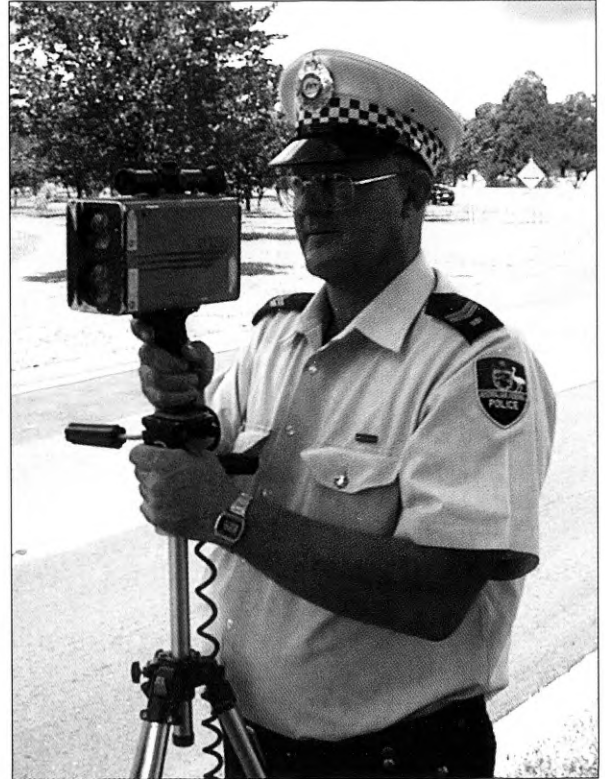


Regional Traffic Team campaigns to make safe roads even safer

By Federal Agent Ally Mercer

The ACT has one of the best road safety records in the world. It also has the highest proportion of drivers in Australia who speed, so earlier this year ACT Region police conducted a campaign to re-educate those drivers who had a complacent attitude towards speeding, and to improve the territory's high road safety standards.



Acting Sergeant Andrew Warry

A report compiled by the Federal Office of Road Safety to give a benchmark for Australia's road safety performance against that of other OECD nations found that in 1994 the ACT performed better than any OECD nation as well as Australian states and territories, in terms of deaths per 100,000 population and deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles.

The ACT also had more long-term success than other Australian states and territories in addressing the risk associated with road trauma, reducing the threat to public health by 63 per cent and the physical risk by 69 per cent.

"These were by far the largest reductions achieved by any state or territory," a summary on road fatality trends from the road safety office reported.

However, the 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics Population Survey Monitor Report on Traffic Offences showed that 60.4 per cent of drivers in the ACT regularly exceed the speed limit by 10-12kph. The statistics showed that ACT drivers topped the list of all state and territory drivers who drove over the speed limit either sometimes or most of the time. The

Northern Territory came in a close second with 58.5 per cent.

An intensive month-long campaign to improve driver behaviour, with concerted efforts at road blackspots, was launched by ACT Region in January this year.

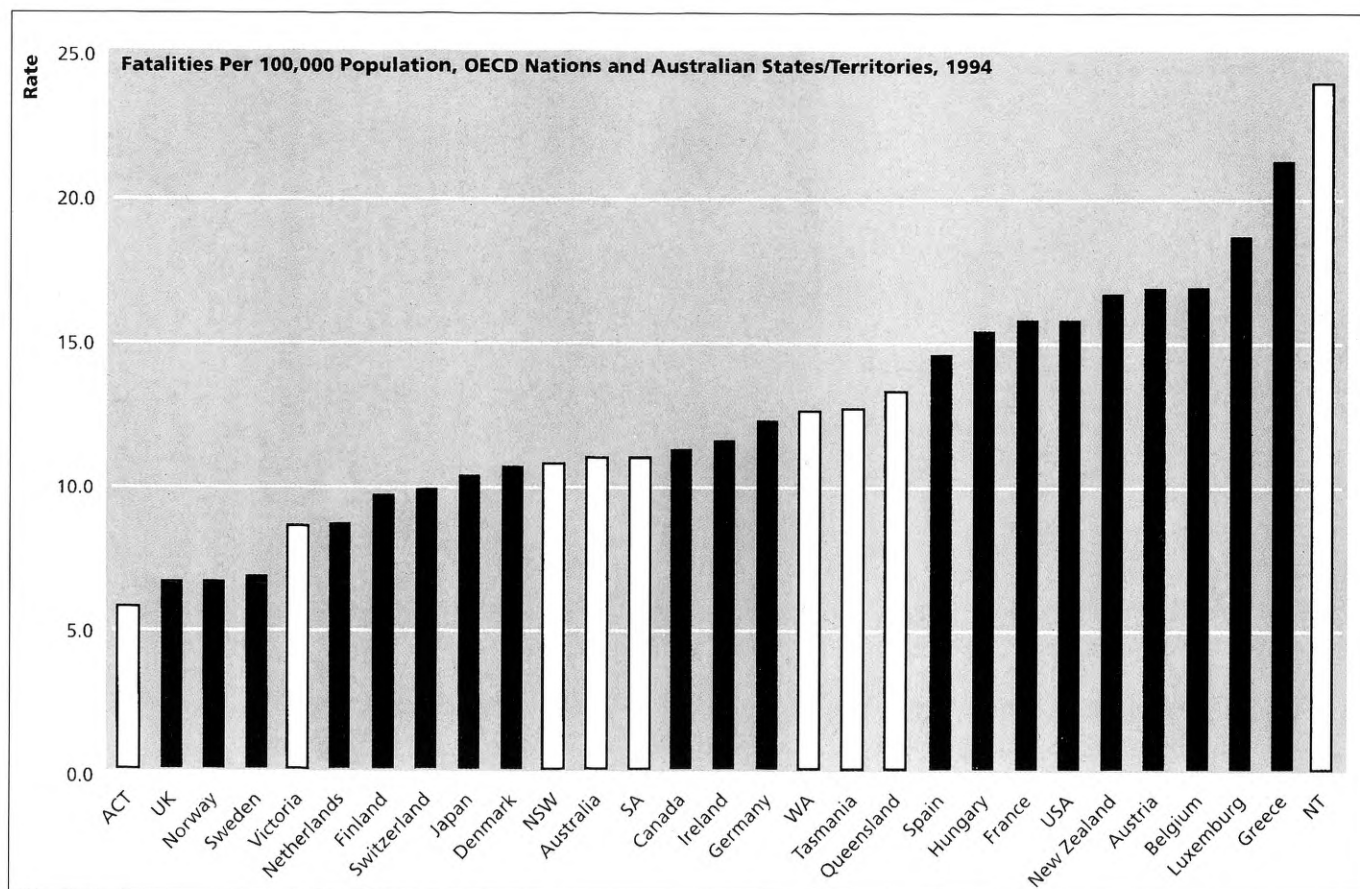
Long-term strategy

Regional Traffic Team leader for the campaign, Acting Sergeant Andrew Warry, said the high standard of roads in the ACT, along with complacent attitudes of some drivers, were factors which contributed to a general acceptance in the ACT that speeding was normal road behaviour on ACT roads. With particular attention to speeding, the long-term strategy was to reduce the road toll and raise public awareness of better driving habits.

The team's 14 members were drawn from all four police patrols in the ACT Region and Traffic Operations. Sergeant Warry has more than 20 years experience in ACT Region policing including drug targeting, intelligence, recruiting strategies, and community policing.

Team members had extensive experience in

Benchmarking: International and domestic comparisons



monitoring traffic offences and were fully qualified in using Autocite (electronic ticketing of infringement notices), DRAGER (the breath analysis instrument), laser and radar technology.

The ACT recorded its worst road toll for many years in the year preceding the campaign with 23 people killed on ACT roads in 1996. Investigations by ACT Traffic Operations showed that a high proportion of fatalities occurred because of excessive speed.

“A considerable amount of research had been done to identify the most dangerous driver behaviour and the areas where it was occurring,” Sergeant Warry said.

“Our team has looked at accidents including last year’s fatal collisions and listened to community feed-back.

“The research clearly showed that the safety of responsible motorists was being jeopardised by a minority of reckless road users.

“Traffic safety is a priority of the AFP and we made no secret of the fact that this program was aimed at motorists who ignore the road laws.

“The aim of the campaign was to bring about

a change in attitude in drivers using ACT roads,” Sergeant Warry said.

To encourage cooperation and support, a telephone hotline number was set up so the public could nominate concerns they had about neighbourhood traffic problems.

Successful prosecution of motorists

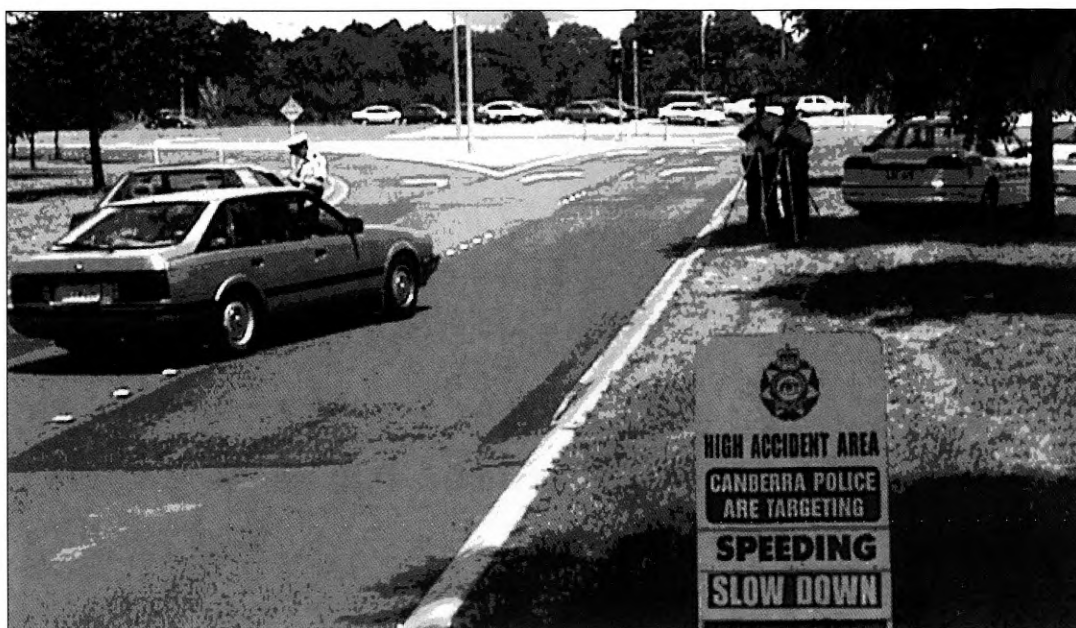
Team members said the telephone hotline was an invaluable asset as it brought together the public and police for a common cause.

Feedback included comments from people who were pleased to see a police presence on the roads, particularly at peak periods.

Media exposure contributed greatly to the success of the campaign with Sergeant Warry saying the exposure received was very good and without it the final results would not have been as comprehensive.

RTT members appeared on commercial television news reports in the ACT and the team advertised in *The Canberra Times* throughout the campaign to advise the public that it was being held.

The RTT also increased its profile by



Road signs were positioned about 200-300m before a traffic team station to inform drivers that the AFP was targeting speeding or that the area was classified a high accident zone.

members taking part in media interviews on the latest developments and providing up-to-date information on its current targeting locations.

Sergeant Warry said the public was told of the team's targeting locations as its aim was to have a high public presence and not to be a money-making scheme.

Warning signs

In keeping with this objective road signs were positioned about 200-300m before a traffic team station to inform drivers that the AFP was targeting speeding or that the area was classified a high accident zone.

"The emphasis of the team was to continually reinforce road safety education, not just to serve traffic-infringement notices," Sergeant Warry said.

There were 27 motor vehicle accidents during the month of the team's operation, some involving death and serious injury. In a break-down of statistics, two pedestrians and four cyclists were hit by vehicles; there were 11 vehicle-to-vehicle collisions involving injury; six single-vehicle collisions; and three single-vehicle collisions involving alcohol.

Penalties

The team issued 3159 traffic infringements notices (TIN). In the first week of operation 901 TINs were issued. In the weeks following the campaign there was a dramatic down-turn with 746 in the second week, 851 in the third and 661 TINs served in the last week of the team's operation. A total of 245 cautions were also issued throughout the campaign.

Interestingly, the statistics showed that less

motorists were booked for traffic offences on the weekend than during the week. In particular, almost three times more motorists were booked for violating traffic offences on a Tuesday than there were on a Saturday.

An operation report was made after the campaign to discuss the outcomes. Among them was that, for various reasons, Canberra motorists still have a careless attitude to driving at excessive speeds. This is being analysed and strategies are being developed to help police in future campaigns to change driver attitudes.

The report also recommended that a traffic law-enforcement campaign continue to be run throughout the Canberra region and that it should be centralised so that the team can pool resources and exchange information.

It recommended that ongoing campaigns should be supported by short term operations targeting specific offences or periods of high accident rates. Some of these would include back-to-school operations, Operation Snow Safe and Easter campaigns. Further traffic teams could also be formed.

In line with this philosophy a small team called Northern Operations Team has been created to build on the successes of the RTT. The team comprises three members who have been looking specifically at speeding in built-up areas in particular 60kph zones and school zones.

In its first month of operation the team has issued 439 TINs, most of which were for motorists exceeding the speed limit in a suburban area.

The team continues to target speeding motorists in a campaign aimed at keeping Canberra's road safety record high.

