behaviours.

Nearly half of Britain's motorists (46%) think that drivers today are certainly no better and, probably, worse than in the past, though opinions are split as to whether they are more safety conscious – 39% say they are, 37% say they are not⁸. Motorists do, however, have a very definite sense of 'the authorities' being more interested in road safety today than in the past (58%).

But what emerges most powerfully is the view that cars are a lot, lot safer (82%) than they used to be.

⁸ There is some evidence that views on both vary by age. Not surprisingly, younger drivers are more likely to think drivers are better now. Similarly, older drivers are less likely to think that drivers are more safety conscious today.

This overall message from motorists – that any improvement in safety has come from cars being safer and/ or the authorities taking more interest – also comes through in their views on what impact various safety initiatives have had.

Impact of safety initiatives: top 10

Percentage of drivers saying this has made driving safer

More safety features on cars, such as airbags, seatbelts, ABS	86%
Clampdowns on drink-driving	84%
The introduction of compulsory seatbelt wearing for all passengers	83%
Lower speed limits in built-up areas	80%
Clampdowns on driving without insurance or MOT	63%
Harsher penalties for motoring offences	62%
Changes to the driving test	59%
Other traffic-calming devices like speed bumps	57%
Speed checks, cameras, etc	56%
Road safety publicity campaigns	54%

Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

Quite clearly, 'more safety features on cars' are seen to have had the single greatest impact on safety. Yet, what is so striking about this list is that, after safer cars, every other initiative in this 'top 10' involves action by 'the authorities'. In fact, this rises to 10 out of 10, if Government initiatives on safety are included – for example, legislation on the compulsory fitting of seat belts in all cars.

The mixed picture on whether driving is safer today than in the past boils down to one basic truth.

Cars and the authorities have made driving safer, not Britain's motorists.

Say Britain's motorists.

What has made driving less safe?

Britain's motorists spontaneously identify the following as having made driving less safe:

- more cars/more traffic
- younger/ inexperienced drivers
- faster/ high powered cars
- drivers doing other things whilst driving
- bad drivers/ boy racers
- speeding/ driving too fast
- foreign drivers
- speed cameras
- road rage or aggressive drivers
- the number of lorries on the road
- impatient drivers/ always in a hurry
- uninsured/ illegal drivers

These are largely, though not totally about how 'other drivers' behave.

2.4 Car safety and technology

The safety of cars themselves is no longer a significant concern for Britain's motorists.

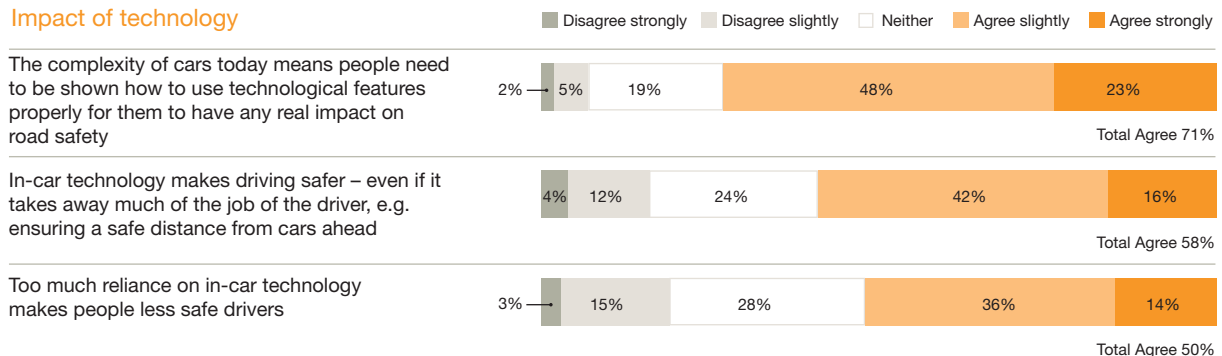
Wide-ranging improvements in the reliability and quality of cars over the last 10-15 years mean that 'things going wrong with the car I am driving' is now the lowest of all their concerns about safety.

Motorists are still very confident that they know how to check the car they drive is safe. Around 90% say they can complete the basic safety checks (oil, water, tyre, lights) and that these are carried out at least once a month – in most cases, by themselves. Motorists are similarly confident they know how to use the safety features on a modern car and 88% claim they understand the meaning of all the warning lights.

It is far from clear, though, whether their confidence is in fact justified. ABS or Anti-lock Braking System is a prime example. ABS needs a different braking technique to be effective – did you know that? – but whilst only 63% of drivers are aware of this, a very impressive 74% say they are confident they know how to use ABS. (This becomes even more impressive, when only 56% of drivers say they actually have ABS on their car.)

However, despite 82% saying that cars are safer than in the past, drivers are somewhat ambivalent about the impact of technology on driving safety.

Impact of technology



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

There are some strong tensions here. Although the majority of motorists (58%) believe that 'in-car technology makes driving safer', notably more (71%) believe that the complexity of modern cars means motorists need to be shown how to use safety features properly for them to have any impact.

In a similar vein, half of all drivers believe too much reliance on technology makes people less safe drivers. In other words, technology increases safety up to a point – and then it gets in the way.

‘New technology is increasingly important. We need to examine the extent to which you remove control from the driver. Perhaps also, the more technology you give the driver, the more they lose control.’

Christopher Macgowan: Chief Executive,
Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders

Safe cars or safe drivers?

‘I think we get back to the problem that the car becomes so technically advanced that it’s almost driving it for you, there’s no stimulus, no natural concentration, whatever you’re doing.’

‘I think because of the overcrowding on the roads and the cars are designed to go faster, that the risk of having an accident is probably higher now than it was twenty years ago.’

‘It’s taking you away from your own thought process isn’t it? When you are reliant on the car to do it for you rather than thinking ahead yourself and you can’t replace that can you really?’

‘I think the risk is higher but the crashes are more survivable... because cars are safer’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

Drivers are not saying there is now enough safety technology on modern cars – they remain interested in new features such as blind spot sensors, lane departure warnings and adaptive cruise control.

What they are saying is that in-car technology could have the opposite effect to what was intended and make drivers – particularly ‘other drivers’ – less safe.

2.5 Safe cars?

Motorists are very aware that cars have not only become safer but a lot better all round over the last 10-15 years. They are now more comfortable and a lot easier to drive.

The general view is that cars are better but drivers and roads are not. There is also a sense that cars may actually be too good for today’s roads and drivers. This sits with a view that, because modern cars are so much better, motorists no longer give as much attention when driving.

Drivers know they should give more attention to the act of driving. They also know that, in reality, this is often not the case. The act of driving becomes an unconscious, more mechanical process and they pay less attention.

Deep down, motorists have an unease – that cars being safer, more comfortable and easier to drive may actually make them less safe⁹. The act of driving becomes too easy, so drivers relax, lose sight of their need to concentrate and become less sensitive to risks.

RAC commentary: ‘road safety’

We did not expect to find driving and safety the biggest concern for Britain’s motorists – and nearly didn’t. That is because we started by asking them about ‘road safety’.

The term ‘road safety’ does not engage Britain’s motorists. It has something very ‘Britain in the 1970s’ about it, like the Tufty Club, the Green Cross Code Man and the message to ‘Clunk-Click Every Trip’. As such, ‘road safety’ does not connect with the everyday realities of driving – possibly, motorists think the term applies more to children, pedestrians or cyclists – so it does not feel relevant to ‘me’ as a driver.

More fundamentally, ‘road safety’ does not come across to Britain’s motorists as something they have to take responsibility for as drivers.

Nor did we expect to find drivers so concerned about so many aspects of road safety. That is because ‘road safety’ is a shell that conceals the cauldron of highly emotive concerns and fears they have about driving safety – particularly the behaviour of ‘other drivers’.

We need to start engaging motorists on the specifics of what they do whilst driving that reflect real areas of risks. An outstanding example of doing exactly this is the recent TV campaign on the risks of mobile phone usage whilst driving.

⁹ Motorists also, and correctly, sense that what makes people inside a car feel safer, often makes people outside less safe.

‘Unsafe drivers? It could be anyone.’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

The campaign raised awareness of the risk and was timed to coincide with the introduction of tougher penalties for using a hand-held phone when driving.

As we have seen, the fears Britain’s motorists have about safety all focus on how ‘other drivers’ behave. The clear implication is that ‘I am a good driver – it is other drivers that are the problem’. The problem is that, by convincing themselves of this, motorists abdicate responsibility for their own personal safety.

And, in doing so, they effectively put all the responsibility for their own safety in the hands of those ‘other drivers’ whose behaviour they are so concerned about.

Then the penny finally drops – we are all ‘other drivers’ to everyone else on the road.



'I would say I was [safe] because I've never had an accident in fourteen years of driving... but I'm sure that you'd be appalled at my bad habits.'

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

Chapter 3

Personal responsibility

What motorists say about their own behaviour and road safety.

3.1 Feeling safe

Virtually all (98%) motorists say they are a safe driver. With such universal agreement, any variations – by age, sex or class – are very much at the margins¹⁰.

Ask motorists how they feel when driving, however, and it is a different story: only 81% say they feel safe whilst driving.

There is a real gap between thinking you are a safe driver and feeling safe while driving.

Safely driving



What is striking is that twice as many say they are very safe drivers (80%), as say they feel very safe when driving (41%). A significant minority (20%) clearly do not feel safe driving on Britain's roads.

Whilst there is little variation in who sees themselves as a safe driver, there are important differences in who feels safe whilst driving. These differences come out of who you are, where you live and why, how much and how well you drive.

In terms of who feels safe, the most significant differences are by age and gender. Feeling safe noticeably declines with age whilst the proportion feeling unsafe increases. As few as one in three (35%) drivers aged 65 and over say they feel very safe driving today, compared with half (48%) of 17-24 year-olds.

¹⁰ The exception is people who 'drive for work' (c.6% of all drivers) more of whom say they are very safe drivers: 88% versus 80%.



Similarly, men feel noticeably safer than women, with half of all men (48%) and a third of women (34%) feeling very safe. There is no difference between drivers with and without children – nor are there any real differences by social class.

There are, however, significant differences in how safe people feel whilst driving depending on where you live. Drivers who live in cities are more likely to feel very safe (47%), particularly by comparison to drivers who live in suburbs (38%). The most significant variations are at a regional level. Very broadly, drivers in the South-West, Scotland, the Midlands and East of England feel safer; and those in the North-East, London and the South-East less safe driving on the roads today than motorists across Britain as a whole.

Some of the most significant differences relate to driving itself. In terms of why people drive, fewer 'private' motorists say they feel very safe compared to people who 'drive for work' – 40% versus 59%. In terms of how much people drive, the same picture comes through. Fewer low-mileage drivers saying they feel safe than high-mileage drivers: 36% versus 49%.

Finally, there are differences that relate to how well people actually drive. Drivers who have had a near miss or an accident are less likely to feel safe than those who say they have never had an unsafe incident. Conversely, drivers who say they feel very safe driving are more likely to be habitual speeders (both in built up areas and on motorways) and have penalties for speeding.

3.2 The rules of the road

Being safe is not the same as feeling safe and it is probably unsafe to feel too safe. The focus groups for this Report have shown that feeling safe involves a lot more than simply how 'safe' you are as a driver.

'How safe I feel whilst driving' is actually the consequence of many other factors. Nearly all of these are outside a driver's control, because they are about the behaviour of 'other drivers'.

In other words, my safety is largely dependent on your driving.

Feeling safe whilst driving requires all road users to adhere to the same set of implicit and explicit rules of driving. That means both recognising and complying with the public 'codes' like The Highway Code and, indeed, the law, that guide and prescribe our behaviour in a shared public space.

The foundation of these rules is common sense. They are designed to give a common basis for using the roads efficiently and safely, and to minimise risk. In some cases, the reason for having these rules is quite clear. For example, all drivers are required to have insurance to protect other road users from the financial consequences of accidents, particularly regarding injury to third parties. With others, for example speed limits, the clear line of sight to what the rule is for has been lost, so the regard in which it is held falls away.

'When driving, you have more interaction with people you don't know than in any other activity. When you're driving in a shared space, there are rules, conventions and habits.'

Peter Bottomley MP

Are they safe?

People who drive for work and drivers who habitually speed are both more likely to say they feel very safe driving on today's roads. This raises the intriguing question of whether they are, in fact, right to feel safer than other motorists; and whether feeling safe whilst driving is actually that good a thing.

Are people who drive for work really safer drivers? Has the fact that they have far greater experience from driving day-in, day-out on today's road somehow made them better drivers?

Similarly, with drivers who speed, does this reflect a higher level of skill and show them to be better drivers? Is driving at higher speed a cause or a consequence of their feeling very safe on the roads? Or could it simply be that drivers who habitually speed are over-confident and will only slow down when they have an accident?

There is a simple answer to all this and it is in the official statistics. People who drive for work and drivers who habitually speed may feel safer but, for differing reasons, both are more at risk than the average motorist.

Research by the Transport Research Laboratory has shown that, even taking into account their higher mileage, people who drive for work have up to 50% more accidents than private motorists. Differently, work by the Department for Transport has shown that whilst speeding is identified as a 'contributory factor' in 15% of all accidents, this increases to 26% in the case of all fatal accidents – speed does, indeed, kill.

3.3 Safe drivers...

Now, go back to the 98% who say they are a safe driver.

Although the question was not whether they are a good driver, it is clear from this year's focus groups that motorists generally see being a 'good' driver and a 'safe' driver as synonymous. Add to this their view that the problem is not about 'me driving safely' but 'the behaviour of other drivers', and it takes us a long way towards understanding why nearly everyone says they are a safe driver.

However, being 'good' as a driver doesn't just mean being good at driving, it also means being well-behaved – that is, respecting the rules, not being irresponsible and showing courtesy whilst driving. This second meaning is borne out of and recognises the inherently social aspect of being a 'good' driver. In that sense, it is not unlike saying someone is a 'good' parent.

In describing themselves as 'safe' drivers, occasional transgressions notwithstanding, Britain's motorists are actually saying they are inherently well-behaved and respect the rules of the road. By doing so, they are effectively drawing a clear distinction between their own behaviour and the behaviour of 'other drivers' who are unsafe and irresponsible because they deliberately break the rules. That is immensely unhelpful.

In pure behavioural terms, good driving and safe driving are not the same – you can be a good driver, and still drive unsafely. That is because safe driving involves a lot more than simply applying the combination of knowledge, skills and experience that characterises good driving.

Furthermore, the notion of being a well-behaved driver brings with it an assumption of being a responsible driver and that fits neatly with their self-perceptions of being a 'safe' driver. However, there is a huge difference between not being irresponsible and taking responsibility for one's own driving and safety.

The problem with equating being a good driver to being a safe driver, means drivers are able to convince themselves that they are a safe driver when, in fact, they are not. This is then compounded by drivers recognising that the social nature of driving means that – to a large degree – my safety depends on your driving, and putting all the blame for unsafe driving on 'other drivers'.

‘Most people will cheerfully admit to being a bad gardener.

But when did you last hear anyone say they’re a bad driver?’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

In thinking this, motorists put the responsibility for driving safety on ‘other drivers’ as well. And at this point, we again see Britain’s motorists putting responsibility for their safety in the hands of those ‘other drivers’ whose unsafe behaviours they are so concerned about.

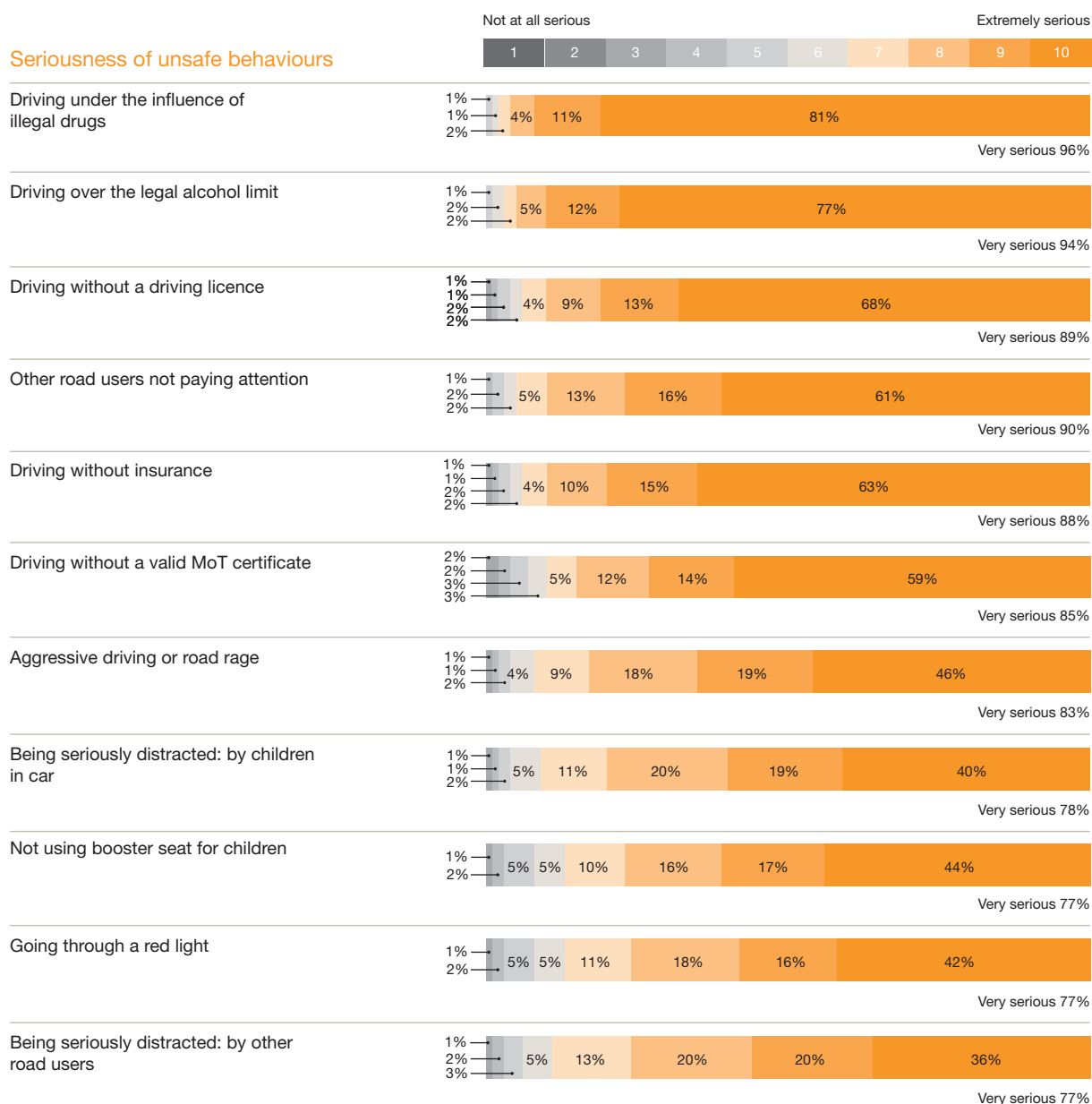
It is time to look at whether drivers do behave unsafely whilst driving. Or, more accurately, to look at what they say they do.

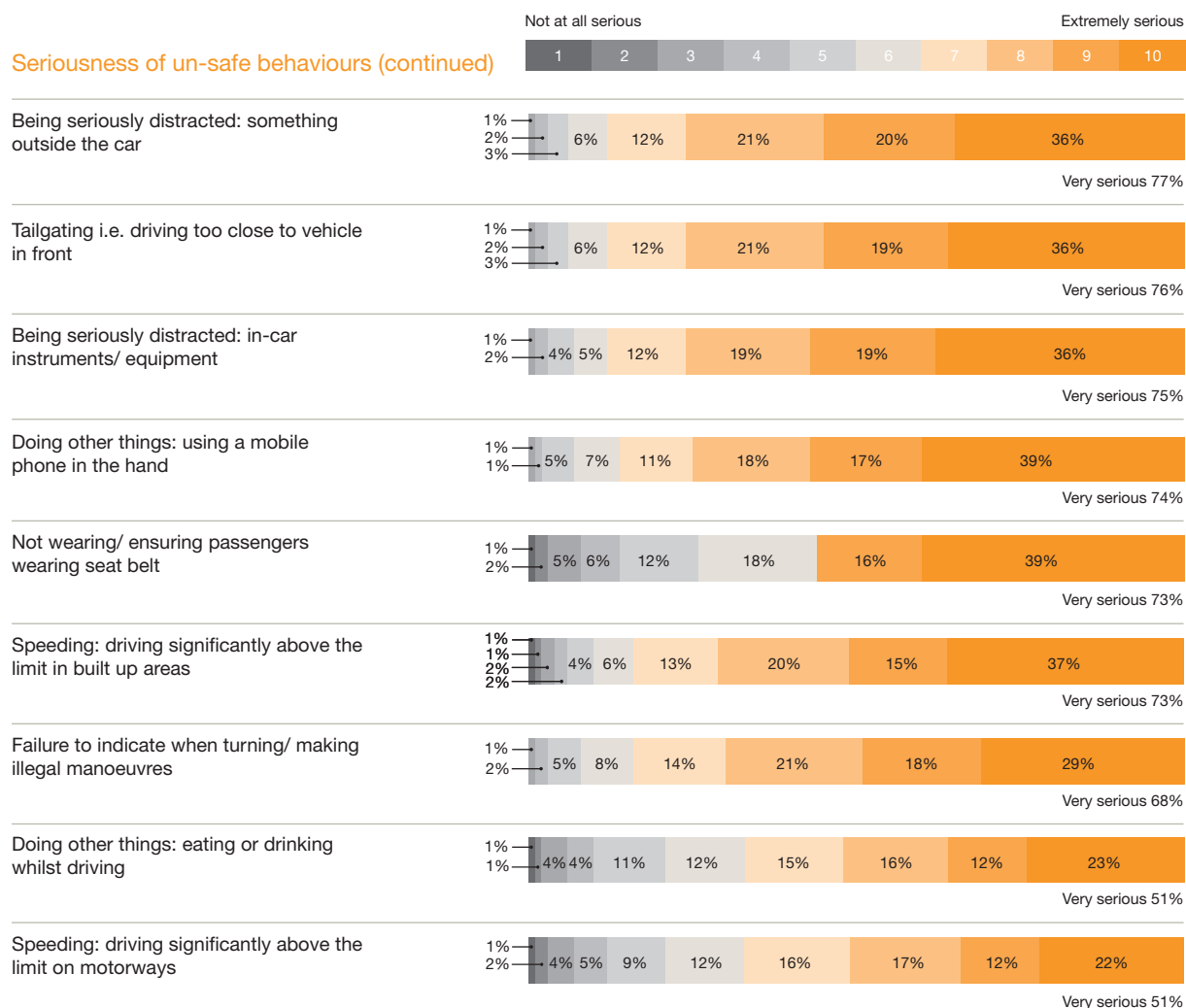
3.4 ... but unsafe driving

The start point is to ask what motorists see as unsafe driving behaviour.

For that, we asked drivers to rate the seriousness of various unsafe behaviours on a scale from 1 to 10.

Seriousness of unsafe behaviours



Seriousness of un-safe behaviours (continued)

Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

NB: Values of less than 1% in the boxes above, are not shown

¹¹ The fears that Britain's motorists have about other people driving on illegal drugs again comes through strongly, as does the unacceptability of drink-driving and their concerns about people driving without a licence or insurance and the roadworthiness of other cars. These are seen as anti-social, irresponsible and, above all, deliberate unsafe behaviours. By contrast, 'driving while tired' whilst no less serious, is viewed as being somehow different in kind.

Whilst there is a clear hierarchy of seriousness – with drugs and drink driving; driving when tired/ nodding off and driving without a licence, insurance or MoT at the top¹¹ – the overall message is that virtually all unsafe behaviours are very serious. The clarity with which Britain's drivers are saying this is remarkable.

Using the same list of unsafe behaviours, drivers were also asked how often they do any. Until it comes to speeding and 'doing other things whilst driving', the overall level of claimed compliance is very high.

Claimed compliance

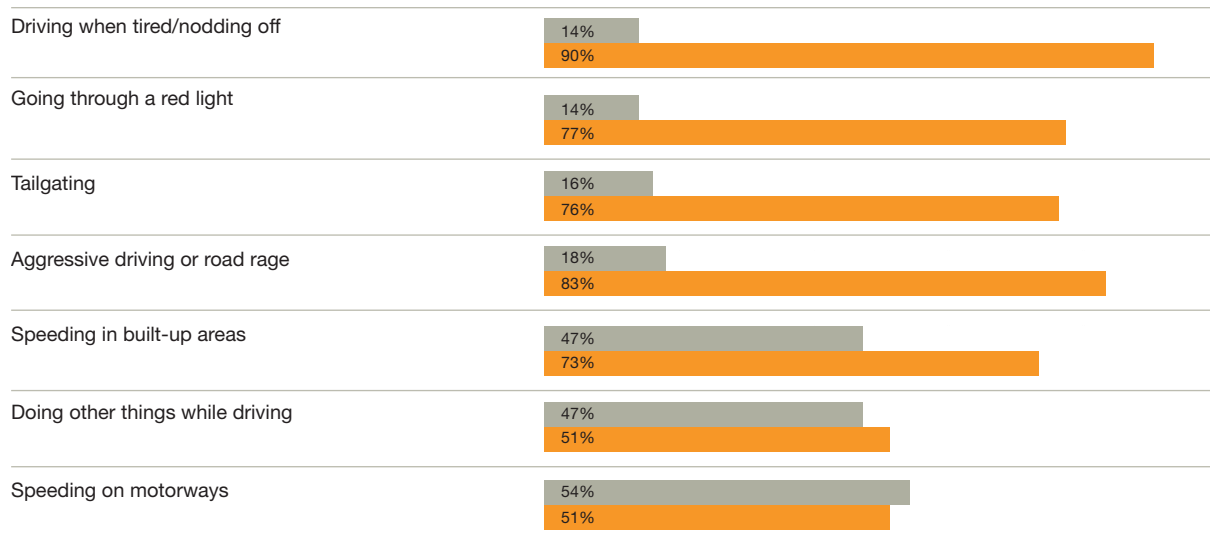
Not at all

Driving without insurance	99%
Driving without a valid MOT certificate	99%
Driving without a driving licence	99%
Driving under the influence of illegal drugs	99%
Driving over the legal alcohol limit	98%
Not using booster seat for children	94%
Being seriously distracted: in-car instruments/equipment	87%
Not wearing/ensuring passengers not wearing seat belt	86%
Driving when tired/nodding off when driving	86%
Going through a red light	85%
Become seriously distracted by children in car	84%
Tailgating i.e. driving too close to the vehicle in front	84%
Failing to indicate when turning/making illegal manoeuvres	83%
Aggressive driving or road rage	82%
Being seriously distracted by other road users	79%
Being seriously distracted: something outside the car	78%
Doing other things: using a mobile phone in the hand	78%
Speeding: driving significantly above the limit in built up areas	53%
Doing other things: eating or drinking while driving	53%
Speeding: driving significantly above the limit on motorways	46%

Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

Drivers do acknowledge their own unsafe behaviours. In the main, though, these are regarded as less serious transgressions – not wearing a seat belt, failing to indicate when turning and various distractions. There are some exceptions, where drivers acknowledge that they do occasionally behave in ways that their ‘hierarchy of seriousness’ defines as particularly unsafe. These exceptions are shown below in (grey) with the numbers of people who regard each as ‘very serious’ shown in (orange).

Exceptions



Vehicle speeds in Britain: 2006

The level of cars exceeding the speed limit varies considerably between road types:

- on motorways, 54% of cars travel over the speed limit
- on 60 mph single carriage roads, 11% of cars travel over the speed limit
- on 40 mph roads in built up areas, 28% of cars travel over the speed limit
- on 30 mph roads in built up areas, 49% of cars travel over the speed limit

In built-up areas, the level of cars exceeding the speed limit is going down on 30 mph roads and up on 40 mph roads.

Source: Department for Transport, April 2007

The numbers who admit to an unsafe ‘behaviour’ are, generally, in inverse proportion to the seriousness with which it is viewed. In very broad terms, there are two categories: the top four, which are regarded as very serious by the vast majority and relatively few drivers admit to; and the bottom two, which are viewed as being somewhat less serious and half of all drivers admit to.

‘Speeding in built-up areas’ is interesting in that it has characteristics from both categories: whilst it is regarded as very serious by the majority, half of all drivers admit to it.

As this suggests, speeding is seen somewhat differently to other unsafe behaviours by Britain’s motorists.

Speeding is the most common unsafe behaviour, with around half of all drivers admitting they sometimes speed. It is also by far the most common motoring offence, with around one in every six (16%) of motorists in this year’s research having been convicted of a speeding offence in the last 5 years¹². Drivers know it is dangerous and are aware few people are taught how to drive or react at speed – yet they still speed.

¹² The next highest convictions are for going through a red light and driving without insurance, both at 1% of all drivers.

‘You’re looking for speed cameras, you’re looking at where you go and you’ve got all these things, plus you’ve got a couple of kids in the back and your partner is nagging as well.’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

Maybe because it is so familiar, they have lost sight of why it is so dangerous. They may not need telling that ‘driving at an inappropriate speed’ is amongst the most dangerous driving behaviours – but they probably do need reminding.

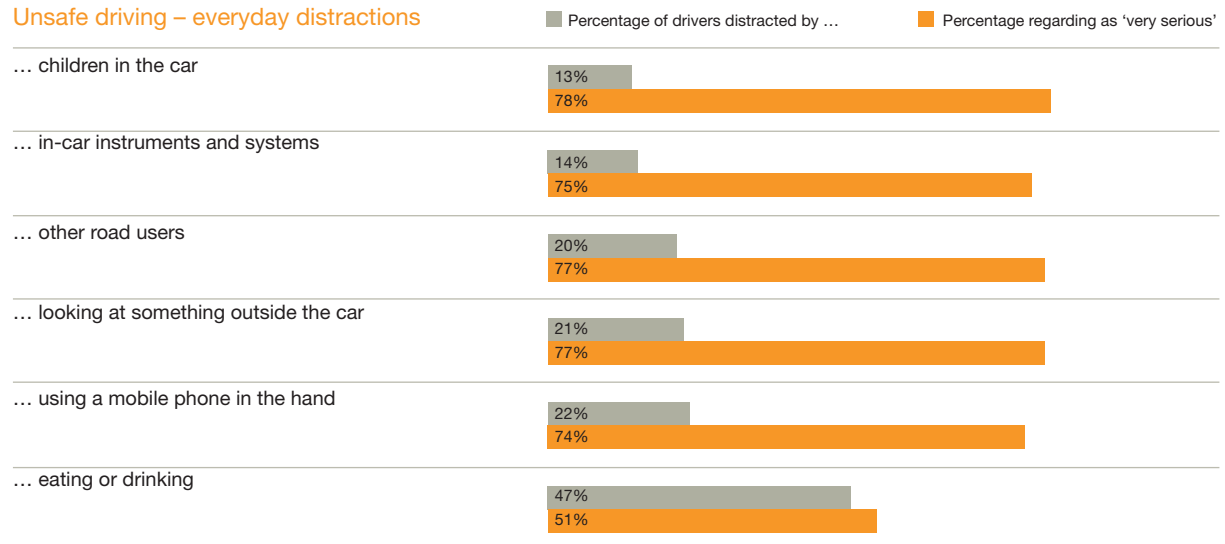
3.5 Familiar dangers

The list of unsafe behaviours drivers admit to is very striking.

Not just because of how many there are, but that most are the kind of things we all do in our cars every day. The list confirms what we instinctively sense – that, along with speeding, the most common unsafe driving behaviours are the everyday ways in which we become distracted whilst driving.

Motorists do know how dangerous these everyday distractions are by how seriously they regard them. But their behaviour belies that and the percentages – particularly when related back to Britain’s 33 million motorists – soon start to add up to very large numbers of people being distracted whilst driving every day.

Unsafe driving – everyday distractions



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

These distractions have little to do with the actual act of driving but are about everything else that is going on at the same time. Some are outside the car however, most distractions are inside the vehicle and are an integral and very familiar part of what really goes on in cars every day – conversations, equipment, children, eating and so on. But it is the fact that they do impact on driving yet are so familiar that makes these everyday distractions genuinely dangerous.

‘You’re doing the same thing and suddenly think, “Am I paying as much attention as I would do if it was a journey I didn’t know?” That worries me, that sometimes I’m not paying full attention.’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007



This year’s research asked drivers who said they were sometimes distracted by equipment what they were distracted by. The most common distraction for motorists was found to be radio/CD controls (82%) followed by heating/air-conditioning controls (44%).

The very familiarity of these distractions erodes the driver’s sense of danger and thereby increases the risk. Generally, people’s sense of safety and security tend to be highest – and conversely their sense of danger and risk lowest – in places that are most comfortably familiar.

The same sense of ‘familiar dangers’ comes through in the way motorists admit to driving with varying levels of regard to safety in different situations. They have more regard to safety when driving in an area or car that is unfamiliar; when they have children/ teens or friends as passengers; when driving on longer journeys, weekend breaks and overseas holidays; and on school runs. They have less regard driving in an area that is familiar or when they are in a hurry.

This is important. It confirms we know we drive with less or more regard to safety in certain situations.

RAC commentary: personal responsibility

It is clear motorists do not connect the two things they say most strongly as drivers.

That the issue of most concern to them is safety, primarily the behaviour of ‘other drivers’.

And that they are all good drivers.

Yet, since we are all ‘other drivers’ to everyone else, it is difficult to see how these fit together.

But they do – and that is the key. My safety depends on your driving – and vice versa. In other words, my safety as a driver depends on both how safe my driving is and how safely everyone else around me drives.

But we can only be responsible for our own driving and if we each take responsibility for our own safety whilst driving, we not only make ourselves safer but, in doing so, we make everyone else around us safer.

The problem is that we look at it precisely the other way round. Far from taking responsibility for our own safety whilst driving, we instead blame ‘other drivers’. By doing so we hand over responsibility for our own safety to the very people whose behaviour we are most concerned about.

This takes us to the heart of the matter. What comes through in this year's research is an over-arching lack of personal responsibility in the way drivers think about and behave with regard to their own safety whilst driving. This is rooted in the fundamental, almost moral differentiation that Britain's motorists make between their own unsafe driving behaviours and those of 'other drivers'.

Differentiating unsafe behaviours

A clear distinction between ...



Drivers differentiate between unsafe behaviours that are deliberate and those that are unintended.

Deliberate unsafe behaviours are seen as deeply irresponsible and it is this that drives the fears motorists have about the behaviour of 'other drivers'. By contrast, unsafe behaviours that are unintended are viewed as 'only human' and, therefore, forgivable. The logic here is very clear – we can continue to see ourselves as safe drivers by differentiating our own unsafe behaviours and describing them as unintended.

The problem with this logic is it legitimises 'my' unsafe driving, whilst condemning the unsafe behaviour of 'other drivers'. This sits very comfortably with our self-perceptions of being good, safe and responsible drivers. But there is no such thing as a 'safe' driver – for the very simple reason that safe driving is not about drivers, but behaviours.

In other words, you can be a good driver, but still drive unsafely¹³.

Whilst drivers say that unsafe driving behaviours should be taken very seriously, this neither gets them to think nor behave more safely. As it suggests, there is a major disconnect here: drivers are simply not joining the dots between (i) their own behaviour, (ii) why something is unsafe (or illegal) and (iii) the potential consequences.

This year's research gives an overwhelming sense of drivers being 'cocooned' in their cars. Drivers are disconnected from the real world outside the immediate surroundings of their car for a variety of reasons e.g.:

- the lack of physical feedback from the road/ outside environment unlike, say, on a bike;
- the familiarity of the immediate environment and their sense of being – literally – in a comfort zone.

¹³ This explains why the logic does not work for speeding. Speeding is a 'deliberate' unsafe act that around half of all drivers admit to. Applying the same logic here would be tantamount to admitting they are not safe drivers after all.

The result is that time, familiarity and nothing untoward happening erodes our sense of the inherent risks in 'travelling at speed in a metal and glass eggshell' and, with it, the need to be alert to danger.

So we get comfortable, drive faster and allow ourselves to become distracted and to make mistakes – all the while telling ourselves we are safe drivers and the problem, the thing to really worry about, is the behaviour of 'other drivers'.

In short, we build up a bogeyman to avoid taking personal responsibility for our own driving and safety.



‘A new category of driving is likely to emerge – driving more closely together at a higher speed. Driver training will need to change to reflect this as at present people aren’t really taught how to do it and aggression often results.’

Meredydd Hughes: Chief Constable, South Yorkshire Police

Chapter 4

Improving driving safety

What drivers think about possible actions to improve safety.

‘We need to get motorists to understand that there is a better way to behave.’

Christopher Macgowan: Chief Executive, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders

‘It is ordinary people that make the difference. It is now seen as hugely unacceptable to drink and drive. Since 1987, road casualty figures due to drink driving have dropped dramatically. There was no change in the law or penalty or police detection – instead, there was cultural change.’

Peter Bottomley MP

4.1 A range of possible actions

It is very clear that motorists need to take more responsibility for their own safety whilst driving.

This year’s RAC Report on Motoring looked at what motorists themselves believe would get drivers to think and behave more safely whilst driving in three broad areas:

- improve driver safety;
- introduce new safety initiatives;
- tougher policies on driving and safety.

Before turning to their views on possible actions in each of these areas, it is worth setting out why it is so important to listen to what Britain’s motorists have to say. There are two key reasons for doing so.

Firstly, any potential solutions need to be acceptable to all road users. If they are not supported, they risk being unsuccessful and undermining the overall goal. Secondly, it is essential to listen to what drivers say for the very fundamental – and obvious – reason that driving can only be safer when drivers think and behave safer.

4.2 Improve driver safety: (i) preparing young drivers

The realities of driving safety amongst young people are shockingly evident in one statistic – a third of all car drivers killed or seriously injured and nearly two-thirds (63%) of all car passengers are under 25 years old¹⁴.

Behind this headline statistic, the facts are equally horrific. Young drivers, especially those under 20 years old, are nearly 12 times more likely than those aged 35-65 years to have caused a fatal accident than to have been innocently involved in one. Seatbelt wearing rates are very low among young drivers with only 60% of those killed wearing a seatbelt. Frighteningly, the younger the passenger, the less likely they are to be wearing a seatbelt in fatal accidents – in the rear seat only 11% of male teenage car passengers wear a seatbelt at night¹⁵.

¹⁴ Road Casualties Great Britain 2005, Department for Transport, September 2006

¹⁵ Fatal Vehicle-occupant Collisions: An In-depth Study. Road Safety Research Report No. 75, Department for Transport, February 2007

‘We need to encourage a greater understanding of road use and road risk from primary school onwards. Learning to drive should form part of secondary education where it’s important to teach people the right attitudes and skills, 5-6 years before they start driving.

‘There seems to be an attitude of “I pass my test and then I learn to drive”. It is important to understand what young drivers are thinking otherwise we will never really change their behaviour and there needs to be better provision for young drivers to encourage them to drive safely.’

Rob Gifford: Executive Director,
Parliamentary Advisory Council for
Transport Safety

Young people, especially boys, cannot wait to start driving. Passing the test is a modern rite of passage – much more so now that the majority (54%) of 17-24 year old drivers live at home and 4 out of 5 (83%) get their own car. Yet even they see the need to be better prepared before they are allowed to drive. Their top three priorities are:

- more about ‘safe driving’ at school (58%)
- more emphasis on ‘teaching to drive safely’ (37%)
- better preparation for ‘modern driving’ (30%).

Once they pass the test, though, young people are generally very confident in their driving abilities. For many, getting a licence is confirmation of their status as a good driver – two out of three (64%) say they have total confidence in their driving ability. In the focus groups, however, this confidence is widely acknowledged as an over-confidence that can lead to silly and dangerous behaviours.

Whilst the statistics and, indeed, they themselves testify to the dangerous driving habits of many young people, it would be wrong to suggest this is born out of any lack of competence or knowledge. Rather, it is the lethal combination of over-confidence, lack of real experience and not being properly prepared for all the realities of modern driving.

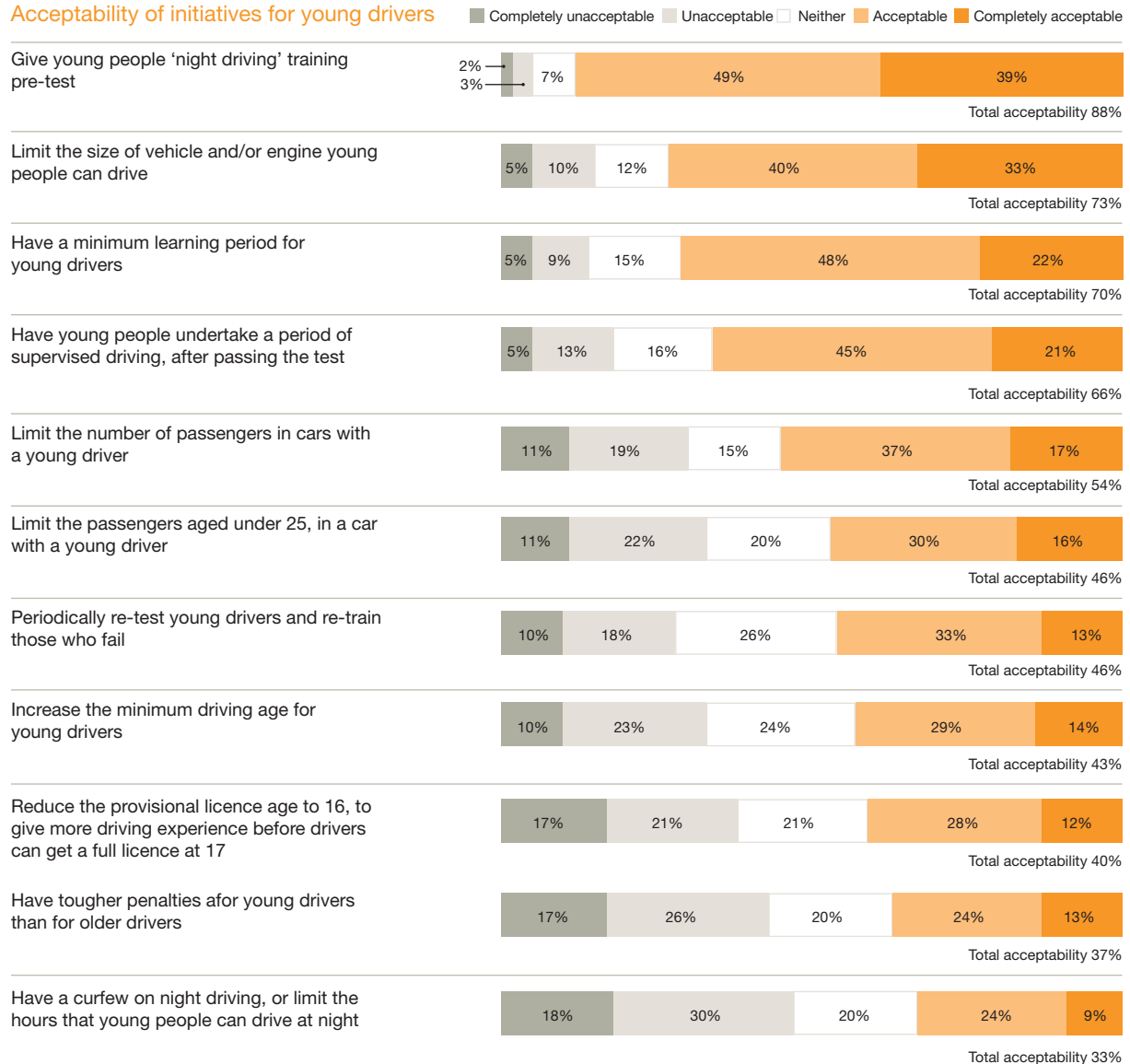
The basic issue is that young people see learning to drive as something to be got through as quickly as possible – it is the only route to passing the test, getting a licence and starting to drive properly.

Britain’s motorists see this and it bothers them greatly. They see the need for something more to be done and the strength of their concern is evident in the high level of acceptability amongst all drivers for initiatives to improve the driving skills and safety of young people.

Motorists are more interested in helping young people improve their driving skills than restricting their driving freedoms, or increasing punishments. They would, for example, like to see training on ‘night driving’ (88%), a minimum learning period (70%) and a period of supervised driving after passing the test (66%). On the other hand, higher penalties for young drivers (37%) and imposing a curfew on night driving (33%) are viewed as unacceptable.

The over-riding message is that motorists want and would accept a great deal more being done to prepare young people for driving and to help them drive safely.

Acceptability of initiatives for young drivers



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

4.3 Improve driver safety: (ii) lifelong learning

The realities of driving today are very different to what they were back in the 1980s or earlier, when most (62%) of the people driving on Britain's roads in 2007 passed the test.

Today, people drive cars that are infinitely more powerful and complex and kitted out with more equipment and features than they could ever have imagined back then. Similarly, we now drive in traffic conditions that are a lot more demanding than even a decade ago. And the future looks like more of the same: more cars, traffic, laws and potential risk.

‘We need to look at how learner drivers are trained to drive linked to the lifelong learning agenda. There are many opportunities once people have passed their test to interact in a positive and supportive way at key stages in their driving careers.’

Trevor Wedge, Chief Driving Examiner,
Driving Standards Agency



¹⁶ Older drivers do not see themselves as unsafe, but as experienced, knowledgeable and tolerant. Whilst not particularly happy with the idea of having regular medical checks to ensure they are safe to drive, 70% still say it would be acceptable.

Every one of these changes has major implications for the skills, knowledge and attitude people need to be good, safe drivers.

There is an emergent consensus amongst the authorities on the need to adopt a ‘lifelong learning’ approach to driving to ensure motorists are able to drive safely throughout their life. Almost certainly, this will involve a combination of support and compulsion, with activity to help drivers update their knowledge and skills on a continuous basis, backed up with new mechanisms and even legislation.

One of the best indicators of the need for a different approach is the response of drivers themselves when asked whether they think they have the skills and knowledge they need for driving today. Worryingly, one in every three (29%) people driving on Britain’s roads today believe they would fail the driving test if they had to re-take it again tomorrow, the top three reasons being the theory test (50%), knowledge of the Highway Code (27%) and speeding (14%). Perhaps even more worryingly, confidence in re-passing the test declines with age.

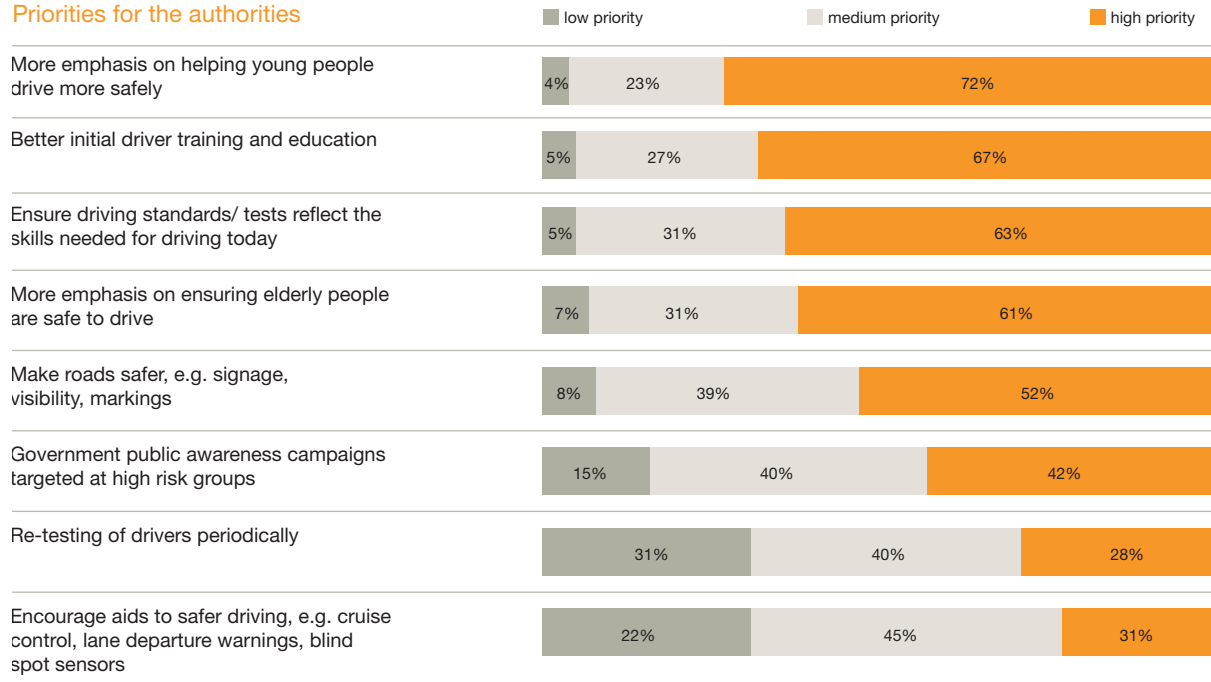
There have been various suggestions about possible extensions to legislation that might play a role in ensuring people drive safely throughout their lives. Three of the most commonly-suggested were explored in the research to gauge their acceptability to drivers:

- ‘make all drivers re-take the driving test periodically, with compulsory re-training for those that fail’. This idea was well received, with more drivers finding it acceptable (42%) than unacceptable (34%);
- ‘make drivers re-take the driving test at the age of 65 – and periodically thereafter’. Again, this was well-supported, with 51% of all motorists agreeing this would be acceptable;
- ‘have regular medical checks for elderly people¹⁶ – that they need to pass to show their fitness to drive’. This idea was strongly supported, with 79% of all motorists agreeing such checks would be acceptable.

All this builds the case for a much more prominent and integrated system of ‘lifelong learning’ to ensure that motorists are able to drive safely throughout their life.

To assess the strength of public support for the ‘lifelong learning’ approach to driving, the research asked motorists what they thought should be the priorities for authorities in seeking to improve safety.

Priorities for the authorities



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

Motorists' top four priorities – young people, better preparation, testing for today and ensuring older drivers are safe – can form the core of a powerful new initiative to improve driving safety.

4.4 Introduce new safety initiatives

There are a great many things that could be done to improve safety.

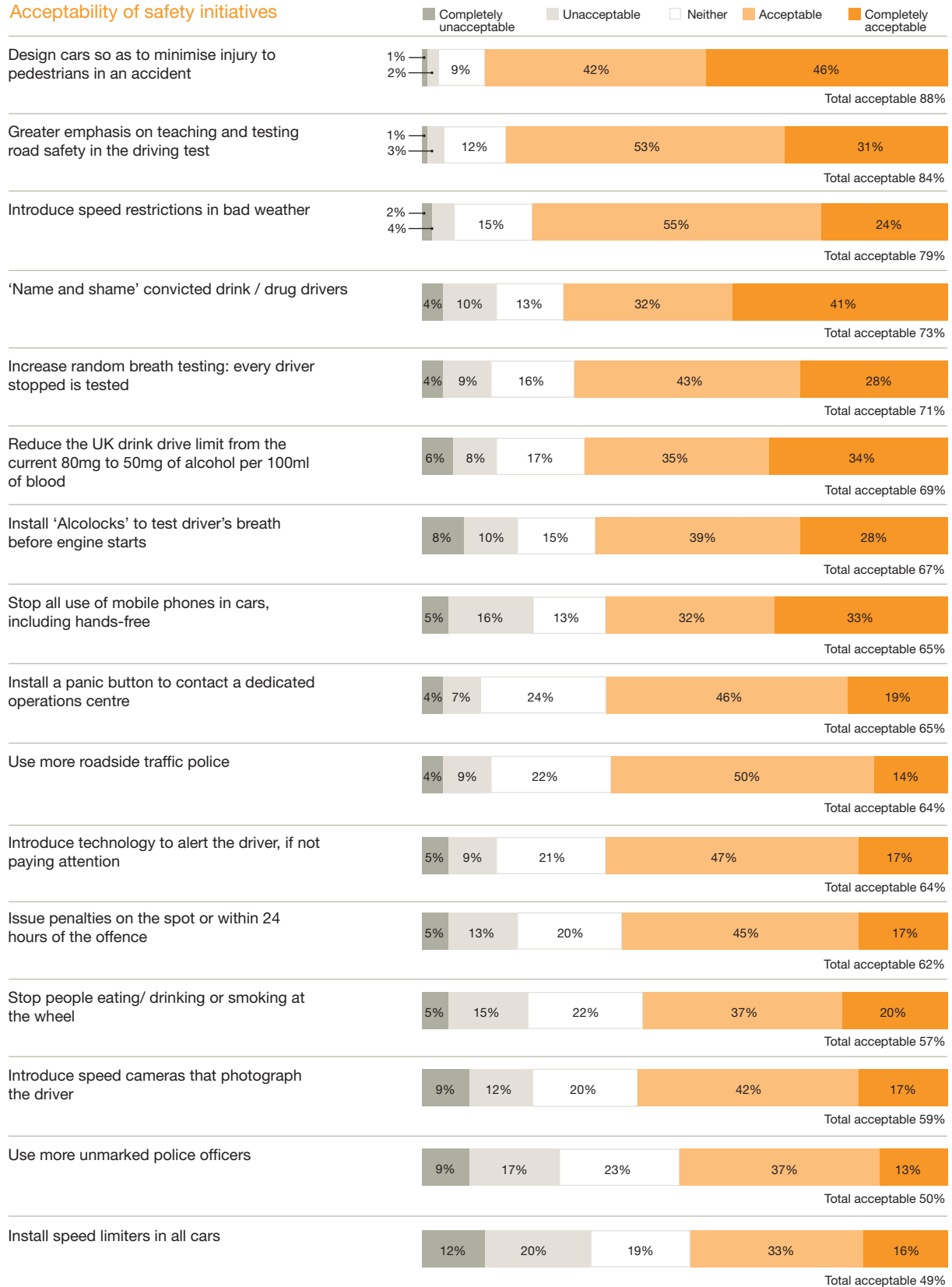
This year's RAC Report on Motoring has sought to understand which of these motorists believe would be most effective in getting them to think and behave more safely whilst driving.

A total of 20 possible new safety initiatives were proposed. For each one, motorists were asked to say, on a scale from 1 to 5, how acceptable they would be.

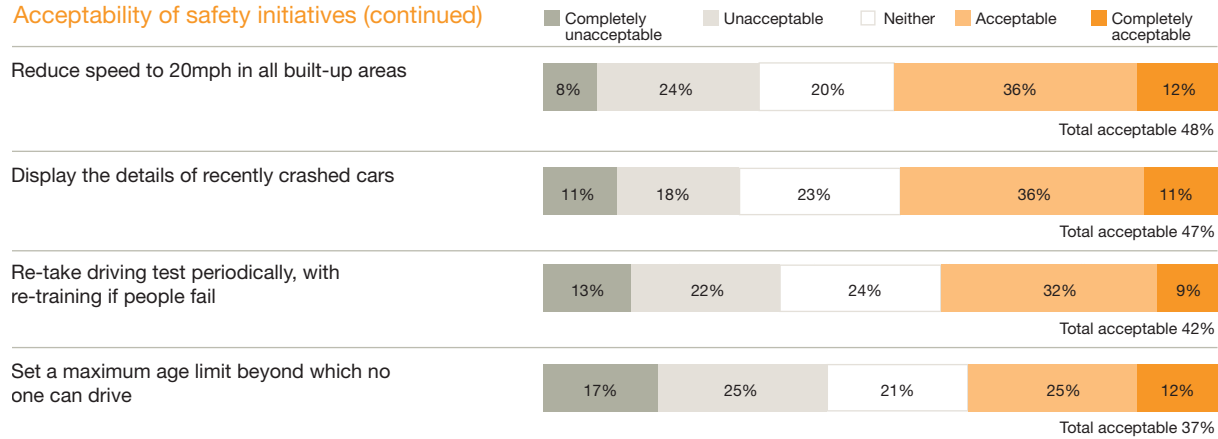
'I'm keen that we should move away from reliance on technology. I am cynical about its impact and the ability to limit behaviour.'

Meredydd Hughes: Chief Constable, South Yorkshire Police

Acceptability of safety initiatives



Acceptability of safety initiatives (continued)



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

‘Drink driving still needs to be addressed. I think we should reduce the drink drive limit to make it in line with other EU countries. I personally believe there should also be a ‘two strikes and you’re out’ policy for drink driving. Alcolocks are worth using for certain groups of people. We should make use of whatever technology is available to us.’

John Leech MP

A strong impression of common sense, reasonableness and decency comes through in these responses that is quite different to the charges of selfish, narrow-mindedness often made against motorists. Here, for example, the most acceptable initiative is to ‘design cars to minimise injury to pedestrians’.

A similar sense of reasonableness comes through in the strong support amongst drivers for ‘greater emphasis on teaching and testing safety’. It comes through most strongly, however, in their views on possible initiatives to tackle drink-driving. Here, with between two-thirds and three-quarters of all drivers supporting each initiative, motorists are saying ‘enough is enough’.

The essential message is that drivers will accept lowering the drink-drive limit, random breath-tests, naming and shaming and alcolocks – so long as these are effective in finally solving the problem of drink-driving.

The big exception, unsurprisingly, is speeding.

Although ‘speed restrictions in bad weather’ are supported, speed cameras, speed limiters and, particularly, a reduced limit of 20 mph in built-up areas are not. Again, this highlights the deep schizophrenia in drivers’ attitudes towards speeding – they say it is serious, they know it is dangerous but the majority do it. Perhaps it is not surprising that their responses are a bit mixed.

The overriding message from their responses to possible new initiatives is that there is a very high level of support amongst motorists for action to improve driving safety. As well as being highly consistent with the rest of this year’s research, this suggests a deep-rooted willingness amongst motorists to accept (limited) constraints in return for an all-round improvement in their safety whilst driving.

‘Speed is a big issue – there is little understanding of the seriousness of breaking the speed limit. We need to reduce the speed limit to 20 miles an hour in built up areas.

‘We also need to widen the debate on speed cameras. They do save lives but they can be frustrating for motorists. It would be far better to measure an average speed. The more basic cameras should only be used at real accident black spots.’

John Leech MP

Last year’s RAC Report on Motoring found evidence that motorists were ‘willing to do a deal on road pricing’ and there is something similar here. The difference is that last year, motorists were thinking in terms of a ‘deal’ – you give us this, we will accept that. In 2007, whilst there is still an underlying trade-off, it is much more substantive and far-reaching – motorists are looking for a culture change around driving safety.

4.5 Harder policies?

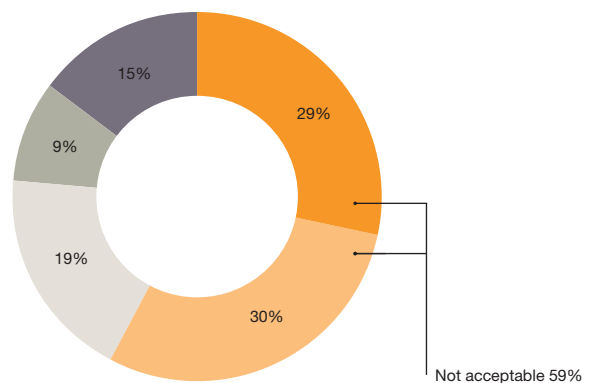
The need for a change in culture around driving safety comes through strongly in the targets drivers believe should be set to reduce road deaths and their support for major changes in order to achieve this.

A primary issue for this year’s Report was whether motorists would like to see tougher policies to improve driving safety. The issue was therefore explored by research at three levels.

Firstly, drivers were told there were 3,201 road deaths in Britain during 2005 and asked which of a number of statements most reflected how they felt about this. From their responses, it is apparent that a majority of Britain’s motorists (59%) would support a more ambitious national target that aims for a sizeable reduction in road deaths.

Road death targets

- It is not an acceptable level of fatalities – the only acceptable level of fatalities is zero
- It is not an acceptable level of fatalities – we need to aim to cut fatalities by at least a half
- It is not realistic to expect a big reduction in fatalities – though we might aim to reduce fatalities by 10%
- It is probably at the level society would accept – given the way we drive and use the roads today
- It is perhaps surprising that it is not higher – given the way we drive and use the roads today



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)

¹⁷ Sweden’s approach is called Vision Zero and aims to have no road deaths. All the agencies involved (police, road engineers, psychologists) coordinate their actions systematically, since a change or decision by one will impact on the way in which each of the others has to consider safety.

Secondly, drivers were asked how acceptable they thought a policy of ‘zero fatalities’, similar to the system in Sweden¹⁷, would be in this country. Again, a majority of Britain’s motorists (56%) says that, in principle, they would support a policy of ‘zero fatalities’, along the lines of the Swedish model.

‘It’s never going to be achievable is it? Even if it’s not down to drink-driving, someone’s going to get killed, just a lapse of concentration for a minute. But it would be nice to try. It’s something to work towards isn’t it? Even though it seems unrealistic, it seems something to work for.’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

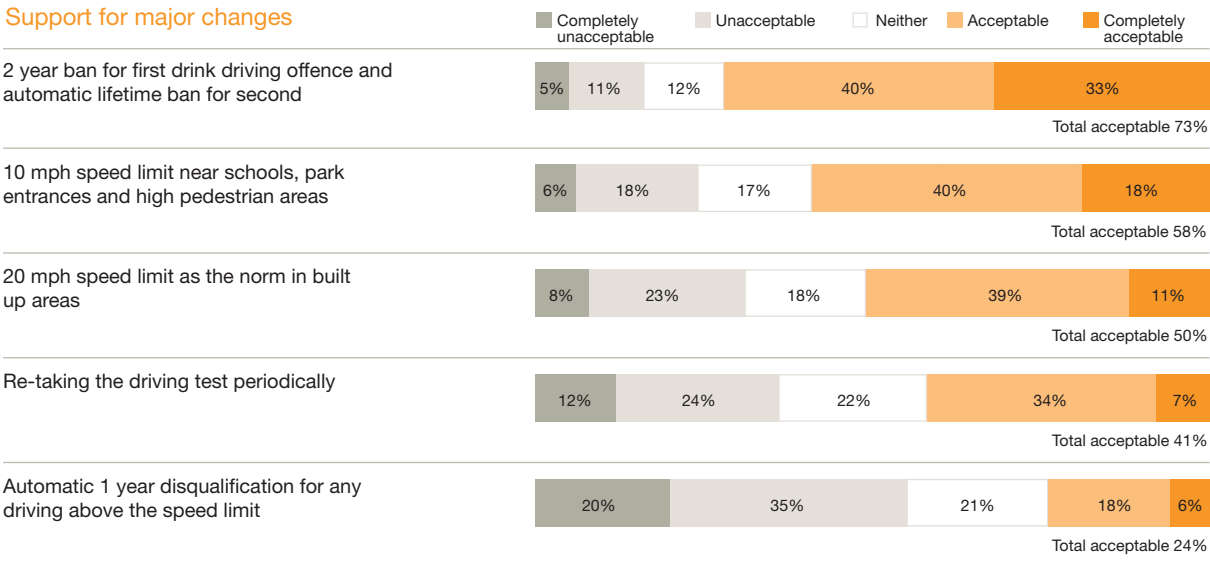
Their support, however, is strongly tempered by scepticism about how realistic such a policy would be.

Finally, drivers were asked whether they thought various major changes that might be made to reduce road deaths would be acceptable to society in this country.

What is of real interest here is the belief amongst motorists that society would accept major changes to achieve a step change in reducing road deaths.

This gives a strong platform to achieve the desired culture change on driving safety.

Support for major changes



Base: all respondents (n=2,029)



‘Harder policy methods are worth testing. We should not rest easy on drink-driving either. We need to get to the stage where speeding is regarded as unacceptable as drink-driving.’

Christopher Macgowan: Chief Executive,
Society of Motor Manufacturers and
Traders

Appropriate penalties

The research for this year’s RAC Report on Motoring also looked at what drivers see as appropriate penalties and actions for specific driving offences.

The clear message is that, overall, drivers support tough penalties for the most serious behaviours:

- life bans or imprisonment: certainly for causing a death, but also to be considered for causing serious injury and driving under the influence of illegal drugs;
- loss of licence or driving bans: for driving under the influence of drugs and above the legal alcohol limit, driving without a licence/insurance, causing serious injury and road rage.

For less serious behaviours, fines and points are seen as appropriate courses of action.

Given motorists’ somewhat schizophrenic attitudes to speeding, it is perhaps not surprising that speeding – both in built up areas and on motorways – is seen as requiring less punitive action:

‘It boils down to money or points. If you take people off the roads, they’re going to start thinking about it.’

‘They should take the car off you if you lose your licence – so people can’t drive.’

‘People who are driving without a licence are so much more dangerous than speeding.’

– RAC Report on Motoring focus group, March 2007

Overall, the message from Britain’s motorists is that they do support tough penalties for serious unsafe driving behaviours – particularly for drugs and drink driving, and for causing death or serious injury.

‘We need measures to tackle the serious offender but also to remind the rest of us how we should behave.’

Rob Gifford: Executive Director,
Parliamentary Advisory Council for
Transport Safety



‘I think everybody has a responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others, you should always be thinking not just of yourself but of others on the roads as well, so it’s attitude at the end of the day again isn’t it?’

RAC Report on Motoring focus group 2007

Chapter 5

Conclusions

How to get drivers to think and behave more safely.

5.1 A mandate to change the culture of driving

Motorists have given a very clear and very strong mandate for action to improve driving safety.

This comes from two, quite different places:

- the real concerns that motorists have about 'other drivers';
- their view that the present level of road deaths and injuries needs to be reduced.

Whilst it is important to understand the concerns motorists have, a mandate that comes out of fear can only take us so far. Although it justifies action to tackle the behaviour of 'other drivers', it does nothing to make individuals confront their own unsafe behaviours or to take responsibility for their own safety whilst driving.

By contrast, the view that the present level of road deaths and injuries is unacceptable can take us a long way. Essentially, it gives a mandate for action that allows an individual's unsafe driving behaviours to be legitimately challenged. As such, it leads directly to the core issue of personal responsibility.

This is not, however, a blank cheque to 'do whatever it takes'. Indeed, motorists would expect any actions to improve driving safety to be weighed in terms of their likely benefits and their impact on other aspects of motoring – overcrowded roads, cost of motoring and so on.

In thinking about what can be done to improve driving safety, it is important to consider three key factors:

- how safe cars are
- what the authorities can do
- how people drive

Starting with cars, the major gains in improved driving safety have already been had. They are now much safer than they used to be, to the point that questions are starting to be asked about the risks of making cars too safe for drivers.

RAC Conclusion I

The mandate from Britain's motorists is for a long-term strategy to change the culture of driving.

Similarly, 'the authorities' have done a good job in helping make Britain's roads safer through a combination of legislation, safer roads, speed limits, policing, penalties and enforcement, publicity campaigns and so on. Yet, there will always be more the authorities could do to improve driving safety. That is because they are in a unique position to create strategy, co-ordinate the delivery of policy and lead on messaging and it is important they continue to leverage this position.

We then look at drivers. Here, it is enormously striking to hear Britain's motorists say that drivers are no better, probably worse, than they used to be. This leads to a conclusion that the primary focus of future strategy to improve driving safety must be on drivers themselves.

5.2 Changing the culture: 'lifelong learning'

Increasingly, a growing and ageing¹⁸ population is driving ever more sophisticated, technologically complex and powerful cars on ever more crowded roads. For most drivers, this represents a very different driving environment to the one in which they first learnt to drive and passed their test.

A major new 'lifelong learning' agenda has now emerged to do with ensuring people have the knowledge, skills, capability and outlook they need to drive modern cars safely in today's environment. This agenda must be at the very centre of any coherent, long-term strategy to improve driver safety – for the very simple reason that it is absolutely key to changing the culture of driving.

Overall, we need to get to a situation where driving is regarded as a lifetime skill, so that learning to drive safely is seen as something we continue to do throughout our lives, not just a one-off event to pass the test. In this, RAC wholeheartedly endorses the view that 'the time has come to reform fundamentally the way that people learn to drive'¹⁹. We would suggest linking this reform to a review of the Driving Test's fitness for purpose as a means to (a) test people's preparedness for modern driving and (b) support a system of learning throughout life²⁰.

Broadly, we see three distinct aspects to the 'lifelong learning' agenda:

- preparing young people for the realities of 'modern driving' and ensuring they drive safely;
- enabling all drivers to continuously update the knowledge and skills they need to drive safely;
- ensuring that the growing number of ageing drivers is both fit to drive and able to drive safely.

Motorists have got it absolutely right in their views that the current levels of deaths and serious injuries amongst our young people is not acceptable and that we need to do more to help them drive safely. Through BSM, we have a great deal of experience in teaching young people to drive and we believe there is much scope to improve what is done to help them drive safely. Our experience says that what they need to help them

¹⁸ We are not that far off a situation where most motorists passed their test 30 or 40 years ago and have had no training in driving skills, road knowledge, use of on-board technologies, etc. ever since.

¹⁹ 'Second Review of the Government's Road Safety Strategy', Department for Transport, February 2007. The Review looks at progress against the 2010 targets in the context of the current strategy as set out in 'Tomorrow's roads – safer for everyone'. It also identifies 'priority areas for attention' in the run-up to establishing new post-2010 targets.

²⁰ The practical driving test was introduced in 1935, though few changes were made until the 1990s. In recent years, the length of the test has been extended and new manoeuvres such as reverse parking, a separate Theory Test and the Hazard Perception Test have all been introduced. Pass Plus, a new scheme offering further training for newly-qualified drivers, was introduced in 1995.

RAC Conclusion II

A major new initiative is needed to help young people be safer drivers, starting in schools and continuing for up to two years after passing their test. Any post-test training must be practically-based, rather than theoretical.

Public funds should be available in the system to support learning. Safe driving is both a skills and a safety issue and society has a legitimate public interest in developing safer drivers.

A significant proportion of revenues from penalties for road traffic offences should go automatically into this system and be used to fund safe driving initiatives for all drivers, i.e. not just offenders.

The likely impact of 'regular medical tests' for older drivers needs to be evaluated as the basis for deciding whether such tests should be introduced.

drive safely is quite different to what they need to pass the test. Not least, this is because the help needs to cover the crucial post-test period when young people tend to be particularly vulnerable – and, often, over-confident – with sometimes horrendous consequences.

Overall, though, what is needed is a more prominent, rounded and integrated system to ensure Britain's motorists have access to the learning they need to drive safely throughout their lives. Over and above what the system should comprise, there are two basic questions. To what extent should the system be publicly-funded?²¹ And where – and to what degree – should compulsion be built in to make sure that people on the roads have the knowledge, skills, etc. they need to drive safely?

In arguing the central importance of the 'lifelong learning' agenda in getting drivers to think and behave more safely, we are hugely encouraged by the extent to which Britain's motorists confirm that this agenda is the priority for the authorities.

5.3 Changing the culture: personal responsibility

This Report is critical of the way motorists' concerns about the behaviour of 'other drivers' so dominate their attitudes towards driving safety that they neglect to take personal responsibility for their own safety.

There are well-founded reasons such as drink-driving, speeding and lack of insurance to be concerned about the behaviour of other drivers. However, these concerns are massively out of kilter – there is a huge difference between the possibility of something happening and its probability. The gap is then filled by fear, so drivers worry about other drivers' behaviour and ignore the risks that are inherent in their own.

Driving is a complex activity that requires constant low-level judgements and a state of continuous active alertness. The process of driving safely relies on the driver being able to see what is happening, interpret this and then action near-instant decisions. The probability of an accident increases when, for some reason, the driver is not able to do so. Crucially, however, not being able to do this does not mean an accident will happen – it merely increases the possibility. For that, something else is needed to crystallise the inherent unsafeness of the behaviour as an accident. Most accidents are caused by the combination of a driver's unsafe behaviour and 'something else' happening – that 'something else' is the spark that triggers the explosion which was waiting to happen.

The only thing that stops 'something else' happening is luck and drivers mis-read being lucky as being safe. Instead of concentrating on their own unsafe driving behaviours, Britain's motorists worry about how 'other drivers' behave. In doing so, they are worrying about the wrong thing – the 'responsible person' in nearly all car accidents is a driver. The raw statistics make this point even more starkly: two-thirds of all the accidents on Britain's roads involve driver error and half are caused by relatively minor mistakes by the driver such as failing to 'look properly' or 'judge other motorists' speed/ path'²².

²¹ A six month pilot is currently nearing completion in Scotland that has involved public funds being used to pay up to 90% of the cost of Pass Plus training to help young drivers who have recently passed the test drive more safely.

²² Source: Department for Transport research into 'Contributory factors to road accidents' (David Robinson and Richard Campbell, Transport Statistics: Road Safety).

RAC Conclusion III

Getting drivers to take personal responsibility is the single most important challenge in improving driving and safety: this should be the focus of the new, long-term strategy.

The nature of our business means RAC is in a strong position to contribute, by helping the drivers we deal with to be more aware of the risk in their behaviour.

There is a need to better understand the basic question of what causes drivers to have accidents. A major study is needed that uses accidents and near misses²³ to define unsafe driver behaviours.

Such a study will generate the planning base for the strategy to be prioritised and targeted against unsafe driver behaviours on the basis of real-world risks.

Longer term, the aim must be to use the revised STATS 19 system the system which collects information on injury accidents, to build an empirical data set, define comparative risks and target the driver behaviours that are most unsafe.

So, beyond simply causing drivers to not take personal responsibility, their fears about the behaviour of 'other drivers' are actually making them less safe. That is because, bluntly, accidents happen when we do not or cannot do what is needed at the moment 'something else' happens. It is not just what 'other drivers' do that causes accidents. Rather, it is the combination of their behaviour and the fact that we have allowed ourselves – through distractions, insufficient attention, familiarity etc – to get into a situation where, as the driver, we're not able to respond and do what is needed.

In short, we have abrogated responsibility for our own safety whilst driving.

At this point it becomes very clear that nearly all accidents are preventable. The everyday bad habits we regard as normal are the very thing that makes us vulnerable. Put differently, our everyday unsafe behaviours eventually cause accidents.

In terms of pure risk, we should be a lot more worried about an accident as a result of our own unsafe behaviours than any other cause.

And, as we need to constantly remind ourselves, we are all one of those 'other drivers' to everybody else.

5.4 Changing the culture: harder policies

Any strategy to change the culture and improve driving safety must be based on clear targets, actions and messaging.

The Swedish approach of 'zero fatalities' combines a clearly defined target with an unimpeachable stance. The strong support for such an approach found amongst British motorists confirms that any policy stance which argues 'the only acceptable level of fatalities is zero... everything should be directed towards this goal' is enormously powerful. This support, however, is tempered by a real sense that some level of accidents is inevitable.

Nevertheless, it is very clear that motorists believe a renewed focus is needed on reducing road deaths in this country and recognise the need for some stronger measures to be introduced. However, if they are to be accepted, any new measures must be designed to protect and/ or benefit motorists, not just to entrap or penalise – otherwise, they risk being counter-productive and feeding cynicism.

Amongst motorists, there is strong support for much tougher enforcement and penalties on drink- and drugs driving, driving without an MoT, insurance or road tax and for stronger penalties where driving causes a death or serious injury. Stronger enforcement and penalties are needed to tackle these areas as a priority. Not because they are where drivers' fears of others are at their strongest, but because they are unacceptable to society.

²³ Some of the most important recent work on driving safety has involved looking at 'near misses', e.g. the 'Assessment of the relative risk of engaging in potentially unsafe driving behaviours' by the US-based Foundation for Traffic Safety in 2006

RAC Conclusion IV

National targets should be unpacked into specific localised targets that reflect local concerns and priorities as the basis for local planning and action.

A renewed focus to reduce road deaths, injuries and unsafe incidents is needed as an urgent priority.

A tougher stance is needed and additional and/ or more severe measures should focus in five areas:

1. Drink-driving:

reduce blood alcohol limit to 50mg in line with Europe

general strengthening of penalties for convicted drink drivers, as follows:

- minimum two year ban for first drink-driving offence
 - permanent points on licence after disqualification
 - automatic banning for life after third offence
 - Alcolocks for convicted drink drivers
- introduce general policy of random breath testing

2. Drugs-driving:

- urgent introduction of robust drug-testing devices
- penalty regime in line with that for drink-driving
- more targeted publicity campaigns on drug driving
- more specific and co-ordinated research on drug driving
- greater clarity around driving on legal drugs

3. Driving at inappropriate speeds in sensitive areas:

- more use of 'average' speed cameras
- step-change in usage of non-punitive 'vehicle-activated' signs on roads
- general reduction to 20 mph limit in most sensitive areas in consultation with local communities

4. Driving without licence, MoT or road tax:

- more powers to stop and check at random
- greater powers to seize a vehicle

5. Causing death or serious injury:

- greater use of long-term bans, including lifetime bans

The specific issues – speed, drinking, drugs, fatalities, etc. – around driving safety vary considerably across the country and the idea of a single, unified national target sits uncomfortably with this.

It is time to consider local targets which will enable particular local 'hotspots' – offences, places, groups, etc. – to be tackled effectively to get drivers to think and behave more safely. It will also provide the basis for planning and action around local priorities, which reflect the different roles and contributions of the relevant agencies.

In this way, a stance of 'zero tolerance' towards unacceptable driving behaviours can be interpreted and delivered locally.

5.5 Changing the culture: messaging around driving safely

In the context of changing the culture of driving, the term 'road safety' is exceptionally unhelpful.

It does not engage drivers and does nothing to help create a culture of personal responsibility. The language we use to get across the message that drivers need to take responsibility for their own driving safety is absolutely crucial. We need to use clear, simple and real-world words ('crash'), to avoid promoting an abstract idea ('road safety') and to focus on tangible consequences ('deaths'). All this matters hugely: the terms in which we try to engage drivers about their unsafe behaviours are the key to changing them.

RAC Conclusion V

The imperative is to stop talking about 'road safety' in order to get drivers to think and behave more safely whilst driving.

Drivers need to be helped to understand the inherent risk in how they drive and persuaded of the need to take personal responsibility for their own driving safety.

Much of this is about relevant messaging: new language and ways to engage drivers are required.

A closer, faster connect between an offence, its rationale and the penalty is also necessary.

We need to get drivers to understand that the everyday bad habits they have come to regard as the norm have made them vulnerable and only luck has kept them safe.

Drivers need to be much more aware of the direct link between their behaviour and the risk of an accident, i.e. the connect between cause and effect²⁵. The focus should be on the dangers in the most everyday, human and banal behaviours and the inherent risks in drivers being distracted and disconnected.

The message has to be brought close to home in a very literal sense as well. The more messaging is seen to be about real local priorities, the more powerful – and relevant – it will be seen to be.

Efforts to improve driving safety need to be constantly reinforced. This is required at both national and local levels and through what happens in real-life, not just by means of promotional activity. For example, drivers who commit an offence should always be given the rationale for the offence, along with the penalty imposed on them. Similarly, wherever possible, the issuing of a local speeding ticket should be accompanied by relevant information about the level of risk and/ or the number of accidents, injuries and deaths each year on that particular stretch of road. There also needs to be a general effort to shorten the time lapsed between an offence taking place and the issuing of a penalty or notice – ideally, to under 24 hours.

In the final analysis, though, all messaging comes back to the mandate to reduce road deaths and the need for drivers to take responsibility for their own safety whilst driving.

These are what legitimise society to challenge the unsafe behaviours of motorists and, ultimately, what will bring about a culture where driving safely is the norm.

²⁵ The use of certain words and/ or particularly emotive situations can have a powerful effect in making this connect. BSM is working in partnership with LARSOA to understand the concerns and fears of young drivers.

Appendix:

About the research

Research methodology

'RAC Report on Motoring 2007. Driving Safely?' is based on a large-scale quantitative survey and focus group discussions conducted by Quadrangle on behalf of RAC.

For the survey, Quadrangle interviewed 2,029 British motorists (defined as currently having a valid driving licence and driving at least once a month) in person at their homes during February and March 2007.

The sample was nationally representative on age, gender and socio-economic groups. Certain regions were boosted to increase sample size. As such weighting factors have been applied to restore the overall sample to be nationally representative for each region.

Quadrangle also undertook seven focus groups, representing the following key motorist types:

- Young/ new drivers
- Elderly drivers
- Company car drivers
- Driving for work
- School run mums
- Offenders
- The 'Average' motorist

Two mini-groups were also held with pre-driving teens aged 15-16: one group of girls and one of boys.

Finally, it is worth adding that the title of this report is 'RAC Report on Motoring 2007: Driving Safely?'. Until 1999, the reports were called 'The Lex Report on Motoring' and from 2000 'RAC Report on Motoring'. Despite this change in name, consistent research methods have been used throughout.

Statistical reliability.

Any figure taken from a sample can never be taken as a precise indication of the actual figures for the total population being sampled. The figures shown are an estimate, within a small margin of error, of the actual figures. The error margin varies with the sample size – the larger the sample is, the lower the error will be. It also varies with the proportions answering so the error is lower for a 90/10 result than for a 50/50 result.

In order to illustrate the use of varying sample sizes and their effect on the statistical significance of results, the table below outlines the degree of statistical error broadly associated with different sample sizes from the car drivers' survey.

For example, from a sample of 2,000, if 50% answered in a particular way, we would be 95% confident that the true range is between 47% and 53%.

About the data tables

Some data sets may not add up to exactly 100%. This is due to two reasons:

- All data have been rounded either up or down, to the nearest whole per cent.
- There are a small percentage of 'Don't Know' responses – which in the normal fashion, have not been presented.

Sample size	Percentage error 90/10	result 50/50 result
2,000	+/-2	+/-3
1,000	+/-2	+/-3
800	+/-2	+/-3
600	+/-2	+/-4
400	+/-3	+/-5
200	+/-4	+/-7
100	+/-5	+/-10

Company Overview

RAC

RAC provides a comprehensive range of motoring and vehicle services for both consumers and businesses. These range from those learning to drive with BSM, people who enjoy peace of mind with RAC breakdown cover and to customers utilising HPI for vehicle history checks. RAC is part of Aviva, the world's fifth-largest insurance group and the biggest in the UK where it operates under the Norwich Union brand.

The wide range of motoring services provided by RAC includes:

RAC Rescue

RAC Rescue, our roadside assistance service, has around 7 million roadside assistance customers – 2.3 million individual members and 4.4 million corporate customers. Our breakdown assistance centres operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week and handle around four million calls a year which, at peak times, can mean two calls every second. RAC has more than 1600 patrols that attend more than 2.5 million breakdowns each year²⁶. RAC Rescue also includes our overseas development of roadside and related products and services, through RAC Europe. Through a wide network of contractors and partners across continental Europe RAC provides breakdown assistance to members when they're abroad.

BSM

BSM is the UK's largest driving school, with over 3,000 driving instructors. It is also one of the largest driving instructor training providers. BSM is fully committed to helping people become safer drivers, not just training them to pass their test. Every two minutes someone passes their driving test with BSM²⁷.

RAC Auto Windscreens

RAC Auto Windscreens provides complete automotive glazing repair and replacement service (windscreens, rear windows and side windows) through 143 fitting centres throughout the UK. Backed by a fleet of nearly 1000 fully equipped mobile fitting units, RAC Auto Windscreens provides a 24/7 national service for its private and corporate customers every year.

RAC Direct Insurance

RAC Direct Insurance uses its expert driving know how to help provide customers with a new way of looking after their motor insurance needs. When a customer calls for an insurance quote they are asked a series of simple questions about their driving habits, allowing RAC to offer further discounts and lower quotes. As well as providing motor insurance, RAC Direct Insurance also offers van, motorbike, home and travel insurance.

²⁶ Based on call-out data from 2006.

²⁷ Calculated using 2006 pass rates and standard test centre opening hours. Applies only to practical element of the driving test.

RAC Legal Services

RAC Legal Services provides expert advice and representation to customers involved in personal injury claims.

RAC Loans

Loans to £25,000 (typical 6.9% APR) are available for any purpose including buying a car, consolidation of other credit bills, home improvements, through to holidays. They are available to everyone, not just RAC members.

RAC Vehicle Checks and Inspections

RAC Vehicle Checks and Inspections help give customers peace of mind when buying a used car. The vehicle check will show whether the car has been stolen, written-off, has outstanding finance or previous plates, is at risk of being sold illegally, and that its number plate and chassis number correspond. RAC Vehicle Checks are powered by HPI. With RAC Inspections, qualified engineers will conduct up to 166 physical checks on the car to make sure it is mechanically and structurally sound.

HPI

HPI provides the most comprehensive check on a car's status – assessing whether a car has been stolen, written-off, clocked, has outstanding finance or previous plates, is at risk of being sold illegally, and that its number plate and chassis number correspond. It will also check whether the car's documents are genuine and give a current market valuation. Though predominantly used by the motor trade, increasingly private customers are also using this premium service.

Travel and traffic information

RAC provides a range of travel and traffic services including online route planners, in-car navigation, up-to-date traffic information via phone or the internet and help with travel documents.

Team RAC

As the longest established UK motoring organisation, RAC is proud and excited to be in its second year of sponsorship of a professional race team in this year's Dunlop MSA British Touring Car Championship (BTCC). This represents a return of RAC to its motoring roots. Our history with BTCC links back to the original governing body and classic events such as RAC British Grand Prix, the RAC Rally and RAC London to Brighton Run.

Team RAC is managed on behalf of RAC by West Surrey Racing (WSR), a leading motorsport engineering company with ten years experience running Touring Cars. Under the sponsorship deal we will be entering the ten race events in 2007 with two RAC branded BMW 320si E90 cars.

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