

DRIVING IN UNFAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS

Part 2: Driving Interstate

There is a common belief among local drivers that interstate drivers are a danger on the road, and this prejudice at times extends to sections of the media.

This monograph reviews issues relating to driving outside of one's home state and concentrates on drivers of passenger vehicles, excluding trucks and buses. The analysis is based on the Federal Office of Road Safety (FORS) Fatality Files for 1988, 1990 and 1992 which summarise the outcomes of coroners' investigations into fatal crashes in those years.

Are interstate drivers a greater risk?

Analysis of fatal crashes in 1988, 1990 and 1992 shows that 6.8 per cent of drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes held interstate licences relative to where the crash occurred and that these crashes were responsible for 6.2 per cent of all fatalities in those years.

One in 16 fatalities on Australian roads involves a driver with an interstate licence. Given the 1995 national toll of 2015, the number of fatalities associated with interstate driving is probably about 125 per year.

The most likely person to be killed in a crash involving an interstate driver is the interstate driver (40%), followed by the passenger of the interstate driver (35%) and the driver or passenger of the "local" car (15%). Overwhelmingly, interstate drivers and their passengers die in interstate crashes.

Thus, driving interstate involves some risk, but quantification of that risk requires not only knowledge of the number of people killed but also the amount of driving undertaken locally and interstate.

The 1991 Survey of Motor Vehicle Use Australia by the Australian Bureau of

Statistics estimates the amount of travel undertaken locally and interstate. In 1991, 3.8 per cent of travel undertaken by passenger vehicles was interstate.

The number of people killed per kilometre driven was calculated on the basis of 1991 Survey and fatalities in 1988, 1990 and 1992. It is estimated (in Table 1) that, for every 100 million kilometres travelled, the number of people killed in fatal crashes involving interstate drivers (3.47 fatalities) is twice that for local drivers (1.44).

Number of people killed per 100 million kilometres travelled

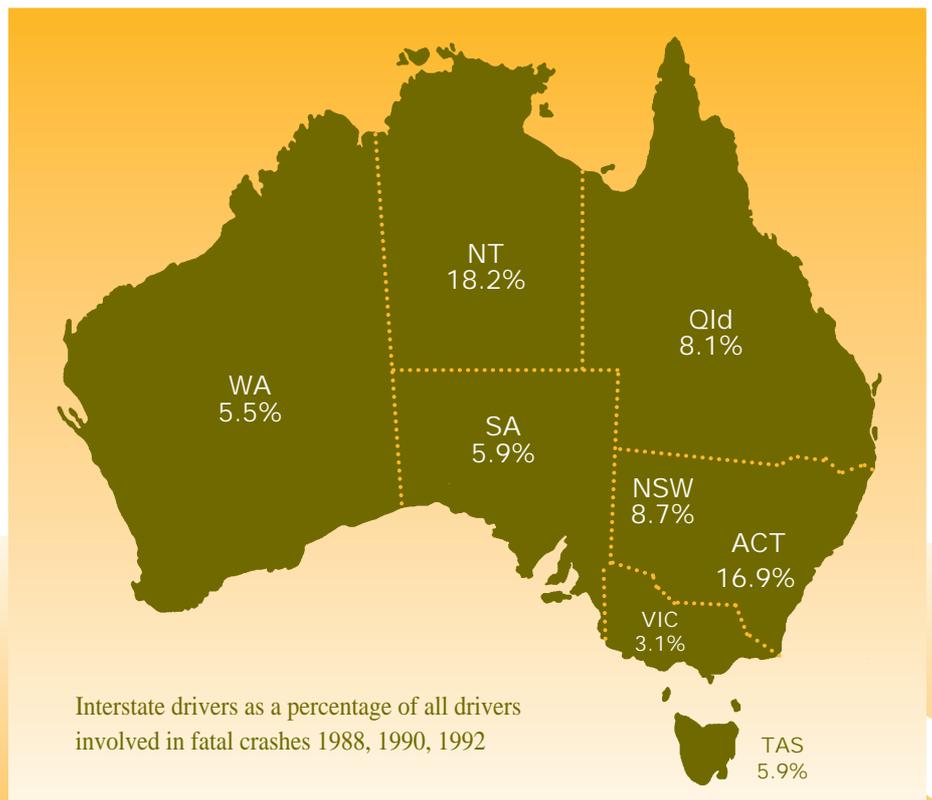
Local drivers	1.44
Interstate drivers	3.47

Certainly, driving interstate appears more hazardous than driving in one's own State. However, the degree of risk should

be qualified by consideration of the type of driving undertaken by these two groups. For example, about 60 per cent of local driving is done within metropolitan areas where the rate of death per kilometre travelled is substantially lower than that in rural areas. Interstate drivers are more likely to be driving longer distances in rural areas.

State/Territory statistics

As the map illustrates, the involvement of interstate drivers in fatal crashes varies among the States and Territories. In Victoria, 3.1 per cent of drivers involved in fatal crashes were from interstate; but in the Northern Territory this proportion was 18.2 per cent. Of the States, New South Wales and Queensland had the highest level of involvement of interstate drivers at 8.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent respectively.



No doubt there are many factors which influence the level of involvement of interstate drivers in local crashes. The relative isolation of a State/Territory, its success as a tourist destination and the presence of a large population centre across the border will impact on the involvement of interstate drivers in crashes. New South Wales, for example, is located between two States with large populations and has more “through” traffic.

A table attached to this monograph shows percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes by State of crash location and State of issue of driver’s licence.

Drivers involved in fatal crashes

Local and interstate drivers involved in fatal crashes tend to be male, accounting for 75 per cent of local drivers and 73 per cent of interstate drivers. Local drivers tend to be younger - those under 25 years of age accounting for nearly 35 per cent of drivers involved in fatal crashes compared with 25 per cent of interstate drivers.

Interstate drivers are much more likely to be on a leisure trip (about 40%, compared with 20% of local drivers) and, not unexpectedly, they were very often a long way from home. More than 40 per cent of interstate drivers were more than 500 kilometres from home at the time of crash, compared with about one per cent of local drivers.

This pattern is very similar to that noted for international drivers in Monograph 3. Both groups are older, presumably therefore with greater economic independence, travelling far from home for leisure purposes.

Crash characteristics also tend to follow the pattern observed with international drivers. Interstate drivers were more likely to be involved in a crash in a rural area, to be driving a vehicle suited to touring and to have a crash during the day.

	Local driver	Interstate driver
Rural crash	43%	72%
Four wheel drive or minibus	9%	14%
Daytime crash	56%	69%

As might be expected, the involvement of interstate drivers in fatal crashes rises by nearly 50 per cent during the Easter and New Year holidays. However, in absolute terms, this issue is not a major one as only six per cent of all involvement of interstate drivers in fatal crashes is during these holidays.

Major risk factors

According to police and coroner reports, interstate drivers are only slightly more likely to be responsible for the crashes they are involved in. Interstate drivers are at fault in 60 per cent of cases while local drivers were found at fault in 56 per cent of cases. This difference may reflect their greater propensity to be involved in single-vehicle crashes where the fault is usually that of the driver alone.

Two of the most common factors in fatal crashes are alcohol and speed. Where the driver was tested for alcohol content, 23 per cent of local drivers were over the

limit compared with 17 per cent of interstate drivers. Similarly, more local drivers (23%) than interstate drivers (20%) were possibly speeding at the time of the crash. The proportion of drivers not wearing seat belts was nearly the same (local 14%, interstate 13%).

In general, interstate drivers appear more cautious in terms of alcohol consumption and speed. There are, however, important factors on which interstate drivers do not score as well. Fatigue is a major factor in crashes involving interstate drivers. Fatigue was implicated as a causal factor for 19 per cent of interstate drivers involved in fatal crashes. This is more than twice the rate for local drivers where fatigue figured in eight per cent of cases.

Interstate drivers were also far more likely to overturn their vehicles: 28 per cent of interstate drivers were involved in overturns compared with 15 per cent of local drivers. This was true regardless of the type of vehicle.

Percentage involvement of major risk factors

	Local drivers	Interstate drivers
Single vehicle crashes	27%	35%
Alcohol	23%	17%
Speed	23%	20%
Overturn	15%	28%
Fatigue	8%	19%
Not wearing seat belt	14%	13%
Driver error	17%	20%

Percentage of overturns by vehicle type

	Local driver	Interstate driver
Car	13%	23%
Forward control vehicles*	16%	42%
Four wheel drive	38%	49%

* includes passenger vans and minibuses where the driver is seated near the front of the vehicle

This pattern of fatigue and overturning the vehicle is common to international drivers, as outlined in Monograph 3.

There appear to be major themes of choice of vehicle type, driving time and unfamiliar road conditions which contribute to increased risk for those undertaking extended leisure trips.

On the basis of the evidence from police and coroners, there is little evidence to suggest that interstate drivers are more likely to make basic errors. Driver error in the form of failure to observe signals or road rules is equally prevalent in local drivers (17%) and interstate drivers (20%).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that driving in the unfamiliar surrounding of another State or Territory increases the risk of fatal crash.

In general, however, this risk is not associated particularly with alcohol, speed or lack of knowledge of road design and features. All these factors play a part, but what distinguishes crashes involving interstate drivers are factors relating to long holiday trips.

Fatigue is a factor in one in five crashes involving interstate drivers. This is twice the rate of that for local drivers and probably underestimates the extent of the problem. Fatigue is difficult to define and a crash is only attributed to fatigue by the police or coroner on the basis of solid evidence.

A knowledge of the handling characteristics of the vehicle in unusual conditions is also important. Interstate

drivers are more likely to roll their vehicles. In some cases, this may be due to the characteristics of the vehicle as well as lack of familiarity with driving techniques appropriate to unsealed roads.

This analysis probably underestimates the overall level of risk of driving in the unfamiliar environment of another State or Territory. There are considerable populations living near State and Territory borders who may well be familiar with the driving conditions in their neighbouring jurisdiction. Their inclusion in the current study as "interstate drivers" will tend to diminish the differences to be noted between interstate and local drivers.

What can drivers do when driving interstate?

The most important principle for drivers considering an interstate trip is planning. Drivers should, with the assistance of material available from motoring organisations, take the time to determine details of the route to be taken including an assessment of likely driving conditions, distances between suitable rest stops and distances to be covered in a single day. It is crucial that drivers understand the requirements of the terrain through which they will be travelling and adopt a suitable driving style. Drivers should be especially aware of the propensity of their vehicle to overturn.

Drivers should also ensure that their vehicles are in sound mechanical condition for the trip ahead.

The following tips are useful for those undertaking long trips:

- plan the trip, possibly with the assistance of material from the local motoring organisations;
- ensure that the vehicle is mechanically sound;
- rest well before beginning the trip;
- start travel in the early morning and preferably drive during daylight hours. Avoid driving during hours when you would normally be asleep;
- on long trips, consider overnight stops;
- take regular breaks every two hours, if possible. Make sure you get out of the car and walk around during these breaks;
- eat and drink properly on the trip, but do not drink alcohol;
- share the driving where possible;
- drive according to the conditions of the road; and
- if you feel drowsy, stop and rest.

When interstate drivers are involved in fatal crashes, they usually kill either themselves or their passengers. An adequate travel plan can be a lifesaver.

Who is involved in fatal crashes in your State?

The following table lists the percentage of drivers from each State and Territory involved in fatal crashes.

State where driver licence issued

State of crash	Local driver	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT
NSW	91%	—	3%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
VIC	97%	2%	—	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
QLD	92%	4%	3%	—	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SA	94%	2%	3%	1%	—	0%	0%	0%	0%
WA	94%	1%	1%	1%	1%	—	0%	1%	0%
TAS	94%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	—	0%	1%
NT	82%	4%	0%	6%	1%	5%	1%	—	0%
ACT	83%	16%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	—

Where are drivers from your State involved in fatal crashes?

The following table lists for each State and Territory the percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes in their home State and in other States and Territories.

State where crash occurred

State of issue of licence	Home State	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT
NSW	95%	—	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
VIC	92%	4%	—	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
QLD	92%	7%	0%	—	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
SA	91%	3%	3%	2%	—	1%	0%	0%	0%
WA	97%	1%	0%	0%	0%	—	0%	1%	0%
TAS	93%	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%	—	1%	0%
NT	90%	0%	0%	1%	1%	7%	0%	—	0%
ACT	73%	24%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	—