

RISK TAKING BY INTOXICATED DRIVERS & RIDERS

Drink driving remains the primary cause of Australian road fatalities, being implicated in one third of motorist deaths (Monograph 10, 1996). It is also associated with 15 to 20 pedestrian deaths each year. This activity is known to go hand in hand with other risk taking such as driving too fast, not wearing a seat belt and riding without a helmet. This monograph examines these patterns among drivers and motor cycle riders involved in fatal crashes, based on coroners' documentation about fatal crashes in 1992, the most recent full year's material currently available.

Drivers

Table 1 and Figure 1 compare risk taking between sober and intoxicated drivers involved in fatal crashes. This comparison is restricted to drivers of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles involved in non-pedestrian crashes, and shows that intoxicated drivers are about three times more likely than sober drivers to be driving too fast (i.e. either speeding or too fast for road conditions) or be unbelted.

Amongst highly intoxicated drivers in 1992:

- 28 per cent had been driving too fast (averaging 37 km/h over the speed limit),
- another 20 per cent were unbelted, and
- a further 14 per cent were both driving too fast and unbelted.

Which are the worst drivers?

Figure 2 shows that driving too fast is most common amongst intoxicated drivers aged below 26 (46% too fast in 1992), involved in single vehicle crashes (44%) in urban areas (54%).

In contrast, being unbelted is most common amongst intoxicated drivers aged 26 or older (34% unbelted in 1992), involved in single vehicle crashes (34%) in rural areas (37%).

Table 1 Risk taking amongst sober and intoxicated drivers involved in fatal non-pedestrian crashes, 1992

Risk taking	Sober	Moderately intoxicated	Highly intoxicated
	%	%	%
Neither driving too fast nor unbelted	81	48	38
Driving too fast	12	27	28
Unbelted	5	17	20
Both driving too fast and unbelted	2	9	14
All drivers	100	100	100
Number of drivers	1228	94	168

Notes:

- Drivers aged 16 or older in passenger cars and light commercial vehicles to 3.5t gvm.
- Driver sobriety has been classified as follows:
Sober: BAC below 0.050 gm/100ml or unknown
Moderately intoxicated: BAC of 0.050 to 0.149 gm/100ml
Highly intoxicated: BAC of 0.150 gm/100ml or greater.
- 'Too fast' represents either speeding or driving too fast for conditions.
- The driver has been given the benefit of doubt in cases of unknown speed or unknown belt use.

Figure 1 Percentage of drivers* involved in fatal crashes who had been driving too fast or been unbelted, by sobriety, 1992

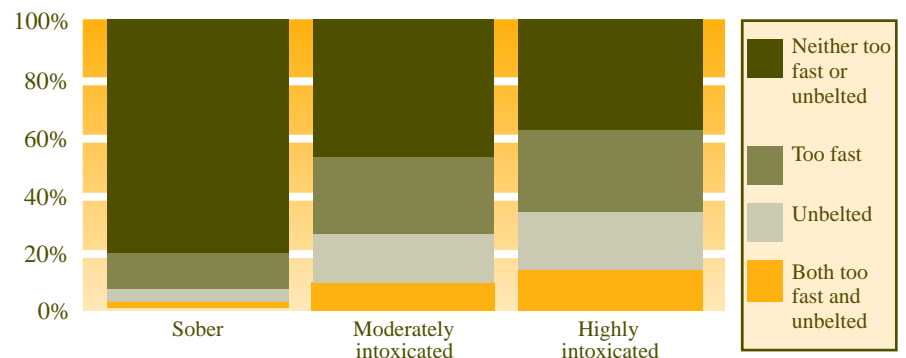
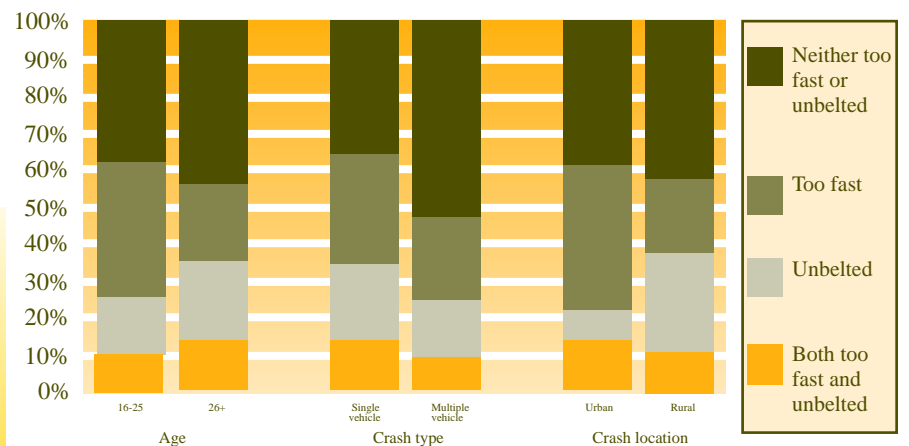
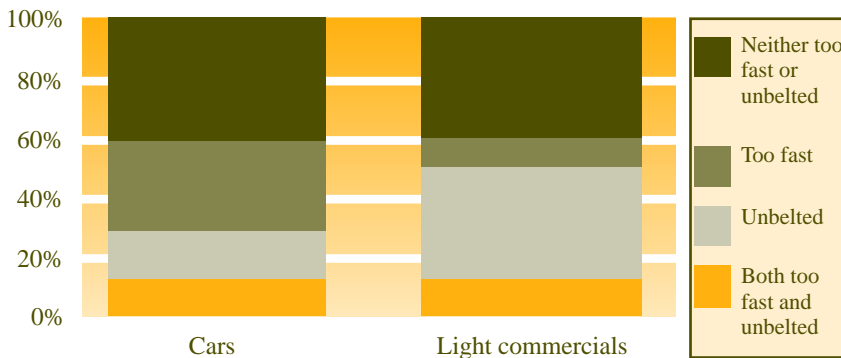


Figure 2 Percentage of intoxicated drivers* involved in fatal crashes who had been driving too fast or been unbelted, by age crash type and crash location, 1992



* Drivers of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles in fatal non-pedestrian crashes

Figure 3 Percentage of intoxicated drivers* involved in fatal crashes who had been driving too fast or been unbelted, by vehicle type, 1992



* Drivers of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles in fatal non-pedestrian crashes

Type of vehicle driven

Figure 3 shows different patterns of risk taking for passenger car drivers and their counterparts in light commercial vehicles.

Amongst 230 intoxicated car drivers in fatal crashes, 42 per cent had been driving too fast and 28 per cent had been unbelted.

In contrast, amongst 32 intoxicated drivers of light commercials only 22 per cent had been driving too fast but 50 per cent had been unbelted. Other data show that only 18 per cent of sober drivers of light commercial vehicles had been unbelted. This suggests that the behaviour of intoxicated drivers of these vehicles is not a result of frequent alighting or absence of belts.

Motor cycle riders

Table 2 and Figure 4 compare risk taking between sober and intoxicated motor cycle riders involved in fatal crashes. Intoxicated riders are almost twice as likely as sober riders to be riding too fast or be unbelted.

Amongst intoxicated riders in 1992:

- 48 per cent had been riding too fast,

- another 10 per cent had been unbelted, and
- a further 8 per cent had been riding too fast and been unbelted.

Summary

- Drink driving goes hand in hand with other risk taking such as driving too fast, not wearing a seat belt and riding without a helmet.
- Intoxicated drivers involved in fatal crashes are about three times as likely as sober drivers to be driving too fast or be unbelted.
- Intoxicated riders in these crashes are about twice as likely as sober riders to be riding too fast or be unbelted.
- Driving too fast is most extreme amongst intoxicated drivers who are:
 - in cars (42% driving too fast in 1992),
 - aged below 26 (46%),
 - involved in single vehicle crashes (44%),
 - in urban areas (54%).
- Not wearing seat belts is most extreme amongst intoxicated drivers who are:
 - in light commercial vehicles (50% unbelted in 1992) and
 - in rural areas (37%).

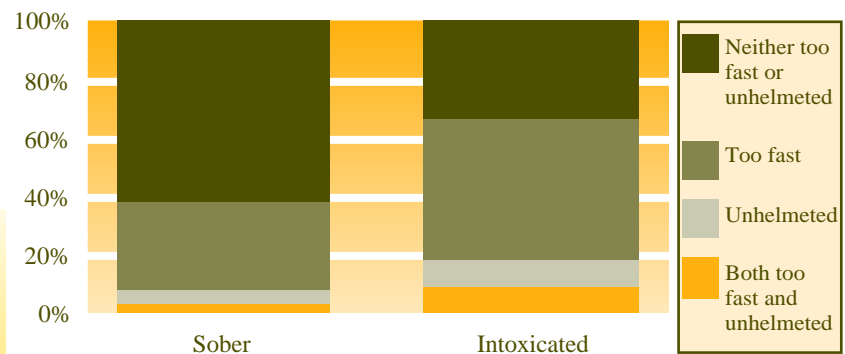
Table 2 Risk taking amongst sober and intoxicated motor cycle riders in fatal crashes, 1992

Risk taking	Sober	Intoxicated
	%	%
Neither riding too fast nor unhelmeted	61	35
Riding too fast	31	48
Unhelmeted	5	10
Both riding too fast and unhelmeted	2	8
All motor cycle riders	100	100
Number of riders	131	52

Notes:

- Motor cycle riders aged 16 or older involved in fatal non-pedestrian crashes.
- 'Intoxicated' represents a BAC of 0.050 gm/100ml or greater.
- 'Too fast' represents either speeding or riding too fast for conditions.
- The rider has been given the benefit of doubt in cases of unknown speed or unknown helmet use.

Figure 4 Percentage of motor cycle riders involved in fatal crashes who had been driving too fast or been unbelted, by sobriety, 1992



Source: Table 2