

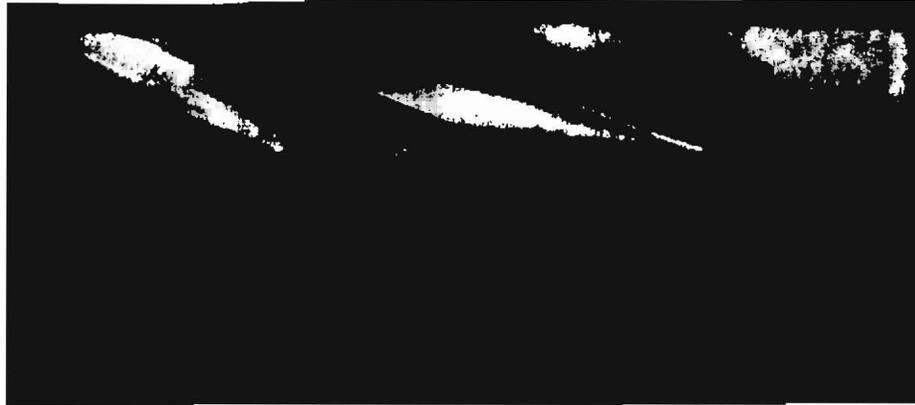
letter of the month

An honest
cop explains
how "speed"
is greatly
exaggerated
as a cause of
accidents.

Speed causes
<5% of all
fatal crashes,
NOT 30%.

Greg Mazy

Inattention
causes >25%
of crashes.



voice of authority

I was a CHP officer for 33 years and have investigated thousands of collisions. I qualified as an expert in traffic collision reconstruction and for several years reviewed other officers' reports. My background indicates "Inattention" as the most apparent collision cause. An obvious related cause, more difficult to appraise, is "Driver Ability."

The Collision Investigation Manual requires, whenever possible, that the collision cause should be recorded by showing a vehicle code violation. Things such as "Inattention" or "Driver Inability" are not normally allowed as the primary collision factors. For that, there is the basic speed law, 22350 CVC, which is possibly the most abused

Try everywhere. law in California. It was written when life and laws were much simpler. It is a short law, requiring drivers to maintain a speed that is safe and prudent in relation to the road and environmental conditions. This law has been used as a catch-all to explain many driving ills. I will provide a couple examples of how "Speed" is routinely listed as the cause of collisions but in my opinion, incorrectly listed.

1. Rear-end collision: The front vehicle slows. The rear vehicle does not slow appropriately and runs into the rear of the front vehicle. The collision cause is attributed to the rear vehicle for maintaining an unsafe speed for the prevailing conditions. Section 22350 CVC is the section of law recorded as the "Primary Collision Factor."

2. Running off the roadway at a curve and striking an object: Again, 22350 CVC may be posted as the "Primary Collision Factor." It is often concluded that the vehicle had been maintained at a speed unsafe for the road curve.

In the above examples, speed probably was not the obvious reason for the collision. Tailgating, inattention, or other poor driving skills are often the obvious culprits. For those items to be selected, however, statements or other evidence are required for their inclusion as the collision cause. No such requirement is apparent for 22350 CVC to be listed as the cause.

The incorrect statistical listing of collision factors warps reality. Speed is presented as the major cause of collisions. Collision investigation policy and practices "feed the need to condemn speed." The root of this inappropriate practice goes back many decades and, without doubt, it has led to erroneous and inaccurate statistical analysis. It helps explain your conclusion that statistics relating to speed are wildly inconsistent and inaccurate.

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Larry wins the complete Knight
Rider DVD collection, courtesy of
Universal Home Entertainment
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