# Road Safety Charity Warns Drivers To Slow Down and Chill Out

**Tuesday 26 May, 2015**

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Brake, the road safety charity, and Direct Line insurance are urging drivers to hang back, slow down and chill out on country roads to avoid tragedies, as a survey reveals the extent of risky, aggressive overtaking. An alarming **one in seven drivers (14%) report that in the past year they have been forced by another driver's overtaking to swerve, pull over or brake to avoid a collision**.

Brake and Direct Line's survey also found that, in the past year:

- Four in five drivers (80%) have felt endangered by an overtaking manoeuvre, either of their own, their driver, or another vehicle.
- Almost all drivers (94%) have witnessed a risky overtaking manoeuvre, and more than half (53%) see them monthly or more often.
- One in five drivers (18%) admit they have themselves overtaken another vehicle when they were not certain if there were any hidden vehicles or hazards they could have hit during the manoeuvre.

When it comes to owning up to risky overtaking, it was most common among male and young drivers, with 21% of men and two in five (39%) 17-24 year olds admitting doing so when they weren't sure the road ahead was clear. The figures for speeding paint a similar picture, with almost half of male drivers (44%) and more than half of young drivers (17-24; 56%) doing over 60mph on single carriageway country roads, compared with less than a third (31%) of women and two in five drivers (37%) overall. This tallies with the statistical evidence that young male drivers are involved in many more crashes than older and female drivers [1].

In another recent Brake and Direct Line survey, risky overtaking came fourth on a list of UK drivers' road safety concerns, cited by two thirds (66%) of respondents [2]. Overtaking is a particular problem on single carriageway country roads, where high speeds and blind bends often make it impossible to be sure the road ahead is clear, creating a risk of devastating head-on collisions. This is one of the reasons country roads are, per mile travelled, the most dangerous for all types of road user, accounting for more than half (52%) of fatal crashes on UK roads [3].

Brake is urging all drivers to think twice before overtaking on country roads, and only to do so if absolutely essential, for instance to overtake an extremely slow moving vehicle, and only if it can be done on a long, clear stretch and without speeding. Otherwise, drivers should hang back and relax.

**Julie Townsend, deputy chief executive, Brake, said:** "Overtaking on single carriageway country roads is a huge risk, and one that ultimately just isn't worth it. Why risk it and rush? You could cause a devastating, high speed, head on crash that ends lives and ruins others. In spite of this, a significant minority are still taking the risk and performing this aggressive and selfish manoeuvre. We're urging all drivers to avoid overtaking on country roads unless absolutely essential and 100% safe – that doesn't include if you're feeling impatient because someone in front is driving a few mph slower than you want to. In those situations, cool-headed and responsible drivers hang back and relax. We're also urging drivers to stay well within speed limits, and slow right down for villages, bends, brows and bad weather, to protect themselves and others."

**Rob Miles, director of motor at Direct Line,commented:** "People die on rural roads in the UK every day and many of these fatal crashes could be prevented. Our own data suggests that young drivers and their passengers are even more likely to be killed on this type of road. Drivers should remember that patience is a virtue when it comes to deciding to overtake another vehicle, as it could be a life saver."

**Brake campaigns for lower speeds on country roads through its rural roads not racetracks campaign. Tweet us:@Brakecharity, hashtag #RuralRoadsNotRacetracks. Read the survey report.**

**Country road facts**

More than half (52%) of fatal crashes in Britain are on country roads [4]. Per mile travelled, these roads are the most dangerous roads for all kinds of road user [5]:

- Car occupants are twice as likely to be killed on a country road as on an urban road.

- Motorcyclists are more than twice as likely to be killed on a country road as on an urban road.
- Cyclists are almost three times more likely to be killed on a country road than on an urban road.

Speed is a major factor in country road crashes [6]. A study of country single-carriageway roads estimated that a 10% increase in average speed results in a 30% increase in fatal and serious crashes [7]. The most common crash types on country roads are collisions at intersections, head-on collisions and running off the road [8] – these are all related to excessive speed.

**Overtaking: Brake's advice**

Overtaking on single carriageway roads is one of the most dangerous manoeuvres drivers can perform – and is usually unnecessary. Overtaking is dangerous because is impossible to accurately judge the speed and distance of approaching traffic. This lack of judgement can easily be fatal when travelling at speed on the wrong side of the road. If two vehicles headed towards each other are both travelling at 60mph the gap between decreases by about 60 metres every second.

It is therefore incredibly dangerous to overtake on rural roads, where there will rarely be enough straight, visible road ahead to be certain that nothing is coming in the opposite direction. It is also simply not worth it: if you are travelling at 55mph, and you overtake someone doing 50mph, and you have ten miles left of your journey, you'll only arrive one minute faster than if you'd stayed behind the slower vehicle. However, in reality you wouldn't even save this much time, as you would still need to slow down for bends, junctions, other traffic, and if entering lower speed limits.

Brake advises overtaking should be avoided unless absolutely essential, for instance to overtake an extremely slow moving vehicle on a long, open stretch, without speeding or traffic coming the other way. Otherwise just hang back, relax and enjoy the journey.

**Calls for government action**

Brake is calling for the government to lower the default speed limit on our rural network from 60 to 50mph, and require local authorities to implement lower limits of 40, 30 and 20mph where there are particular risks, including 20mph in villages.

This should be coupled with wider traffic enforcement, including more speed cameras, especially average cameras, and investment in roads policing, as well as education warning of the dangers of speed and overtaking on rural roads to encourage compliance with lower limits.

Brake also calls for investment in far more traffic-free cycle and walking paths connecting rural communities, as well as frequent, cheap and well-marketed rural bus and train services, to discourage reliance on cars and encourage use of active travel and public transport.

**Case study**

**Kenny McLeod, 44, from Ayrshire,** was killed by another driver's overtaking manoeuvre in August 2008. He was driving on the single carriageway A78 when Marcus Brown, then 38, travelling in the other direction, attempted to overtake another vehicle driving at 60mph and crossed onto the other side of the road. Despite it being a straight stretch of road, there was not enough space to complete the manoeuvre safely. Kenny took evasive action, but was unable to avoid the head-on smash. He had to be cut free of his car, but was pronounced dead at the scene. Brown was found guilty of causing death by dangerous driving, and was sentenced to five years and seven months in prison.

**Sasha McLeod, Kenny's wife, says:** "I passed my driving test six months after the crash that killed Kenny, and every day I drive that road on my to work. Almost seven years on and it still feels like yesterday. I lost my husband and my kids lost a father they adored. The learner driver who killed him has been released and still lives in the area with his partner and children – he'll soon be able to apply for his license again. His life goes on, while we struggle every day to understand why this happened. There was no need to take the huge risk of overtaking – a risk that resulted in my husband being killed on his way to work, because of a moment of impatience from an inexperienced driver. One moment of madness and a lifetime of grief. If only these people knew what they had done to the families of their victims."

**About the report**

These survey results come from Section 1 of Report 4: Speed, part of the Direct Line and Brake reports on safe driving, 2015-17, released today (Tuesday 26 May 2015). The survey consisted of 1,000 drivers and was conducted by Surveygoo. See the report.

**Full results**

Q1: In the past 12 months, have you driven above 60mph on a rural road (not dual carriageway or motorway)?

- 63% said no (69% women, 56% men, 44% 17-24)
- 14% said yes, once or twice (12% women, 17% men, 7% 17-24)
- 7% said yes, less than once a month (6% women, 7% men, 19% 17-24)
- 6% said yes, about once a month (2% women, 9% men, 4% 17-24)
- 11% said yes, weekly or more (10% women, 11% men, 26% 17-24)

Q2: In the past 12 months, have you overtaken a vehicle when you couldn't be certain if there were any hidden vehicles or hazards you could have hit during the manoeuvre?

- 82% said no (85% women, 79% men, 61% 17-24)
- 5% said yes, once or twice (4% women, 6% men, 8% 17-24)
- 3% said yes, less than once a month (4% women, 3% men, 11% 17-24)
- 5% said yes, about once a month (3% women, 6% men, 12% 17-24)
- 5% said yes, weekly or more (3% women, 7% men, 7% 17-24)

Q3: In the past 12 months, have you witnessed a risky overtaking manoeuvre by another driver (whether you were driving, a passenger, or on foot or bike)?

- 6% said no
- 26% said yes, once or twice
- 15% said yes, less than once a month
- 27% said yes, about once a month
- 26% said yes, weekly or more

Q4: In the past 12 months, have you felt endangered by an overtaking manoeuvre?

- 6% said yes, by their own overtaking when driving
- 15% said yes, by the driver they were a passenger with
- 43% said yes, by the driver of another vehicle coming towards them
- 41% said yes, by the driver of another vehicle going the same way
- 14% said yes, by the driver of another vehicle which forced them or their driver to swerve, pull over or brake
- 20% said none of the above

**Brake**

Brake is a national road safety charity that exists to stop the needless deaths and serious injuries that happen on roads every day, make streets and communities safer for everyone, and care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes. Brake promotes road safety awareness, safe and sustainable road use, and effective road safety policies. We do this through national campaigns, community education, services for road safety professionals and employers, and by coordinating the UK's flagship road safety event every November, Road Safety Week. Brake is a national, government-funded provider of support to families and individuals devastated by road death and serious injury, including through a helpline and support packs.

Brake was founded in the UK in 1995, and now has domestic operations in the UK and New Zealand, and works globally to promote action on road safety.

Follow Brake on Twitter, Facebook, or The Brake Blog. Follow Julie Townsend on Twitter.

*Road crashes are not accidents; they are devastating and preventable events, not chance mishaps. Calling them accidents undermines work to make roads safer, and can cause insult to families whose lives have been torn apart by needless casualties.*

**Direct Line**

Started in 1985, Direct Line became the first UK insurance company to use the telephone as its main channel of communication. It provides motor, home, travel and pet insurance cover direct to customers by phone or on-line.

Direct Line general insurance policies are underwritten by UK Insurance Limited, Registered office: The

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Direct Line and UK Insurance limited are both part of Direct Line Insurance Group plc. Customers can find out more about Direct Line products or get a quote by calling 0845 246 3761 or visiting www.directline.com.

**End notes**

[1] Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2013, Department for Transport, 2014

[2] Direct Line & Brake Reports on Safe Driving 2015-17: Report 3 – Section 1, Brake, 2015

[3] Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2013, Department for Transport, 2014

[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid

[6] Rural roads, Road Safety Observatory, 2013

[7] The Relationship between Speed and Accidents on Rural Single-carriageway Roads, Transport Research Laboratory, 2002

[8] Rural Road Safety: A Literature Review, Scottish Executive Social Research, 2005

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