

## A third of young motorists have driven while on drugs

By Louise McBride  
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Almost one in three young drivers have driven their cars under the influence of drugs and many drivers are blatantly ignoring speed limits, according to a shocking new report.

The report, by the insurer Hibernian, found that about 30 per cent of those under the age of 24 drove under the influence of recreational drugs at some stage.

Almost one in five of those under 35 admitted to being stoned at least once while driving.

Irish drivers are also dangerously fond of the fast lane. About half of drivers under 35, and one third of drivers over 35, admitted to speeding. Despite this, the report found that Irish drivers blame other road users for accidents and problems on the road, rather than accepting some personal responsibility themselves. "The very large majority of drivers say they observe others speeding, but do not do so themselves," said the report.

Despite their penchant for drug driving, most young drivers had no tolerance for drink driving -- 94 per cent of drivers under 35 said they had never driven a car while over the drink-driving limit.

The managing director of Hibernian Insurance, Dick O'Driscoll, described this "ambivalent attitude" towards drug and drink driving as "worrying".

"The mixture of drugs and driving is a lethal cocktail and must be tackled immediately," said O'Driscoll. "We would like to see further research in this area. In other countries, roadside testing has been introduced for drug driving."

Responding to the report, the Minister for Transport, Noel Dempsey, said he was committed to reviewing road safety legislation on the use of drugs while driving.

"I am concerned about driving under the influence of drugs by any driver," said Mr Dempsey. "Studies show many drivers appear unaware of the effects that drugs can have on their alertness, vigilance and ability to react rapidly to unexpected events."

Dempsey said the Road Safety Authority was examining how roadside drug testing could be used to target drivers under the influence of drugs.

Meanwhile, traffic jams continue to push up the blood pressure of Irish drivers, according to the Hibernian report. Almost a quarter of drivers say traffic jams add at least 20 minutes to their journey every day. "The situation in Dublin is worse, with more than half of Dublin motorists claiming that traffic jams increase their journey time by at least 20 minutes," said the report. The average Dubliner spends 40 minutes in their car driving to work every day, compared to a national average of 29 minutes.

Although commuting times have increased over the last year, eight out of 10 motorists believe they could not operate without their car, which according to the report, proves "the widely held belief that Irish people are in the throes of a love affair with their car". The days of one-car households are long gone -- 68 per cent of families own at least two cars. The increased car ownership is unlikely to please the Minister for the Environment, John Gormley, and neither will the report's finding that four out of 10 motorists never think about carbon emissions at all.

Meanwhile, with the June deadline for learner drivers fast approaching, the backlog of learners on the roads is finally starting to clear, according to the report. Last year, the average learner driver spent about three years driving before getting their full licence. This has since fallen to about two years. However, only one in 10 learner drivers said they always drive with a fully licensed driver and never on their own.

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