



Fatal crash involvement of never-licensed motorists

Unlicensed motorists feature prominently in Australia's road crash statistics. Their crashes contribute about one in every twelve road fatalities.

This monograph describes the Australian fatal crash involvement of those unlicensed motorists who drive or ride without ever having obtained a driver's or rider's licence for the type of vehicle used, as distinct from those who drive or ride whilst disqualified. The description is based on data derived from coroners' records about fatal crashes in 1994 and 1996, the latest years currently available.

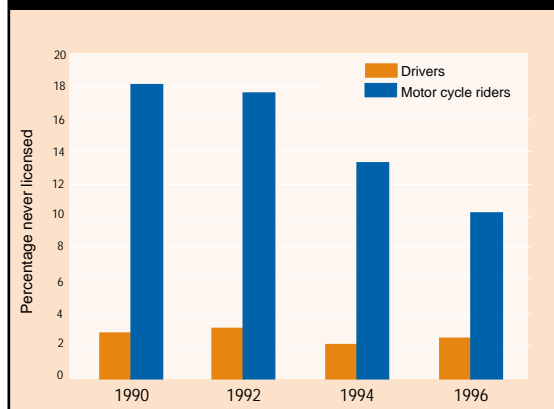
Composite descriptions of all unlicensed motorists involved in Australian fatal crashes were given in the former Federal Office of Road Safety's monographs 20 and 21 (1997).

The extent of the problem

Table 1 shows that at least 2% of all drivers involved in fatal crashes in 1996 had never obtained a driver's licence for the type of vehicle used nor had a learner's permit.

A far higher incidence of never-licensed road use is evident amongst motor cycle riders involved in fatal crashes. Some 10% of all

Figure 1
Proportion never licensed among drivers and motor cycle riders involved in fatal road crashes, Australia, 1990–1996



riders involved in fatal crashes in 1996 had never obtained a rider's licence nor had a learner's permit. As Figure 1 shows, this is nevertheless a substantial improvement on the picture earlier this decade (18% incidence in 1990) which has possibly been associated with a gradual increase in rider age observed over that time.

Table 1 also shows that an additional 3% of drivers and 3% of riders involved in fatal crashes in 1996 were unlicensed for other reasons.

Table 2 shows that crashes involving never-licensed drivers accounted for 66 fatalities during 1996, with about two out of every three of these fatalities being parties other than the never-licensed drivers. Crashes involving never-licensed motor cycle riders accounted for 21 fatalities, most being the never-licensed riders themselves.

Who are never licensed?

Table 3 compares the incidence of never-licensed vehicle use across demographic and regional categories of motorists involved in fatal crashes. It is based on composite figures for fatal crashes in 1994 and 1996.

Table 1 Licence status of motorists involved in fatal crashes, Australia 1996		
Involved drivers		
Never licensed (a)	54	2%
Other unlicensed	66	3%
Licensed (b)	2 067	95%
Total drivers	2 187	100%
Involved motor cycle riders		
Never licensed (a)	21	10%
Other unlicensed	6	3%
Licensed (b)	179	87%
Total motor cycle riders	206	100%
(a) Drivers and riders who had never held a driver's or rider's licence for that type of vehicle nor had a learner permit.		
(b) Includes motorists of unknown licence status.		

Table 2
Persons killed in crashes involving never-licensed motorists, Australia 1996

	Number killed	%
Involving never-licensed drivers (a)		
Never-licensed drivers	23	
Passengers of these drivers	38	
Occupants of other vehicles	5	
Total persons killed	66	4%
In other crashes involving drivers (b)	1 725	96%
In all crashes involving drivers	1 791	100%
Involving never-licensed riders (a)		
Never-licensed riders	18	
Passengers of these riders	3	
Occupants of other vehicles	0	
Total persons killed	21	10%
In other motor cycle crashes (b)	186	90%
In all motor cycle crashes	207	100%

(a) Drivers and riders who had never held a driver's or rider's licence for that type of vehicle nor had a learner permit.

(b) Includes deaths in crashes where driver's or rider's licence status is unknown.

The motorists categories within which never-licensed vehicle use was most common were those aged below 25 years of age, students, the unemployed, those involved in crashes in the Northern Territory, and drivers involved in remote rural crashes. Never-licensed motorists represented:

- 5% of drivers and 18% of riders aged 16 to 25;
- 7% of drivers and 41% of riders who were students;

- 13% of drivers and 24% of riders who were unemployed;
- 14% of drivers and 40% of riders in Northern Territory crashes, and
- 9% of drivers in remote rural crashes.

There has been a consistently high involvement of never-licensed drivers and riders in NT fatal crashes over many years - 16% in 1990, 13% in 1992, 13% in 1994 and 16% in 1996.

Never-licensed riders were commonplace in fatal motor cycle crashes in most jurisdictions and regions.

Road behaviour

Tables 4 describes the road behaviour of never-licensed drivers and motor cycle riders involved in fatal crashes in 1994 and 1996. These results are summarised in Figure 2.

Never-licensed drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes had displayed significantly more irresponsible road behaviour in those events than had their licensed counterparts. Specifically:

- 53% of never-licensed drivers were intoxicated compared with 17% of licensed drivers,

Figure 2
Road behaviour of never-licensed motorists involved in fatal crashes, 1994–1996

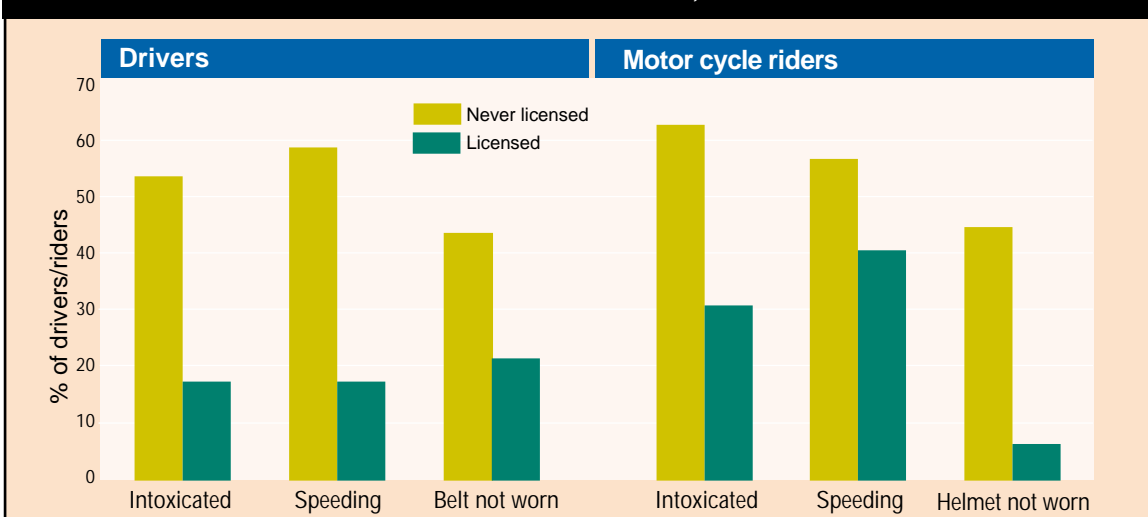


Table 3
Characteristics of never-licensed motorists involved in fatal crashes, Australia 1994 and 1996

	Number of drivers			Number of riders		
	All drivers(a)	Never licensed drivers(b)	% never licensed	All riders(a)	Never licensed riders(b)	% never licensed
Motorist age						
11 – 15	13	13	100%	3	3	100%
16 – 24	1 127	56	5%	157	28	18%
25 – 39	1 254	14	1%	182	13	7%
40 or more	1 512	12	1%	52	3	6%
Motorist gender						
Males	3 313	82	2%	385	43	11%
Females	941	17	2%	14	4	29%
Motorist work status						
Student	125	9	7%	17	7	41%
Unemployed	195	25	13%	38	9	24%
Professional, manager or para-professional	391	2	1%	42	2	5%
Trades-person or labourer	635	7	1%	138	9	7%
Clerical, sales	217	4	2%	25	3	12%
Retired or keep house	495	2	0%	13	1	8%
Skilled machine operator or driver	653	1	0%	18	0	0%
State/Territory of crash						
New South Wales	1 388	20	1%	117	12	10%
Victoria	952	15	2%	87	11	13%
Queensland	895	25	3%	91	10	11%
South Australia	365	5	1%	39	3	8%
Western Australia	466	14	3%	56	8	14%
Tasmania	147	6	4%	5	0	0%
Northern Territory	101	14	14%	5	2	40%
Aust. Capital Territory	43	0	0%	2	1	50%
Location of crash						
Capital cities	1 392	22	2%	147	17	12%
Towns	848	22	3%	102	14	14%
Non-remote rural	1 904	42	2%	143	13	9%
Remote rural	141	13	9%	2	1	50%
All motorists (c)	4 357	99	2%	402	47	12%

(a) Includes drivers and riders for whom licence status is unknown.

(b) Drivers and riders who had never held a driver's or rider's licence for that type of vehicle nor had a learner permit.

(c) Totals include the following drivers and riders not recorded separately: 82 for whom crash locality is unknown, 463 for whom age is unknown, 106 for whom gender is unknown, 1,670 of unknown labour force status and 87 in miscellaneous employment categories.

Table 4
Road behaviour of never-licensed motorists in fatal crashes, Australia 1994 and 1996

	Drivers		Riders	
	Never lic.(d)	Licensed(e)	Never lic.(d)	Licensed(e)
Number involved	99	4 148	47	342
Sobriety (a)(b)				
	%	%	%	%
No intoxication	47	83	38	70
Moderate intoxication	27	6	30	12
High intoxication	26	11	32	18
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Speed category (a)				
Not speeding	27	76	39	42
Possibly speeding	15	7	5	18
Speeding / too fast (c)	58	17	56	40
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Seat belt or helmet use (c)				
Worn	57	79	56	94
Not worn	43	21	44	6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

(a) Percentages pertain to motorists for whom details of road behaviour are known.

(b) BAC is classified as:
 - 'No intoxication' if BAC below 0.050 gm/100ml,
 - 'Moderate intoxication' if BAC 0.050 to 0.149 gm/100ml,
 - 'High intoxication' if BAC 0.150 gm/100ml or greater.

(c) Either speeding or driving too fast for conditions.

(d) Motorists who had never held a driver's licence for that type of vehicle nor had a learner permit.

(e) Includes motorists for whom licence status is unknown.

- 58% of never-licensed drivers were speeding or driving too fast for road conditions compared with 17% of licensed drivers, and
- 43% of never-licensed drivers were unbelted compared with 21% of licensed drivers,
- 62% of never-licensed riders were intoxicated compared with 30% of licensed riders, and
- 44% of never-licensed riders were unhelmeted compared with 6% of licensed riders.

Table 5
Crash fault of never-licensed motorists involved in fatal crashes, Australia 1994 and 1996

Licence Status	Number involved	Crash Fault	
		At Fault	Not at Fault
Drivers			
Never licensed ^(c)	99	95%	5%
Licensed	4 148	55%	45%
Riders			
Never licensed ^(c)	47	93%	7%
Licensed ^(d)	342	71%	29%
<i>(a) Percentages pertain to motorists for whom crash fault is known.</i>			
<i>(b) Either fully or partially at fault.</i>			
<i>(b) Drivers and riders who had never held a driver's license for that type of vehicle nor had a learner permit.</i>			
<i>(c) Includes motorists for whom license status is unknown.</i>			

Crash fault

Never-licensed motorists involved in fatal crashes tend to have elevated levels of responsibility for the event. Table 5 shows that amongst motorists involved in fatal crashes in 1994 and 1996:

- 95% of never-licensed drivers were at fault compared with 55% of licensed drivers, and
- 93% never-licensed motor cycle riders were at fault compared with 71% of licensed motor cycle riders.

Overall, 94 of the 99 never-licensed drivers involved in fatal crashes were either fully or partially at fault. This was the case for only 2 281 of the 4 148 licensed drivers, which suggests that a never licensed driver in these crashes was about 15 times more likely than a licensed driver to be at fault.

Similarly, 44 of the 47 never-licensed motor cycle riders involved in fatal crashes were either fully or partially at fault. This was the case for only 244 of the 342 licensed riders, which suggests that a never licensed rider in these crashes was about five times more likely than a licensed rider to be at fault.

Summary

- Amongst motorists involved in Australian fatal road crashes in 1996, 2% of drivers and 10% of motor cycle riders had never obtained a driver's or rider's licence for the type of vehicle used nor held a learner's permit.
- These crashes resulted in 87 road fatalities, many of the dead being parties other than the never-licensed drivers and riders.
- Amongst motorists involved in fatal crashes, the groups having the highest proportion of never-licensed drivers and riders were:
 - those below 25 years of age,
 - students and the unemployed, and
 - drivers travelling in remote rural regions and drivers/riders in the Northern Territory.
- The never-licensed drivers and riders involved in these crashes displayed significantly more irresponsible road behaviour in those events than their licensed counterparts.
- The never-licensed drivers involved in fatal crashes were about 15 times more likely to be at fault than their licensed counterparts. The never licensed riders were about five times more likely to be at fault.