

## Drink Driving Case Study

Reducing the number of crashes caused by drink driving has been a key road safety target for the TAC since its inception. The number of lives lost and the crippling and life-long injuries sustained through drink driving are unacceptable. Many of those involved are in the younger age groups. This is a needless waste that the TAC continues to tackle with the most effective means it can use.

The many campaigns initiated by the TAC combining mass media advertising and police enforcement have resulted in drink driving being much more widely recognised in the community as a major road crash risk. More drivers now realise that "if you drink then drive, you're a bloody idiot".

But while real gains have been made, a significant problem still remains. Some drivers deliberately ignore the law by drinking excessively before taking the wheel. Others get caught up in social situations involving drinking. They feel that although they might be "just a little bit over" the limit, they are unlikely to constitute a risk to others on the road. These drink drivers also believe that they will avoid detection by police.

To challenge the false beliefs of those drivers who think they are safe and in control when driving in the .05 to .10 range, the TAC has recently started a new phase in its overall drink driving program - the *Only a little bit over? You bloody idiot* campaign.

## Alcohol and road crashes

Drink driving is a major factor in Victoria's road toll.

- around 25% of drivers and motorcyclists killed have a BAC of or above .05
- in the 12 months to November 2007, 59 drink drivers and riders were killed
- during the month of December when social drinking increases, an average of 16 drink drivers and riders were killed (2002 to 2006).

## What are some of the characteristics of drink driving offenders?

Based on data from evidential breath tests conducted by police in Victoria, drink driving offenders are:

- predominantly male (84%)  
The age demographic of drink driving offenders follows a linear pattern downwards from 21-29 onwards. In other words the older the person the less likely they are to be caught offending.  
The newly fully licensed 21-25 age group have recorded almost 23,000 offences (almost 20%) during the period 2000-2005.
- Almost one third of drink driving offenders in Victoria were employed as either tradesmen or labourers, with tradesmen making up almost one quarter of all recorded drink driving offences.
- The most common place that alcohol was consumed before people were caught committing a drink driving offence was at home or at a friends place. The second most common place was at a hotel or club.

---

## The TAC's previous drink driving campaigns

The TAC became involved in mass media road safety advertising in 1989. It launched a new series of television advertisements in December 1989 with Girlfriend highlighting the tragic results of drink driving. This advertisement introduced the now widely known tagline - drink drive, bloody idiot. This was followed in September 1990 by Booze Bus, an advertisement to support the random breath test program. Joey was launched in November 1992 showing that death and crippling injury are a real consequence of taking the wheel after having too much to drink.

These and other advertisements have aroused a strong public response through their emotionally intense and often graphic style. A summary of the major TAC advertisements targeting drink driving is provided in Attachment A.

Enforcement has formed a key part of the strategy to deter drink driving from the beginning of the TAC campaign. The TAC funded the purchase of booze buses for Victoria Police random breath test operations, and other equipment such as breath testers to streamline the detection of offenders. The number of random breath tests performed by booze buses rose from 521,000 in 1989 to over 1 million in 1992 and has peaked at around 1.4 million in the last couple of years.

A significant aim of the TAC's drink driving advertising strategy has been to emphasise the real likelihood of being caught after committing an offence and the severe penalties that will follow a conviction.

The TAC's drink drive sponsorships also support the overall program and reinforce the message at a grass roots level all year round. The activities generated by these sponsorships educate Victorians on alcohol consumption and its impact on safe driving over the longer term. In addition, partnerships with the Australian Drug Foundation and the Good Sports Accreditation Program provide further avenues for communicating the facts about drinking and driving.

In 1989, the year that the TAC commenced its campaigns, 114 drivers and riders died in road crashes with an illegal blood alcohol concentration. This figure had dropped to 59 in the 12 months to November 2007.

## Driver attitudes about drinking and driving

A study of the attitudes of drivers who are willing to take the risk and drive near or over the BAC limit was carried out in June 2003 (undertaken by Barry Elliott, Consulting Psychologist). The aim of the study was to assist the TAC in the development of its future drink driving campaigns.

Several key findings emerged:

- TAC mass media campaigns have helped convince Victorians that drink driving can cause harm
- despite this, a sizeable proportion of drinkers take the risk and drive at "low level" but illegal BACs
- when a drinker drives their car to a venue where alcohol will be consumed the chances are very high that he or she will drive home even with an illegal BAC - hoping not to be over the limit and not breath tested
- situations which result in being just over the BAC limit tend to be unplanned, for example: drinks after work (at the workplace) or in a nearby pub, going to a mate's place, catching up with friends, family get togethers, sport training and playing sport

- the most powerful legal sanction is felt to be the loss of licence; social embarrassment and shame are also significant deterrents for otherwise law-abiding citizens.

An important conclusion to emerge from the study was that communication strategies need to focus on both the threat of detection and the real life consequences of losing a licence. This has influenced the subsequent development of the *Only a little bit over? You bloody idiot* campaign initiated in 2003.

## Development of the "Only a little bit over?" campaign

Many people ignore the clear dangers by mixing alcohol and driving and continue to drive with lower, but illegal, blood alcohol concentrations. They use the excuse that driving "only a little bit over .05" is OK. Such behaviour is most common amongst 26 to 39 year olds males, a group that has had several years of driving experience and should know better.

They ignore the fact that the risk of a crash increases many times over. The impairment in skill is also further compounded by the fact that drink drivers are more likely to speed, less likely to wear a seatbelt and less likely to take steps to prevent fatigue.

The key message of the Only a little bit over? campaign therefore is - if you drink and drive over the BAC limit, you are breaking the law and endangering the lives of innocent passengers and other road users. The campaign features five linked phases as follows:

Phase 1 - December 2003:

- setting the scene and the main campaign theme (emotive)
- reinforcing the message that low level drink driving is being targeted and detection is likely (enforcement)

Phase 2 - March 2004:

- demonstrating physical signs of impairment at low blood alcohol levels (education)
- further reminder of the likelihood of detection (enforcement)

Phase 3 - November 2004:

- showing the consequences of a conviction for drink driving on the driver and beyond to family, friends and the workplace (education/emotive)
- reinforcing that police target drink drivers in covert operations, and will not give any leeway to drivers at or above the limit (enforcement).

Phase 4 - November 2005:

- showing that you don't have to be drunk to be over the limit and that you can't judge your BAC by how you feel. If you drive and crash, beyond incurring a fine, losing your licence or even serving a jail sentence, the consequences of drink-driving could haunt you for life - even if you were only a little bit over. (education/emotive).

Phase 5 - September 2006:

- demonstrating the increased levels of Police enforcement now on Victorian roads. It also reinforces the fact that every police car is equipped to conduct preliminary breath testing and that back streets are being targeted. If you choose to drink and drive, it's not a case of if you get caught, it's when (enforcement)

## What are drink drivers thinking right now?

The TAC measures the audience reaction to its advertising campaigns and the changing attitudes of the community to road safety issues using independent research organisations. Sweeney Research conducted research and continues to conduct weekly telephone interviews with a sample of drivers in during which attitudes to various drink driving issues are explored.

## Reasons given for driving when near or over .05

People who admitted driving when they were near or over the .05 limit were asked why they did so. It should be noted that this group forms a very small percentage of all drivers. A comparison of the relative importance of the main reasons given is provided in the following table.

Reason given for driving near or over .05	%
Just wanted to get home	22
Thought I was okay/under the limit	10
Driving is more convenient	9
I was just a little bit over	8
Only a short distance	8
To go to another place	6
Didn't want to leave the car behind	5
Need the car the next day	4
Unlikely to be caught	3
Wasn't thinking	3
I can drive okay when I'm a little bit over	2
No taxis or public transport available	1
Don't know/no reason	4
Other reasons	15

Note: Other reasons given include being irresponsible; my friends wanted me to drive; felt in control; needed to drive others home; had no money; didn't expect to be drinking; taxi costs too much.

---

## Reasons for not driving when possibly over the limit

The main reasons given for not driving when around or over the limit were:

- afraid of an accident and injury to oneself or others
- afraid of losing licence
- afraid of being caught.

## Some key attitudes to drink driving risks

In the weekly surveys conducted by Sweeney Research, among other issues, people are asked:

- what they think is the risk of a crash if over .05
- what they think of their chances of being caught by police if driving over the limit.

The results show an encouraging trend in the way drivers are thinking about the risks associated with drink driving:

In quarter 4, 2007

- one in ten (10%) admit to having driven in recent months when they may have been over the .05 BAC legal limit.
- The most likely group to drive than when they could very well have been over .05 are males under 30 years of age.
- When asked about the likelihood of being caught if they were to drink drive, 39% of drivers rated it as high
- Figures indicate that 'drink drivers' are less likely than 'non drink-drivers' to rate the risk of detection as high (27% c.f. 40%).

## Some questions answered

### Who is the latest phase of the campaign targeted at?

The Only a little bit over? You bloody idiot campaign is relevant to all people who have a few drinks and then risk getting behind the wheel because they are under the illusion of being in control, or assuming that they will not get caught.

Many of these people also think that driving "a little bit over" the legal BAC level of .05 is OK. It is both illegal and unacceptable to put passengers and other road users at risk.

While the expectation of being caught by the police while drink driving has increased over the past three years, people still continue to take the chance.

The campaign is particularly targeted at male drivers and riders aged 21 to 39 who represent the majority of drivers killed and injured on the roads as a result of drink driving.

### Is drink driving on the increase?

Drink driving remains one of the biggest killers on Victoria's roads, with around 25% of all drivers or riders killed on the roads having an illegal BAC.

In recent years there has been a welcome decrease in the number of drivers killed with a BAC between .05 and .10; however the numbers remain at an unacceptable level.

Unfortunately, many people continue to believe that it is OK to drive a little bit over the legal limit.

### **Does this mean that earlier communication campaigns have not worked?**

There is no doubt that the TAC's drink drive, bloody idiot message has played an important role in educating Victorians about the dangers of drinking and driving, and has contributed to a culture where it is now much less socially acceptable to do so.

What many do not understand, or refuse to admit, is that a person does not need to be drunk for alcohol to affect driving ability.

What the TAC is now trying to achieve through its campaigns is a reduction in "low-level" drink driving. Whilst previous campaigns communicated educational and enforcement messages, this new campaign also addresses the effects on one's usual lifestyle of losing a licence through drink driving.

### **How can people know what their BAC is – two people might drink the same amount but register a different result?**

People find it difficult to gauge their own blood alcohol level as there are many factors that need to be considered such as:

- the amount of alcohol consumed
- the period of time over which alcohol is consumed
- one's body mass
- whether or not food has been eaten
- the person's fitness level
- the health of the liver.

Because everyone is different, some people would need to drink less than the suggested hourly guidelines to maintain a BAC level below the legal limit.

If there is any doubt about the BAC level, the best solution is not to drive. It is just not worth the danger of losing a licence or causing injury or death.

The fact remains that driving with any alcohol in the bloodstream reduces concentration, reaction time and ability to judge distances.

### **Isn't excessive drink driving the real problem?**

A person does not have to appear to be outwardly drunk before alcohol affects their driving ability.

Driving with any alcohol in the bloodstream means that critical abilities are reduced, which makes the driver much more vulnerable to being involved in a crash.

Importantly, the current campaign targets "low level" drink drivers before they graduate to higher, more risky levels of alcohol consumption.

### **Why doesn't the Government use alcohol interlocks as a means to address the issue?**

Since May 2002, Victorian courts have been able to order anyone committing a repeat drink driver offence or driving with a BAC reading of more than .15 to have an alcohol interlock device fitted to their car, motorcycle or truck ignition.

New laws for young drivers were introduced in January 2008 as part of the Graduated Licencing System. Drink driving offenders who are under the age of 26 will have to fit an alcohol ignition interlock for a minimum of six months when re-licensed. In addition, any licence suspension, drink-driving offence with a BAC up to 0.05, or drug driving offence, will result in an extension of the P plate licence period for six months, plus the period of suspension.

## **Attachment A - The TAC Drink Drive Advertising Campaigns from 1989**

### **Girlfriend - December 1989**

This was the first TAC drink driving advertisement and launched the drink drive, bloody idiot slogan. Set in a hospital casualty ward, the advertisement shows a young girl arriving, having been badly injured in a car crash - her drunk boyfriend is the driver. It gives a snapshot of the casualty situation and the impact on the lives of those involved.

### **Booze Bus - September 1990**

The advertisement launched the introduction of booze buses in Victoria. It shows a range of people and their reactions to the penalties they face as a result of being caught with a BAC of over .05.

### **Joey - November 1992**

Shows two brothers leaving a party. One offers to drive but his brother, who has had too much to drink, insists on taking the wheel. He rolls the car killing his brother and seriously injuring himself.

### **Glasses - September 1993**

The advertisement shows the driver's view of the road, with empty beer glasses appearing in his line of vision. The more glasses, the more blurred the view. The driver has an accident and his young wife is told of the crash by the police.

### **Country RBT - December 1993**

Shows a country driver being breathalysed at a mobile booze bus. He is found to be over the limit, loses his licence and is fined.

### **Flashback - September 1994**

The advertisement features a young man reliving the horrors of a crash to his wife. As he turns away from her we become aware that he is in a wheelchair.

### **Silent Night - Christmas 1994**

The scene is a Christmas party where a man tries to convince his mates that he is fine to drive. A series of crash scenes from previous TAC advertisements is shown to the music of Silent Night. The advertisement closes with the line "Should you be driving home tonight?"

### **Prison - November 1995**

Highlighting the consequences of drink driving, the advertisement is set in a visiting room at a prison, where a young mother brings her children to see their father. He has been sentenced for killing a boy when driving under the influence.

### **Bush Telegraph - September 1996**



Depicts the reliance of the “bush telegraph” in country Victoria to avoid booze buses. A man and his son drive home from a mate’s after a few beers. The driver fails to give way at an intersection, resulting in a fatal crash with a tanker.

#### **Lennon’s Christmas - December 1996**

Set to an evocative rendition of John Lennon’s “And so this is Christmas”, the advertisement depicts the scene in a busy casualty ward, with newly admitted crash victims, their families and medical staff.

#### **Covert - October 1997**

The advertisement shows a driver being pulled over and breathalysed by an unmarked police car. It shows that now every police car operates as a booze bus.

#### **1000 Booze Buses - 1997 and 1998**

A range of advertisements supporting police drink driving enforcement both with booze buses and police cars. The emphasis is on the wide range of circumstances in which drivers may face a random breath test.

#### **Double Whammy - January 1998**

Showing that police that carry speed lasers also carry breathalysers. The advertisement features a businessman being pulled over for speeding and also being breathalysed by the same police.

#### **John and Jessica - February 1998**

Set in a hospital emergency ward, the advertisement shows the aftermath of a crash. John resists a blood test knowing that he is over the limit. He is informed that the passenger in the other car has died.

#### **Waiting Game - September 1998**

Opening on a celebration the advertisement shows an older man encouraging drinking amongst his friends then getting into his car to drive home. He is pulled over by the police almost immediately and is booked for drink driving despite his protests.

#### **Back Streets - September 1998**

Shows a couple driving home after dinner with friends. The woman driver is pulled over for a broken tail-light and is breathalysed at the same time. She is found to be over the limit.

#### **12 Days of Christmas - December 1998**

Set to a child’s voice singing “The Twelve Days of Christmas” the advertisement shows a young pregnant mother whose husband receives a serious brain injury in a crash. He dies just before Christmas leaving his wife alone with her children.

#### **Pub - March 2000**

Targets the typical repeat drink driver who unlike his mates persists in driving home from the pub. He kills two pedestrians and is jailed for culpable driving.

### **Stop - August 2000**

Highlights police drink driving enforcement by reminding drivers to stop and think before drinking and driving.

### **Never - December 2000**

Shows the impact of a drink driving fatality on those closest to the victim - both a young woman's father (who will never see her marry or have children) and her boyfriend. Looks like a new car advertisement at the start.

### **See the Light (Booze Bus and Police Car) – December 2001**

These two linked advertisements highlight the increased chances of drink drivers being caught. This is a result of booze buses operating for longer periods, more unmarked police cars and a tough approach to enforcement at .05 and above.

### **Blue Squares – December 2001**

Reinforces the strong message that police will be out in force targeting drink drivers, with increased police resources on the road.

### **Little Bit Dead – December 2003**

Sets the scene for the "little bit over" message by depicting three people affected by the actions of a drink driver - one seriously injured, one killed and one grieving. Parodies the blasé attitudes of some drivers to driving a little over the limit.

### **Little Bit Worried – December 2003**

Shows a driver who realises that he has probably had one drink too many and might be over the BAC limit. Despite hoping so, he does not get away with driving home while impaired and is apprehended by police and subjected to a breath test.

### **The Little Things – March 2004**

Highlights some common social drinking situations - drinks at a workplace, at a friend's place, at a BBQ - where the drinkers show some typical signs of being affected by alcohol without being 'drunk'. While seemingly small impairments, they can affect the safe control of a car.

### **Netball - November 2004**

A father incurs the wrath of his wife and then sullen treatment from his daughter when he's unable to drive his daughter to her weekly netball game. We see them walking across a country town, only to arrive late. Another parent shoots the father an accusing look. A flashback then shows him being pulled up by police who disregard his pleas to be let off.

### **Insurance - November 2004**

A man on the phone renewing his car insurance discloses that he was recently caught for drink driving. He's shocked to hear that a drink driving record will affect his car insurance policy for many years to come through higher excesses, This is regardless of his rating or whether or not he's had a crash.

### **Unemployed - November 2004**

We overhear the conversation of a guy on the phone in a suburban family home. He's trying to arrange an extension on the payment of a bill. Gradually we realise that he is getting by on unemployment benefits. A flashback then shows him getting out of a work van and being lead away by police for drink driving. He vainly tries to explain that he needs his licence to work.

### **Boat - November 2004**

It's a perfect, sunny day - the sort of day that we should all be out enjoying. A boat is parked in a suburban yard, showing signs of lack of use. We then see the reason - it appears that the owner and his mates were out fishing when they were pulled over by police and the driver was breath tested. Although he may have had the least to drink of all his mates, he was over the limit and lost his driver's licence as well as his boat licence.

### **Haunted - November 2005**

We see a series of life events through one particular mans life as he grows older – in a park (about 22 years), on a bus, at work, at home with his kids, lying in bed at night, the marriage of his daughter and later back to the park (about 60 years). All the time there is a small boy watching him – as the ad progresses we realise the boy doesn't age and he is missing a shoe. We then discover that the man, as a 20ish man is being breath tested at the scene of a pedestrian accident and we hear that he is being told the boy he just hit has died. He blows .062 BAC.

### **When? Metro - September 2006**

Open with a super on the screen 'Say when'. We see two guys in a car driving down a main road. Super on screen says 'Tonight?' They see a police car with flashing lights but it overtakes and speeds on after someone else. Another day. On the screen is a super saying 'Next week?' The same guy is driving home dropping a few mates off after cricket. He turns into a side street and an unmarked police car is conducting breath tests. But he gets waved on. A few weeks later – super says 'Next month?' He is driving home with his girlfriend and this time is pulled over and tested. He is asked to get out of the car and come to the police station for further testing.

### **When? Regional - September 2006**

Open with a super on the screen 'Say when'. We see two guys in a car driving down a road. Super on screen says 'Tonight?' They see a police car with flashing lights but it overtakes and speeds on after someone else. Another day. On the screen is a super saying 'Next week?' The same guy is driving home dropping a few mates off after football. He turns into a street and an police car is conducting breath tests. But he gets waved on. A few weeks later – super says 'Next month?' He is driving home with his girlfriend and this time is pulled over and tested. He is asked to get out of the car and come to the police station for further testing.