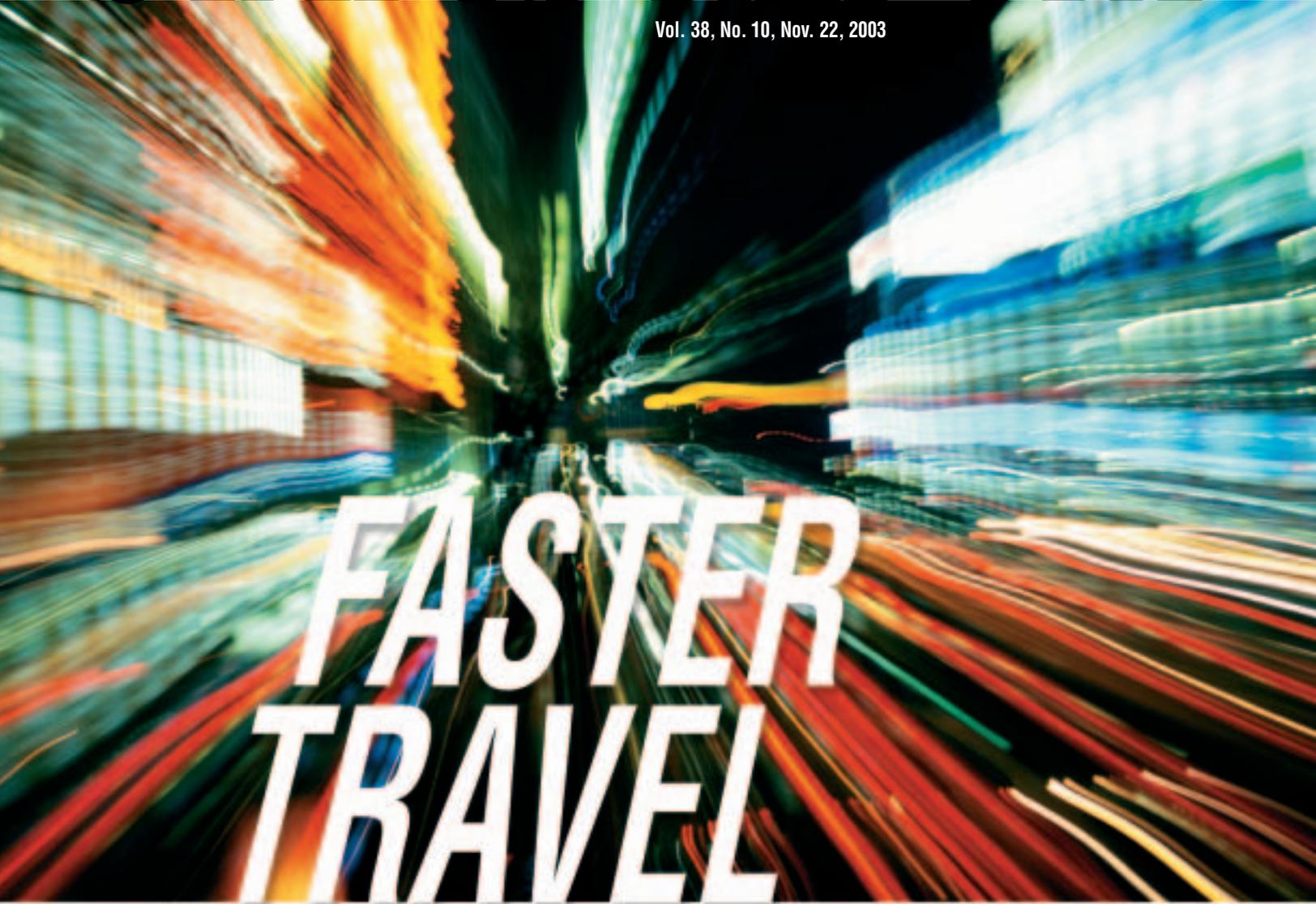


Special issue: speeding

STATUS REPORT

INSURANCE INSTITUTE
FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

Vol. 38, No. 10, Nov. 22, 2003



**FASTER
TRAVEL**

AND THE PRICE WE PAY

Speed limits are higher on many U.S. roads than they used to be, and motorists are going faster — in many cases a lot faster than the newly posted limits. There's a notable absence of public support for, or political will to, lower speed limits, or even to enforce existing limits in the interest of public safety.

“The perception is that moderate speeding is a harmless infraction, not a serious safety hazard,” Institute chief scientist Allan Williams says. “And for any individual motorist on any given trip, this perception is probably accurate. Getting a ticket for speeding, let alone getting into a crash or being injured, isn't likely to happen. But this doesn't mean speeding is harmless. There's a significant societal cost in the form of an increase in crash deaths and injuries.”

For years, Institute and other research has quantified the price in lives we pay to get from here to there a little bit faster. The most recent estimate is that higher speed limits increase deaths on rural interstates by about 35 percent (see p.2). Yet motorists on both rural and urban roads are going faster and faster (see p.3), encouraged by automakers who build ever more powerful cars (see p.7) and tout their speed capabilities in ad after ad (see p.5).

DEATHS GO UP WHEN SPEED LIMITS ARE RAISED

Higher travel speeds on rural interstates reportedly are responsible for about a 35 percent increase in death rates. This is the main finding of a new study of fatalities in states where speed limits on rural interstate highways were raised to 70 or 75 mph during 1995-96. Previous studies, including Institute research, also show increased fatalities associated with higher speed limits (see *Status Report*, Jan. 12, 1999; on the web at www.highwaysafety.org).

Researchers at the Land Transport Safety Authority of New Zealand examined the number of deaths per million vehicle miles driven in U.S. states that raised speed limits on rural interstates and in states that retained prior limits following the repeal in November 1995 of the national maximum speed limit. The researchers grouped states according to their speed limits — 75 mph, 70 mph, and states where speed limits on rural interstates remained at 65 mph. Excluded from the study were 16 states where there aren't any rural interstates or where speed limits were changed outside of the 1995-96 timeframe. Texas was excluded because the nighttime speed limit differs from the daytime limit.

States that increased speed limits to 75 mph experienced 38 percent more deaths per million vehicle miles than expected, based on deaths in the states that didn't change their speed limits — an estimated 780 more deaths. States that increased speed limits to 70 mph experienced a 35 percent increase, resulting in approximately 1,100 more deaths.

Geographical differences among the states that changed or didn't change their speed limits may have contributed to the estimated effects. All states that raised speed limits to 75 mph were in the western United States, while most that didn't change were northeastern and midwestern states.

"Whenever vehicle speeds increase death rates also increase," says Institute chief scientist Allan Williams. "And the reverse is true. In 1974 when the national maximum speed limit lowered the limits across the country to 55 mph, fatality rates dropped significantly."



ON RURAL AND URBAN ROADS, MOTORISTS ARE TRAVELING **FASTER & FASTER** BUT CONSEQUENCES ARE FORGOTTEN

SPEEDS (MPH) ON RURAL & URBAN INTERSTATES, 2003

RURAL INTERSTATES	Speed limit	Mean speed	Percent going faster than 70	Percent going faster than 80
Georgia	65	74	68	20
Massachusetts	65	69	44	2
Maryland	65	66	17	1
New Mexico	75	72	68	10
Colorado	75	76	84	24
California	70	74	69	19

URBAN INTERSTATES	Speed limit	Mean speed	Percent going faster than 70	Percent going faster than 80
Atlanta, GA	55	75	78	18
Boston, MA	55	69	38	3
Washington, DC	55	67	31	2
Albuquerque, NM	65	67	25	2
Denver, CO	55	64	11	<1

CAR SPEEDS (MPH) ON NEW MEXICO RURAL INTERSTATES

SPEED LIMIT	Date	Mean speed	Percent going faster than 75	Percent going faster than 80
65 mph	4/1987	64	1	—
65 mph	4/1988	66	6	—
65 mph	4/1989	67	6	—
65 mph	4/1990	67	7	—
65 mph	4/1991	67	6	—
65 mph	4/1992	68	9	—
65 mph	4/1993	68	12	3
65 mph	4/1994	68	8	3
65 mph	4/1996	69	14	4
75 mph	6/1996	72	26	5
75 mph	6/1997	73	37	10
75 mph	3/2003	75	55	16

Note: Percentages going faster than 80 mph weren't recorded until 4/1993.

When speed limits on rural interstates are raised, travel speeds generally go up, and speeding violations continue. Behavior is similar on urban interstates. These are the results of an Institute survey conducted in six states.

In the majority of these states more than two-thirds of vehicles on rural interstates were going 70 mph or faster. In Colorado nearly one of every four vehicles was traveling 80 mph or faster. The other five survey states included California, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, and New Mexico. Travel speeds also were surveyed in five major cities.

"These are the fastest speeds we've ever observed," says Richard Retting, the Institute's senior transportation engineer. Institute researchers began surveying travel speeds on interstate highways in New Mexico in 1987 (see *Status Report*, Dec. 26, 1987), when Congress began allowing states to set rural speed limits higher than 55 mph.

Speed limits typically are set higher on rural interstates than on urban ones. But speeds on the urban stretches often don't reflect the lower limits. Average travel speeds on urban interstates in Atlanta, Boston, and Washington, D.C., were the same or higher than the average on rural interstates near these cities. In Atlanta, where the highest urban speeds were observed, 78 percent of vehicles on one urban interstate were clocked at more than 70 mph and 18 percent were exceeding 80. Similar speeds were observed on a rural interstate in Georgia, where 68 percent of motorists were going faster than 70 and 20 percent were going more than 80 mph.

"Drivers tend to choose speeds they perceive as unlikely to result in a ticket," Retting says. "Presumably, differences in the perception of the amount of enforcement among these areas were major factors in the higher or lower travel speeds."

Institute data going back to 1987 in New Mexico show speeds on rural interstates increasing during 1987-96, when the speed limit was 65 mph. After it was raised to 75 in June 1996, speeds increased sharply. By last March they had increased even more, especially among cars. About 16 percent of cars were going 80 mph or more on New Mexico's rural interstates.

"When the Institute started measuring vehicle speeds in New Mexico, we didn't even report the percentage of cars going over 80 because they were so rare," Retting says. But even as speeds have escalated, not just in New Mexico but elsewhere, too, and researcher after researcher has quantified the price we're paying in lives for the faster travel, speeding still seems to be a forgotten public health issue."



PORSCHE



BURN RUBBER NOT MONEY

THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING A HIGH-PERFORMANCE CAR SHOULD BE
YOU THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING A VOLVO HAS ALWAYS BEEN
THEN YOU BUILD

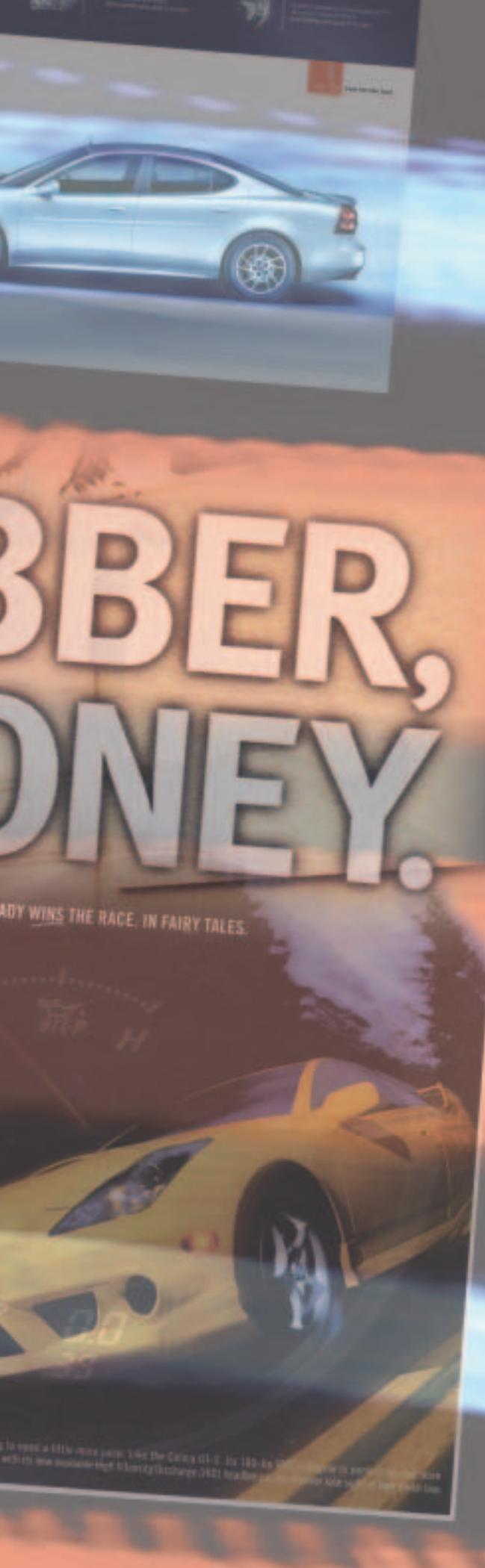


ZOOM-ZOOM

SLOW AND STEADY



CELICA In real life, you're going to get it used down. And



CAR ADVERTISING **GIVES SHORT SHRIFT TO SAFETY** **IN FAVOR OF ENCOURAGING** **MOTORISTS TO ZOOM, ZOOM**

Auto manufacturers encourage speeding by building ever more powerful vehicles (see p.7) and relentlessly appealing to potential car buyers to “get the feeling” of all that power.

Institute researchers surveyed car commercials on television in 1983, 1988, 1993, and 1998, finding that performance was the most frequent theme of the ads (see *Status Report*, Sept. 30, 2000; on the web at www.highwaysafety.org). In contrast, safety was the theme of only 2 percent of the ads surveyed in 1998.

More recently, the Institute monitored car advertisements in national publications and on national television during July 2003. These ads indicate that performance is a preferred method of selling cars. For example:

Porsche boasts that satellites have trouble keeping up with the positioning of fast-moving Cayennes. Jaguar’s XJ “goes fast, faster Drag coefficient improves, aerodynamic efficiency is maximized, and a grin on your face is guaranteed.”

Cars like these, which are known for performance, aren’t the only ones to feature speed capabilities in advertisements. Volvo emphasizes the souped-up aspects of its S60 model. Subaru describes the Forester Turbo as “assertive” with “power to spare.”

Institute president Brian O’Neill gives Subaru some credit, saying “this company does display restraint by comparing the power of the Forester to that of bicyclist Lance Armstrong, not a Ninja racer like we see in some other advertising. Besides, compared with many other carmakers Subaru pays more attention to safety in its advertisements.”

Mercedes lures buyers with “lightning under the hood.” Toyota reminds car shoppers that “slow and steady wins the race” only “in fairy tales.” Dodge tells us in huge type to “burn rubber.” Print ads for Pontiacs are even less subtle, encouraging potential buyers to “unleash your nasty little urges.”

Remember those disclaimers that routinely used to accompany auto advertising? Cautions to “please drive safely” and “obey speed limits” always were afterthoughts, and now they’re frequently absent from ads altogether. Even when they’re included, they virtually always are relegated to the fine print or flashed on the television screen for a fraction of a second.

On television the Infiniti M45 is proclaimed “the muscle car with brains.” Over a chase scene in which a black Mercedes is being pursued by motorcycles and a helicopter, there’s this message: “To catch one, you gotta be in one.”

Even Camrys are hyped for performance. In one commercial, a driver goes backwards, jumps hilltops, and swerves across four lanes, all miraculously empty of traffic. The tagline: “My car makes me feel like the road is my playground.”

O’Neill counters that “driving isn’t a game. Ads like this send the wrong message. It’s up to drivers to obey speed limits, but the manufacturers aren’t helping with ads that equate going fast with having fun.”



NO STIGMA **ATTACHED TO SPEEDING**

Times have changed. Drunk driving isn't tolerated anymore. Most motorists buckle their safety belts. But speeding is another story. The perception is that everybody does it, at least sometimes, and that most motorists speed by a few miles per hour or so.

In fact, motorists seem increasingly willing to go much faster than speed limits.

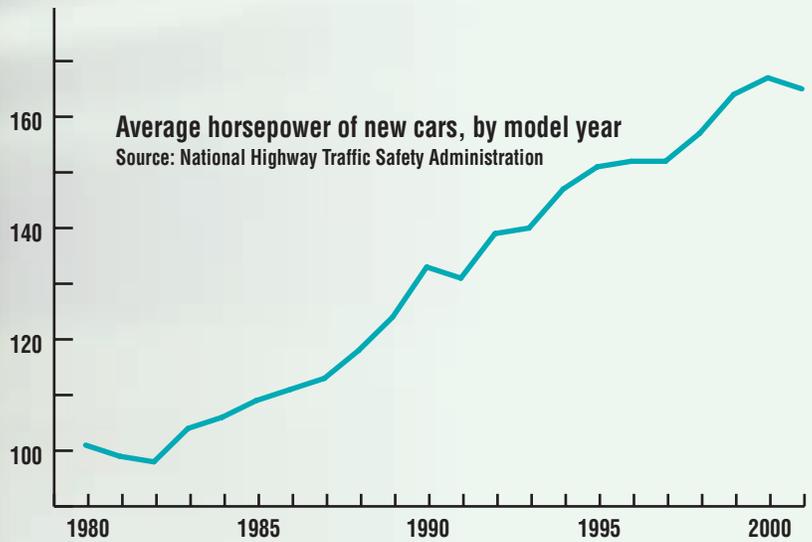
With little or no stigma attached to this particular brand of law-breaking, even image-conscious politicians joke about their lead-footed tendencies. In the United States the most notorious of these in recent years is Congressman Bill Janklow, who collected 12 speeding tickets during a 4-year period in the 1990s and, more recently, boasted to an audience about trying to drive 1,100 miles during a weekend to attend events in multiple states. When Janklow got off with a warning instead of a ticket for speeding in June 2003, he thanked the "polite gentlemen who cut me a little bit of slack."

Two months later Janklow was charged with running a stop sign and killing a motorcyclist. Janklow reportedly told a trooper he saw the sign but was going too fast to stop.

Other politicians haven't gotten the message. A reporter accompanying New Mexico governor Bill Richardson on a campaign swing took note as the governor urged his driver to "hurry up" . . . Within seconds the two-car caravan hits 95 miles per hour, then 100, then 110, weaving in and out of traffic, tailgating." Later that night Richardson was "back in his SUV, contemplating dinner at the leisurely pace of 90 mph."

A general tolerance of speeding isn't confined to the United States. Under the news headline, "Speeding Not a Stigma," the BBC reported last month that almost half of the male motorists questioned for a survey said they wouldn't be embarrassed to have points added to their driver's licenses for exceeding speed limits. Speeding offenses in the United Kingdom nearly doubled from 1995 to 2001, the BBC also reported.



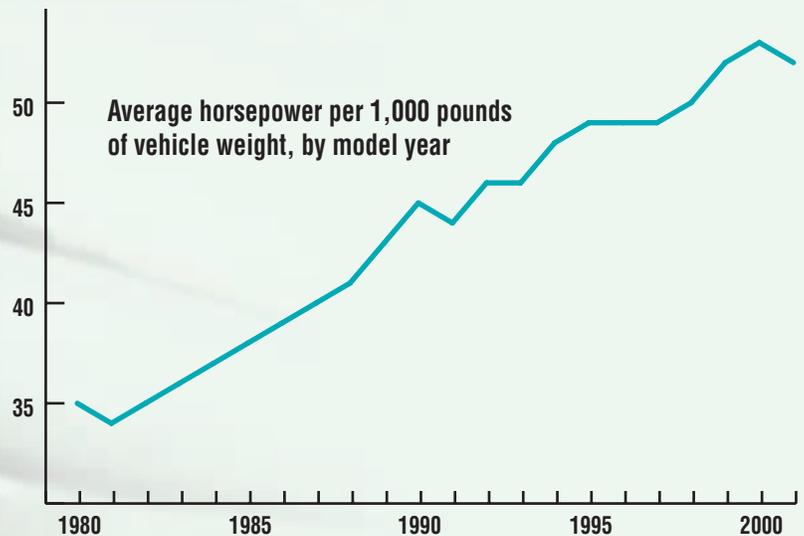


MORE & MORE POWER

For two decades automakers have been pumping up the performance capabilities of new cars. From 1980 to 2000, average horsepower increased 65 percent. The average horsepower-to-weight ratio, a key measure of performance, increased somewhat less (51 percent), reflecting the increased average weight of newer vehicles.

By both measures, performance peaked in the 2000 model year, when horsepower reached the highest average ever, surpassing even the muscle car era of the late 1960s and early 1970s. To top it off, the 2000 model year included the highest percentage of vehicles with turbocharged engines. These accounted for about 6 percent of all new vehicles.

While both horsepower and horsepower-to-weight ratios indicate that performance dropped slightly in 2001 (the latest year for which data are available), these measures have briefly leveled off before and then continued to rise. So the trend might not be over.



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Special issue: speeding

When higher speed limits are posted on U.S. roads, deaths go upp.2

More than 2 of 3 vehicles on rural interstate highways are going 70 or faster, Institute survey revealsp.3

Most car advertisements emphasize speed and performancep.5

'Everybody does it' is a frequent excuse for exceeding speed limits, and there's no stigma attachedp.6

Horsepower of new cars has increased during the past 20 yearsp.7



Safety is the focus of some car ads, but the biggest selling points are speed and PERFORMANCE.

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