

## **The Case for Higher Limits and Lower Speeds**

*A driver's carefully prepared speech for his next court appearance*

*By Rick Maier*

Your honor, I admit to doing 78 miles an hour in a sixty-five zone on the Interstate. I wasn't looking down at my speedometer to see how fast I was going, but I accept the word of the officer. There was no fire, no wife in labor, and I didn't have to go to the bathroom. But I do believe I can justify my behavior, if you will allow me to explain.

I consider myself to be a pretty good citizen. I vote in every election, try to be a good role model for my kids, and have a lot of responsibilities at work. I'm honest and don't break any laws - except for minor traffic violations.

The police could have arrested me for speeding on any given day, on any given thoroughfare. In fact, I'll bet you could arrest just about anyone at anytime for driving over the speed limit. And that's the issue here - there's something wrong with a law that almost everyone breaks every day.

The simple solution is to slow down, so I tried it for a couple days. Not to be a wise guy, your honor, but have you ever tried driving under the speed limit for a day? I made every effort to ignore the angry jeers and the hostile gestures, but there were times when I thought I would cause a wreck!

### **Limits are inflexible**

The big problem with posted speed limits is that they can't change with the conditions. I can drive more safely on a sunny day than on a rainy night, faster in my own car than in an old rental truck, and better when I'm alert than when I'm tired. But that metal speed limit sign just stands there saying the same thing, so I figure it's better to just drive in the flow of traffic.

Frankly, I don't pay much attention to speed limit signs when I'm behind the wheel. After 33 years of driving without an accident, I trust my instincts. But we need limits because not everyone has the experience, skill or good judgement to drive safely. So I've come up with a few suggestions to make the rules more effective.

The first thing we ought to do is increase speed limits based on average traffic flows, not some engineer's studies. If nearly everyone drives at least 75 miles an hour on I-75, make that the limit. If most people do over 35 mph on Edna Place, that should be the new limit.

### **Up enforcement sharply**

If all we did was raise speed limits, people would probably drive faster - and that's not what we need. So, next we should dramatically increase enforcement by hiring a whole

new force of law officers, funded from traffic fines. Their focus should be in areas where accidents occur and on people who drive carelessly, at any speed.

Over the years I've developed a split personality when I drive – aggressive on the open road and cautious in residential areas. Kids and pets need a brake once in a while, and adults deserve room to walk run and cycle along secondary roads.

What I'm suggesting is to decriminalize the way good citizens already drive, particularly on highways, and step up enforcement to cut down on dangerous driving in high-risk areas. We turned public sentiment against drinking and driving over the last few years by increasing enforcement, and we can do the same with speeding.

To sum it up, your honor, until we have more realistic speed limits and a more effective enforcement effort, I think you should rely on the judgement of good, safe drivers like me. I was driving well within the limits of my driving ability, my car's capacity and road conditions, and I ask you to please dismiss the charges.

*(Pause for judge's response).* Do you take credit cards or can I send you a check?

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