

But clearly, the speed of others on the road is also crucial in your decisions. And there is:
a wide range of behaviours for you to cope with.

Some drivers are constantly in a rush, and try not to slow for anything. They berate the incompetence of anyone in their way. Whereas others are habitually slow, and fail to see when it is safe to go more quickly. These drivers are convinced that anyone who passes them is reckless. And there are many others in between - thus the potential for abrasion as we all share the same roads.

Significantly, in nature's terms, humans are the only creature to harness a mechanical contrivance to go so fast. From the bicycle to the airplane, we regularly exceed our biological design speed.

And the benefits are stunning throughout the modern world. But the artificial power coupled with our still fragile bodies means that speed must be used with care.



Interestingly, surveys of driver pet hates show that people who go too slowly and obstruct traffic flow are a bigger annoyance than those who go too fast.

It is also true that:

taking speed in isolation is an increasingly common mistake.

So never forget that speed is just one of the things you control, and must fit in with everything else that is happening.

2.7.1.1 Legal speeding

Key points:

- Choosing a safe speed is your own responsibility, and cannot be delegated to a speed limit.
- More casualties happen in crashes that are below speed limits than above them.

Let's start the topic of speed right in the tiger's mouth - with speeding. This is a high focus subject by any measure! The thing to avoid, though, is that speed limits occupy so much of your thinking as to take your mind off the full breadth of skills you need to use. No one wants that to happen.

It would certainly be a cruel deceit to suggest that sticking to speed limits is the main safety obligation that a driver has. Or indeed that driving slowly is automatically safe.

Your attention to risk must be infinitely more rigorous than that.

The immovable point is that:

**choosing a safe speed is your own responsibility.
You cannot delegate it to a speed limit - or to anything else.**



Even more, no one should dispute that choosing a safe speed in real situations must depend on a lot of variable things. And the Sense of Danger model has given us a solid framework for what they are. So it is wishing for the impossible to expect a speed limit to define the boundary of safety for you.

And then, following this through:

**although the law gives us one definition of speeding,
it is better to think of two.**

These two forms of speeding are:

1. **Exceeding the posted limit** - this is illegal, and the basis of the "speeding" offence that is prosecuted in law. It is purely numerical, easy to measure, and may be unsafe.
2. **Too fast for the situation** - but within the speed limit. By definition, this is always dangerous, though not illegal as a speed in itself - thus the term "legal speeding". It depends on the situation, and is a judgement that instruments cannot measure.

The first of these is usually called "excessive" speed, and the second "inappropriate" speed (though not always consistently).

However, although the word "inappropriate" sounds more innocent than "excessive", it is in fact far more guilty in terms of carnage. More casualties happen at legal speeds than illegal ones. And confusion over the relationship between speed and danger is one of the most treacherous elements in our driving culture.

It leads, for example, to claims like, "It wasn't dangerous, I wasn't speeding" - which is a nonsense. Or even the television campaign in which a young girl pleads to be hit at 30mph rather than 40mph - to improve her chances of survival.

The mistake is that the higher chance of survival almost implies that 30mph is an "acceptable", or even blameless, speed to hit the child!



It is vital that both the legal and the safety aspects are worked together into your speed decisions. The first is sign-posted on the road, but:

the second part you need to decide for yourself.

And you must guard against the "illusion of safety" in simply travelling at a speed limit.

Critically, you must judge when any speed is too fast - especially below the limit when you might also be tempted to believe that the law gives you permission. A legal speed does not mean it is safe. However, round the other way, when you judge that travelling above the speed limit would be safe, then the law overrides taking the opportunity.

So the challenge here is to improve your skill in understanding and judging the actual danger of speed. Driving legally is fundamental, but don't imagine that sticking to a numeric speed limit is a skill - it is simply obeying the law. The actual skill is in assessing and controlling real danger, and:

being able to make balanced decisions about what to do - at any speed.