

# HPD “Slower is Faster” Critical Concepts

## Key Elements & Issues in Police Driving that all Officers Should Know (v.4.3.2015)

“You don’t rise to the occasion you sink to your level of training.”

### Purpose

The HPD takes a different approach to police driver safety than what is typically done. While apexes, how to accelerate out of a corner, and correcting skids are covered during in-car training, they take a back seat to decision-making, situational awareness, emphasizing key skills to help keep officers in control and out of trouble, and techniques to help keep officers calm during stressful responses. Police driving is a complicated interdisciplinary skill that involves an understanding of a variety of subjects from physiological and psychological impacts on one’s body and brain under stress to eye movements and knowing where to look at critical moments on the road. Understanding the aforementioned topics and others covered in the curriculum are essential in learning to handle one of the most dangerous and challenging aspects of a being a police officer – driving a patrol car.

As you work through this curriculum, it’s helpful to remember the words of retired Californian Highway Patrolman and law enforcement risk manager Gordon Graham, “if it’s predictable it’s preventable.”

### Why does police driver safety and training matter?

1. Line of Duty Deaths – policing driving collisions are often the leading cause of officer fatalities, injuries, and career ending injuries. While officers rarely fear death and injuries, their losses have devastating impacts on the family, friends, and co-workers they leave behind.
2. Police officers can’t help if they don’t get to the call!
3. Cost – insurance to pay for vehicle damage, officer injuries, civilian injuries, property damage, and other liability claims can generate up to four different types of claims against an agency for just one incident. These are funds that can be better spent on supporting the police department operations and officers.
4. Civilian safety – while the focus on police driving is usually officer safety and saving money, the following chart derived from national data is an attention getter as civilians are dying at a rate of almost 4 to 1 over officers in law enforcement collisions.

#### **Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) 1982 – 2010 Persons Killed in Police Collisions**

<b>Police Fatalities</b>	<b>718</b>
<b><u>Civilians</u></b>	<b><u>2,715</u></b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,433</b>

***Ratio: 1 to 3.78***

## 1980 to 2008 NHTSA Fatality Report Law Enforcement Collisions

### Primary Causes: Routine Driving & Conditions

- 58% - Non-emergency
- 42% - Emergency
- 78% - Dry
- 70% - Straight road
- 86% - Weather normal
- 61% - Going straight
- 66% - Level road
- Peak time for fatalities: 11 PM to 2 AM



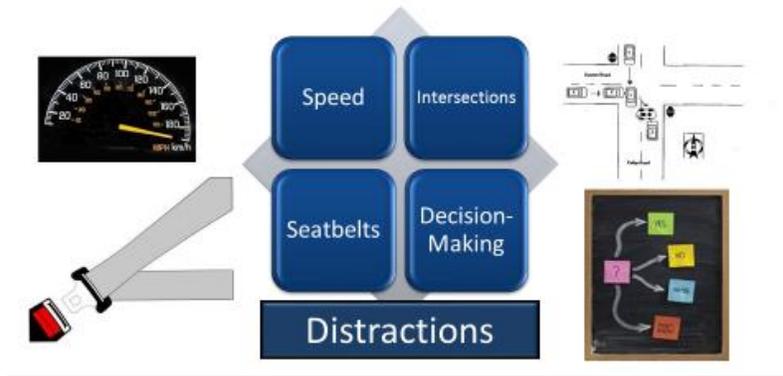
### Section #1: Police Driving Trends

- Single car collisions comprise about 60% of vehicle related fatalities in law enforcement. *Going too fast for conditions* often results in collisions with fixed objects after the officer's vehicle leaves the roadway. In addition to speed, misjudging brake distances, entering turns too fast, in-car distractions, and/or not looking and thinking far enough ahead often contribute to these types of collisions. As Tulsa Police Major Travis Yates frequently says, "it should piss you off that trees and poles are killing more officers than psychopaths."
- Collisions during non-emergency responses: Multiple studies have found that 50+% of serious collisions and LODDs (Line of Duty Deaths) occur when officers were **not** responding to emergency calls, just standard driving. Driving too fast for conditions and/or the situation is often a key contributor to these tragedies.
- Seatbelts: Approximately half of officers involved in fatal crashes were **not** wearing their seatbelts. Since 1980 approximately 750 of the officers who lost their lives during collisions were not wearing seatbelts – 19 percent were ejections.
- 1 – 5 Years/12 – 18 years: Officers in these ranges are most likely to lose their life in a vehicle collision. A study released in 2012 indicates that 75% of officers injured in crashes had less than five years on the job.
- Straight roads with good conditions: Contrary to popular belief, most officer vehicle fatalities are not happening in curves or on slick roads. Officer fatalities occurred on straight roads (70%) and with no precipitation (85%).



- Most vehicle fatalities involve speeds in excess of 75 MPH.
- Higher speeds = greater injury rates.
- Longer pursuit = greater accident rates.
- Night time driving death rate = 3 times higher for officers than daytime.
- 1 of 3 pursuits ends in collision.

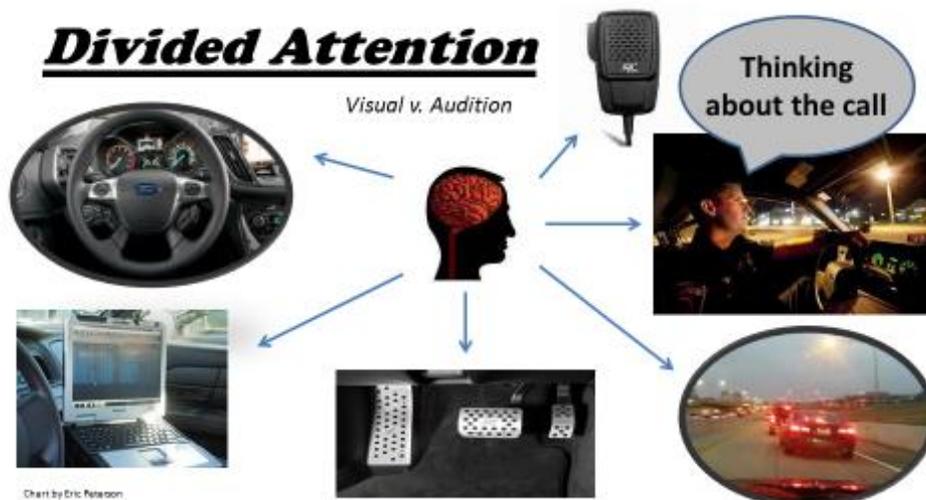
**Primary Contributing Factors in Police Collisions**



**Section 2: Other Contributing Factors to Law Enforcement Collisions**

**Decision-making is the #1 cause of roadway accidents!** The skills of discipline, knowing the limitations of the car and driver (especially during multi-tasking and when under stress), allow savvy officers to recognize situations when they need to slow down or refocus. The ability to overcome the natural reaction to push harder and drive faster in stressful situations is an advanced skill that is the hallmark of seasoned and disciplined officers.

**Distractions & Multi-tasking:** In spite of great improvements in safety (e.g., airbags, vehicle construction, emergency medicine, and officers wearing bullet proof vests) the injury and fatality rate for officers is still high. Studies, including a recent one that studied police crashes in the State of Minnesota from 2006 – 2010, indicate divided attention or distractions inside the cockpit are a major culprit contributing to law enforcement accidents.



Your brain does not multi-task, rather it “toggles” back and forth between different tasks. Thus, if you are driving near your limits, then upon adding other tasks (e.g., talking on the radio, operating emergency equipment, thinking about how you will handle the call upon arrival, and other tasks) your driving capability quickly erodes. Hence, slowing down, braking early, looking/thinking ahead can free you up to absorb other key information, such as radio traffic, tire squeal, identifying traffic that is a potential threat to you, your vehicle speed. Avoiding overload is also important to provide capacity to process what you are about to deal with upon arrival. Training can help officers improve their awareness in this area, but the ability to safely operate a car still seriously degrades as the number of tasks and stress increase.

Verbal tasks, such as talking on the radio, also rob mental concentration needed to process hazards or complex tasks. The more difficult and complex the conversation (whether it be on the radio or cell phone) the greater the possible negative effects on driver distraction. Image processing, or thinking about the call on your way to the scene after being dispatched, is relatively complex and can hinder driving performance. All the tasks described above add to the “cognitive load” an officer must handle while driving. **The bottom line is this: more tasks = slower reaction times and less control of the car!** Cognitive load can slow reactions by 0.3 to 1.0 seconds. As a reference, a vehicle travels 88 feet in one second when going 60 MPH. In addition, multi-tasking increases the likelihood of experiencing inattentive blindness (discussed later in this material).

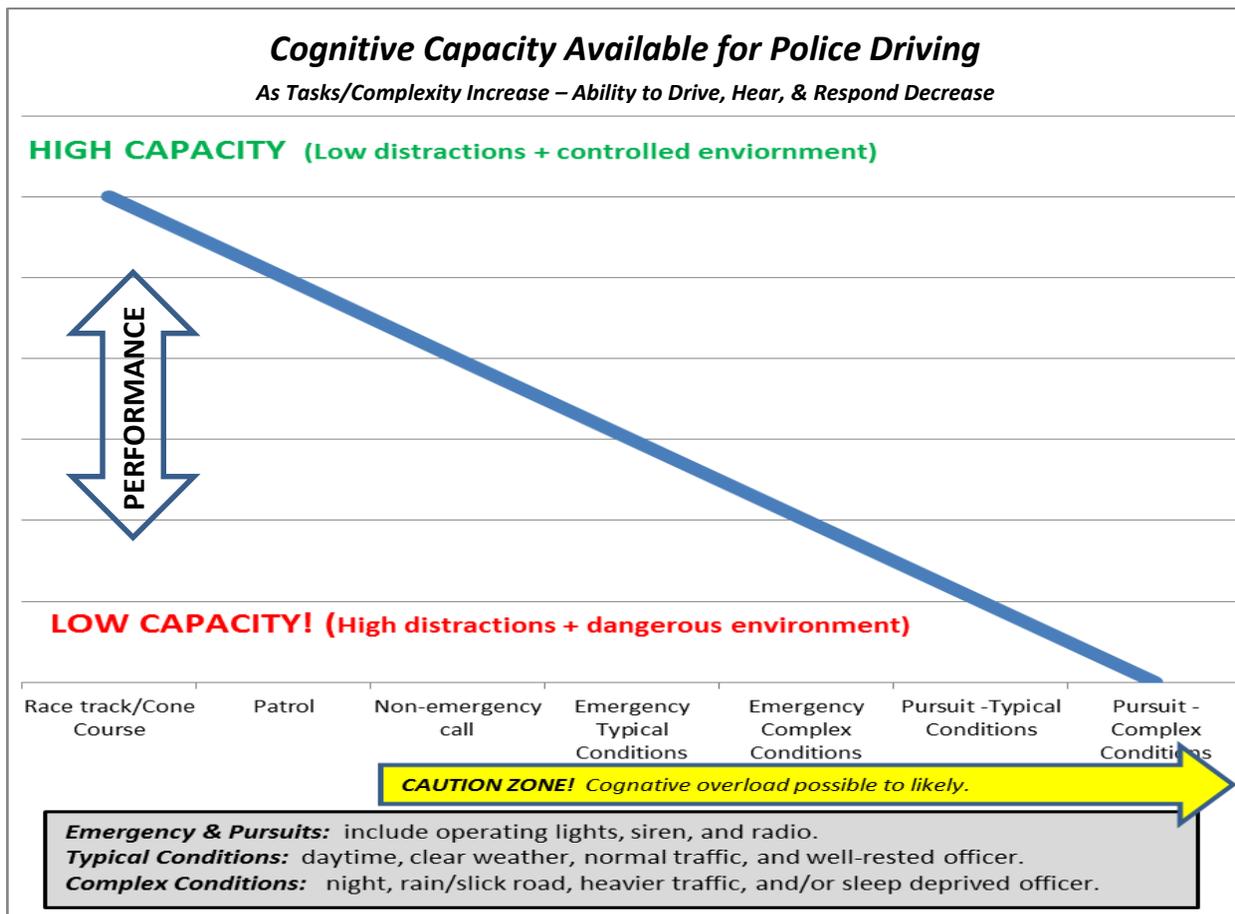


Chart by Eric Peterson

### **Sleep Deprivation** *(Excerpts from Force Science Institute Newsletter)*

Dr. Bryan Vila, a former 17-year veteran street cop in Los Angeles who now directs the Simulated Hazardous Operational Tasks laboratory in Washington State University's Sleep & Performance Research Center in Spokane. Author of the landmark book *Tired Cops*, Vila spoke at the latest IACP annual conference as a panelist discussing "Strategies for Promoting Officer Safety by Managing Fatigue and Work Hours."

First, some sobering statistics Vila shared with his IACP audience. According to a survey by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, among officers in the US and Canada:

- 53% get less than 6.5 hours of sleep daily (compared to 30% of the general population)
- 91% report feeling fatigued "routinely"
- 14% are tired when they start their work shift
- 85% drive while "drowsy"
- 39% have fallen asleep at the wheel.

Vila identified some of the many unwelcome consequences. "Fatigue decreases attentiveness, impairs physical and cognitive functioning, diminishes the ability to deal with challenges, and sets up a vicious cycle: fatigue decreases your ability to deal with stress and stress decreases your ability to deal with fatigue.

"So far as health and wellness are concerned, chronic sleep deprivation is associated with cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal disorders, sleep apnea and other sleep disorders, and metabolic syndrome—the group of risk factors that increase your chances of coronary artery disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes."

And, he estimates, fatigue is likely to be responsible for at least 15% of officer deaths and career-ending injuries from vehicle crashes and felonious assaults.

**FLAWED DRIVING.** The greatest risk from drowsy driving seems to come from cops heading home

fatigued after shift. Before the obvious hazard of falling asleep at the wheel occurs, there's the issue of momentary inattentiveness.

"A drowsy driver does not experience a steady decrease in driving ability," Vila explains. "You get random, but increasingly frequent, lapses of attention. You space out for a few seconds.

"Most of the time, you get away with it. If you're on a straight, flat road with no other traffic, it can be no harm, no foul. But if the road turns while you're inattentive, you've got a problem." He cites the case of a California officer driving home up a winding canyon on a bright Sunday morning. "During an attention lapse, the road curved and he kept going straight—out of lane and into a swarm of bicycles coming downhill. He killed 2 riders, a horrible tragedy."

During their work shift, periodic shots of adrenalin may help officers stave off drowsiness until they're off-duty, Vila speculates. "But then when the adrenalin wears off, the payback comes." More research is needed, he says, to clarify the adrenalin-fatigue interaction and its effect on performance.

**COMBAT LIMITATIONS.** Fatigue is also "a prime candidate for affecting how well you do in a combat situation," Vila says. Again, specific research findings are sparse, but "the best information so far strongly suggests that long work hours and erratic, insufficient sleep put officers more at threat in confrontations, as well as driving," he says.

Among other things, as you get more and more tired, you experience a "cognitive narrowing" that can cause you to miss important elements in your surrounding environment, Vila explains. This is similar to the so-called "tunnel vision" stress reaction that is common in a threat situation and indeed may accentuate that phenomenon, Vila says. "You're not

able to shift focus readily with a lot of competing demands on your attention.”

Moreover, the fatigue-related narrowing can also impede your decision-making. “Your judgment is likely to be compromised,” he says, “and the risk increases that you won’t make as good decisions as you otherwise would. When you’re tired, you tend to latch onto a ‘solution’ for challenges that confront you and stick with it even when objective information suggests it is wrong.

“Parts of the brain that we know are especially vulnerable to fatigue are those that help you control emotion and arousal and those that direct the executive functions, such as making and realizing the consequences of decisions.

“These elements obviously affect your ability to survive life-threatening challenges. Being tired puts you at a substantial disadvantage, compared to being fully alert and having your best faculties for detecting and addressing the threat.”

SELF-MONITORING. What’s also certain from studies of astronauts, fighter pilots, and other subjects is that “human beings are lousy judges of how impaired they are from fatigue,” Vila says.

“One of the first parts of your brain negatively affected by lack of sleep is the part that looks in on yourself and reports how you’re doing. That means that one of the first pieces of safety equipment to go down as you get more tired is your tiredness monitor.

“Your cognitive ability can be affected by fatigue, without your realizing it, to the same degree as someone who’s drunk. In tests even of elite professionals, people’s reports of how tired they are don’t relate accurately to how tired they really are. In short, you just can’t self-monitor fatigue worth a damn.”

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. “You need to be your own first line of defense in combating fatigue,” Vila emphasizes

Among the personal issues that affect whether you get the recommended 7-8 hours of quality sleep per 24 hours are these:

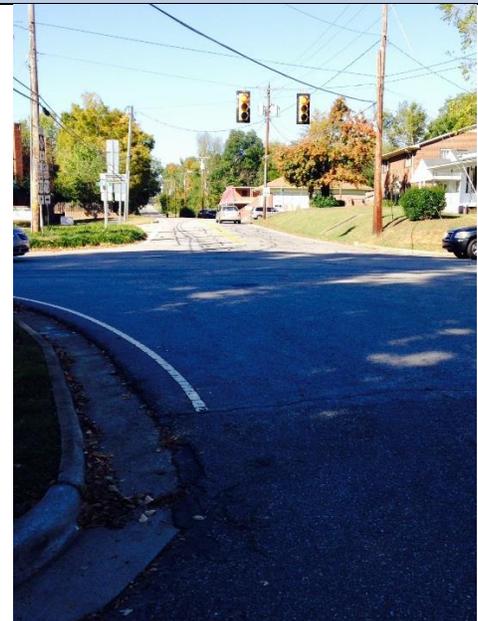
- What’s your sleep environment? “Are you sacking out in the La-Z-Boy with the game on and getting up every hour or so to do things?” he asks.
- How much caffeine are you taking in?
- What’s your overall level of health and fitness?
- Are you working a 12-hour shift and then tacking on overtime or a second job?
- If you work nights, are you scheduling sleep appropriately? “The farther into the day that you first try to sleep, the fewer consecutive hours of sleep you’re likely to get,” Vila explains. “If you can go to bed at 5 to 7 a.m., good. But if you wait ’til noon, sleep is harder to sustain.”

Dealing effectively with the fatigue issue in law enforcement is really “a tightrope walk,” Vila says. “Agencies have to back the demands for service in their community with concern for the needs of the officers they put on the street to meet those demands. But by the same token, if officers are not making rest and resilience priorities for themselves, whatever departments do may not be enough.”

## **Danger Zones & Environmental Changes**

- *“Danger zones”* are areas of increased risk for collisions, such as intersections, turns, curves, hill crests, driveways connections, and congested areas. Night driving makes all roads a danger zone.
- An *environmental change* is important to recognize, especially when conditions get more dangerous. For example, driving fast on the Interstate may not represent a significant hazard. Continuing the same speed or level of aggressive driving into a more congested area (e.g., intersections, traffic lights, two lane road, sub division, or business district) is extremely dangerous and greatly increases the risk of a collision.
- *When your environment changes your behavior must change!* Thinking about these types of situations in advance can be a big help. Once adrenaline gets pumping and an officer focuses on getting to a call quickly, it can be hard to “change gears” and slow down as the environment changes.

*Transitioning from higher speeds on the open highway back to an urban setting, where more hazards exist, requires officers to change their driving approach (e.g., greater patience and lower speeds).*



### **Inattentional Blindness**

Inattentional blindness is when someone does not see something, even if they are looking right at it. Many studies have demonstrated this point and it happens frequently in the real world. You may have seen different versions of videos with two teams passing a basketball. You're asked to count the number of passes by one team. When asked to focus on passes most people never see the "moonwalking gorilla" or other highly visible distractions. Hence, that's why citizen drivers can look right at you yet still pull in front of your patrol car. Motorcycle and bike riders experience "near hits" due to this phenomenon - people are not looking for them and don't expect to see them.

The amount of information that can be taken in by our senses is limitless. But the brain has very limited resources when it comes to attentiveness. Our senses receive much more information than can possibly be processed at one time. To combat information overload, the brain allows large amounts of information through almost entirely unassimilated, peeling off just a few pieces of selected information for a closer look.

In deciding what to focus on, the brain scans about 30 - 40 pieces of information (e.g., sights, sounds, smells, tactile information) per second, until something captures its attention. Our attention filter selects just a small amount of information to process, and anything leftover gets short shrift. The rest of the information never reaches our consciousness—thus the term inattentional blindness. Unfortunately, the brain is a master at filling in the gaps and compiling an integrated portrait of reality based on just a flickering view. Collisions happen when attention mistakenly filters away important information and the brain fills in the gaps.

One interesting experiment at Western Washington University tracked 347 pedestrians and displayed how distractions contributed to intentional blindness in basic tasks such as walking. In this experiment a brightly colored clown on a unicycle traveled by. The

individuals participating in this experiment were divided into four sections. They were either talking on the phone, listening to an mp3 player, walking by themselves or walking in pairs. The study showed that individuals engaged in cell phone conversations were least likely to notice the clown.



Actual clown from study



Out of all the distractions, those using a cell phone walked more slowly and were less likely to acknowledge others with a head nod or wave. Of those listening to music on an mp3 player – one in three saw the clown, walking with a friend, 60% saw the clown, talking on the cell phone – 8% saw the clown. According to Dr. Hyman, "They put their eyes on things, but they don't see it."

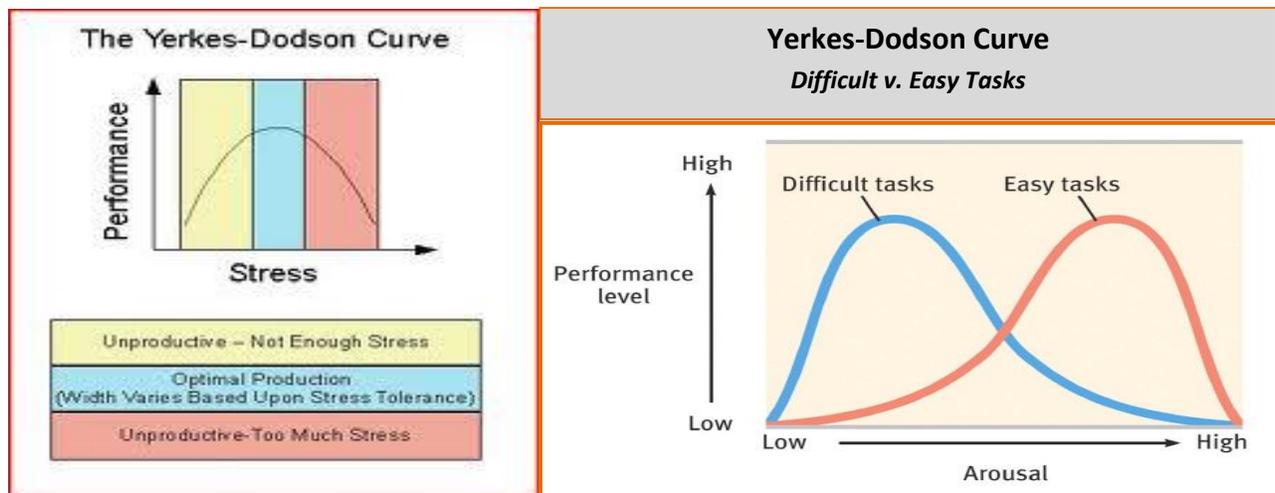
What does all this mean? **You are the clown!!**  
Be careful out there and never assume they see you coming!

### **Section #3: Survival Stress – How it Affects Police Driving**

Performance improves with arousal, up to a point then it starts to decline. This is true with police officers, athletes, soldiers, elite military teams like the Navy SEALs, SWAT officers, firefighters, EMTs, musicians, and many other professions or tasks. This is reflected in the charts below titled the “Yerkes-Dodson Curve,” or as is often called - the “Inverted U.” Please note in the right hand graph below, stress starts negatively affecting performance much earlier in the cycle with difficult tasks, such as driving a police car while multi-tasking. An example used by Dr. Jonathan Roberts (psychology professor, five-time Sports Car Club of America National Champion and police driving instructor) when teaching classes on this topic is the following:

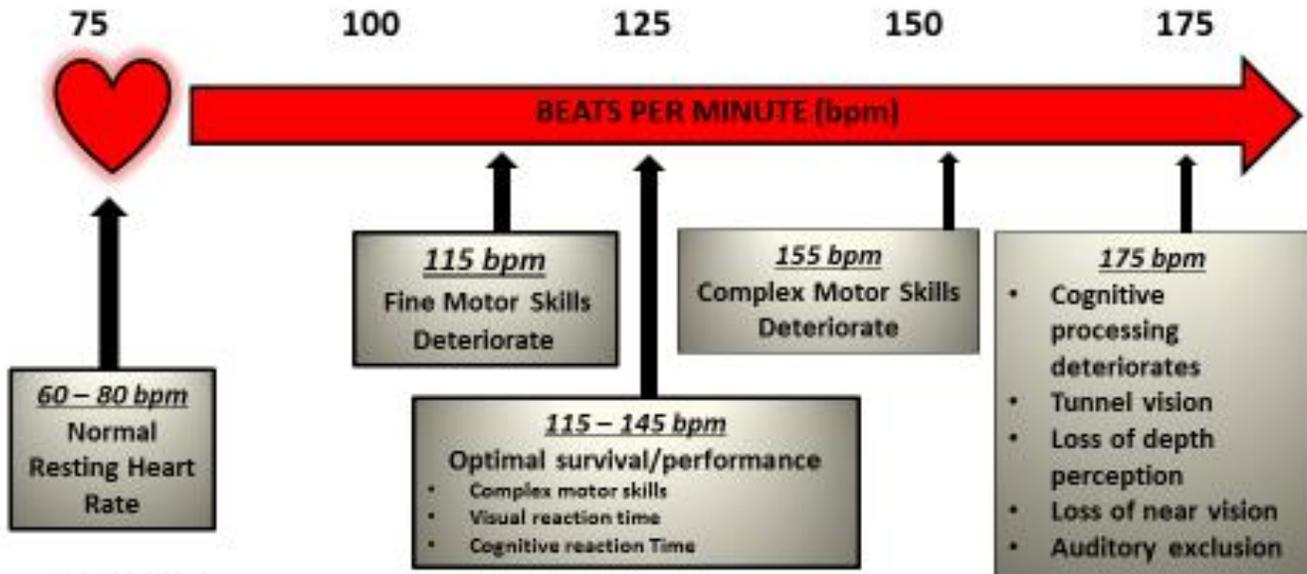
*“On a long, boring drive we do anything possible to increase arousal (e.g., turn-up the radio volume, sing, open a window, crank up the A/C, etc.). At the end of said trip, if we are trying to read directions to the place we are going (more cognitively difficult) we close the window, turn off radio, and ask our passengers to be quiet. Law enforcement driving is a difficult task, and a task that only becomes more complex when you add talking on the radio, operating lights and sirens, navigating around other cars, simply trying to keep the car on the road, and processing what the officer is going to do upon arriving at the scene.”*

Yerkes-Dodson is more evidence of how ability to drive declines and the risk of collisions increase as situations get more complex.



Stress, fear, and/or anxiety can cause an officer’s heart rate to skyrocket almost instantly. A well-known chart from Lt. Col. Dave Grossman shows the effects of hormonal or fear induced heart rate increases resulting from sympathetic nervous system arousal. Exercised induced increases do not have the same effect. An adaptation of the Grossman chart, presented on the next page, shows the negative effects this naturally occurring condition can have on one’s driving and ability to safely arrive at a call. Engaging the sympathetic nervous system, as happens when officers are under stress when responding to a call, can naturally result in adrenaline, hormones, and other chemicals being dumped into the body. As Major Yates of the Tulsa, Police Department often states in his seminars, “there is no drug that will take your pulse from 60 to 160 almost instantly. When this occurs you are messed up!” The combination of stress and multi-tasking can have effect of essentially making officers impaired drivers.

## **Effects of Hormonal Induced Heart Rate Increase**



This “dump” severely diminishes officers’ abilities to operate a vehicle. Interestingly, the same effects or resulting perceptual distortions (e.g., tunnel vision, auditory exclusion, or things moving in slow motion) that can save one’s life during a deadly force encounter, yet can cost an officer their life in a car. Auditory exclusion or time distortions can result in not hearing critical radio traffic, being oblivious to tire squeal or wind noise indicating that an officer is driving much faster than they realize (i.e., “speed creep”). Tunnel vision, loss of peripheral vision, means officers often don’t see threats or impending collisions because they are either looking off the hood of the car or their vision tunneling due to the stress. What makes this condition even more difficult to combat is that most officers don’t realize, in the moment, the extent to which their physical and cognitive skills are being diminished. In addition, as law enforcement cognitive control and tactical stress expert Dr. Jonathan Page reminds us that “stress robs decision-making ability,” further handicapping officers’ ability to drive safely during emergency responses.

### **DRIVING AT HIGH SPEEDS**

- ✓ Heart rate increases
- ✓ Vision narrows
- ✓ Depth perception goes away
- ✓ Loss of peripheral vision
- ✓ Impaired ability to judge distance
- ✓ Slowed reaction times
- ✓ Auditory exclusion Fine & complex motor skills degrade
- ✓ Forebrain functions and cognitive processing slows (decision-making impaired)

### **Combating Stress-Induced Effects When Driving**

**Scan** - Put your head on a swivel, scan smoothly vertically (up and down the road) and side to side.

**Slow down - Focus on “What’s Important Now” (WIN)!** You are cognitively overloaded and can’t process everything that is being thrown at you (e.g., speed, vehicular traffic, radio traffic, and unpredictable citizen drivers). Knowing your “limits” is an advanced skill possessed by disciplined officers – there is only so much a human, even a well-trained police officer can do!

**Breathe!** This is a proven way to mitigate negative effects from stress. Get up to speed on combat or other breathing techniques that work for you.

## **Section #4: Tactics, Strategies, and Critical Skills to Survive on the Road**

1. **Speed (Slow down!!!)** – High speeds reduce reaction time as well as decreasing or eliminating an officer's ability to react to unexpected situations (e.g., car pulling out in front of them, or correcting a skid). As one trainer says, speed takes away all variables and escape routes. Get in the habit of checking your speed. Remember, when you're "jacked up" on adrenaline, under stress, or focused on other tasks, it's easy to drive a lot faster than you think you are going.
2. **Brake Early!!!** Going too fast into a corner, turn, hill crest, intersection or other feature (especially at night) is the leading cause of single vehicle collisions resulting in officers' cars hitting various roadside hazards. Entering turns and other road features slow and under control is critical to officer and bystander safety. Stress can cause tunnel vision and impair depth perception, resulting in officer's braking too late for approaching features. Hence, the parallel strategy of maintaining a substantial reactionary gap (via slowing down) AND initiating braking much earlier than a driver thinks necessary work in tandem to help officers drive safely. It's literally better to start braking 50 feet too early than 5 inches too late. As the time and data acquisition results demonstrate in the video: "slower really is faster" – and most importantly, safer!

### ***Little Margin for Error Maintaining a Buffer/Reactionary Gap is Critical***



3. **Seatbelts – Wear your seatbelt!** It's OK to "punch out" at low speeds (e.g., less than 10 MPH+/-) if the officer is concerned about the threat of ambush or has arrived safely on the scene of a call and needs to exit quickly.
4. **Intersections**
  - ✓ Come to a complete stop for a red light or stop sign (a slow roll may be fine in the middle of the night or when clear visibility is available).
  - ✓ Maximum speed through an intersection with a light or stop sign should be the prevailing speed limit.
  - ✓ Cover the brake with your foot as you go through the intersection to decrease reaction time.
  - ✓ Reserve sufficient buffer to react to and avoid citizen drivers who don't see you coming.
5. **Safety Buffer – Leave Margin for Error and the Unexpected!**

Don't drive the car more than 80 - 85% of the car or driver's potential! Leave the remaining 15 – 20% in reserve for unexpected situations or misjudgments (such as entering a turn too quickly, or a civilian vehicle, pedestrian, or cyclist cross your path). Once you start to lose control of the car, especially when it's unexpected and the driver is under stress, the likelihood of preventing a collision is severely reduced. This is especially true with so

little room for mistakes on the roadway, with curbs, poles, other vehicles, and ditches always being just inches or feet away.

#### 6. **Electronic Stability Control (ESC) & ABS**

Definition from Wikipedia: **Electronic stability control (ESC)**, also referred to as **electronic stability program (ESP)** or **dynamic stability control (DSC)**, is a computerized technology <sup>[1][2]</sup> that improves the safety of a [vehicle's stability](#) by detecting and reducing loss of traction (*skidding*).<sup>[3]</sup> When ESC detects loss of steering control, it automatically applies the brakes to help "steer" the vehicle where the driver intends to go. Braking is automatically applied to wheels individually, such as the outer front wheel to counter [oversteer](#) or the inner rear wheel to counter [understeer](#). Some ESC systems also reduce engine power until control is regained. ESC does not improve a vehicle's cornering performance; instead, it helps to minimize the loss of control. According to [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#) and the U.S. [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#), one-third of fatal accidents could be prevented by the use of the technology.<sup>1</sup>

ESC and ABS - "use it, don't abuse it"!! If you find yourself regularly engaging the ESC and/or ABS, this means you are pushing the car too hard, are using up your safety buffer or reactionary gap, and may be on the verge of losing control of your patrol car. ESC and ABS are great tools but should NOT be relied on regularly to get yourself out of trouble. Ideally, smooth and controlled driving should keep you from engaging these safety features. If you make a mistake or are surprised by a situation they are a tool to help you and provide a small margin of error when you inadvertently make a mistake, push too hard, and/or get surprised by an unexpected situation.

## ***Drive Smart***

### ***Discipline & Decision-Making Trump Car Control Skills***

Police Driving: "It's easier to stay out of trouble than to get out of trouble"

- ✓ Avoiding crash @ last second = **Low "batting average"**
- ✓ Anticipating danger + reactionary gap/safety buffer = **HIGH "batting average" for collision avoidance**
- ✓ Overconfident driver = danger & high collision risk

#### **Major Yates advice to fellow officers: Always ask yourself a few key questions before driving fast...**

Unfortunately there are thousands of examples of officers losing lives and being severely injured because they took unnecessary chances behind the wheel, when it wasn't worth it. Two real examples that cost officers their lives include: 1) speeding at over 100 MPH, without a seatbelt, to a shoplifter in custody; 2) travelling at high speeds, without a seatbelt to a domestic that turned out to be a child who did not want to take a bath. Situations like these happen too often in law enforcement. A quick visit to [www.odmp.org](http://www.odmp.org) will verify this. Of California law enforcement fatalities due to speed, 45% occurred when **not** responding to calls.

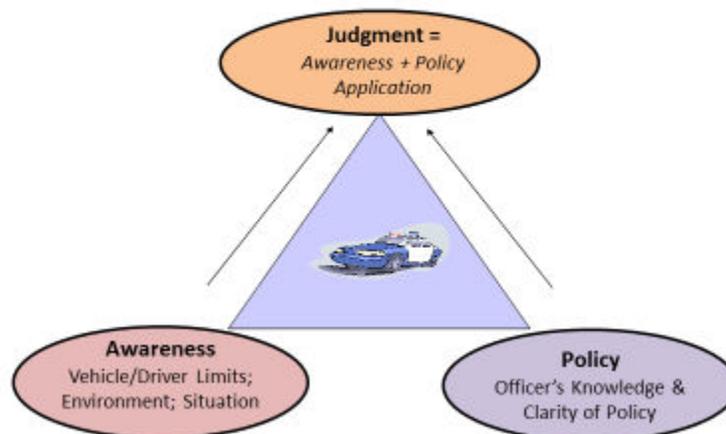
Upon receiving a call it's a natural reaction to want to get to the scene as soon as possible. As officers know, *much of law enforcement is learning to override your "natural" reactions to situations*. Therefore, planning in advance how you will react to various types of calls is essential. This aids in combating negative effects from adrenaline dumps that often come with a call response. Arriving a few seconds earlier rarely makes a difference as the situation is often over upon the officer's arrival. Most officers can't count the number of calls they sped to that turned out to be nothing. As Major Yates jokingly says, "who actually want to get to a fight in progress?"

As an officer you need to get in the habit of asking yourself these critical questions during all responses where you find yourself driving faster than normal and taking chances:

- 1) Is it worth it?
- 2) Is it going to make a difference?
- 3) What's Important Now (WIN)?

Answer to the WIN question: Getting to the call safely and ready to help!

### #1 Priority in Police Driver Training: Judgment & Decision-Making



Hillsborough's citizens, town government, and HPD have a lot invested in you. The amount of time and expense it takes to train, equip, and retain good officers is substantial. Quite simply, you are an extremely valuable asset and vital part of Hillsborough's public safety team! Police officers already put themselves at risk in so many situations.

*It is not worth risking your life or serious injury speeding to most calls. There are calls that require officers to take greater risks to arrive quickly as reasonably possible, but most calls don't fall into that category. As a veteran officer recently stated, "my family needs me to come home after each shift." Your family, friends, co-workers, supervisors, management, and elected officials don't want to see you get hurt unnecessarily.*

Officers have said the following when situations like breaking off a chase occur: "Yes, it's a slap in the face. Yes, it pisses you off. Yes, that dirt bag got away and deserves to be arrested." More importantly, these same officers said that by exercising discipline 1) they are safe and available to come back the next day protecting Hillsborough's citizens, 2) unnecessary risk to innocent citizens was avoided, and 3) they will be ready to catch the perpetrators later - on the HPD's terms or situation of choosing!

# **#1 Focus**

## ***Vision Up = No Surprises***



### **Vision/Scanning – An Officer’s Best Weapon in Identifying Threats and Maintaining Control**

- What differentiates poor, average, good, and great drivers is when, where, and how long they focus their vision. Visual tracking tests have proved this to be the case with other law enforcement activities/skills, such as successfully engaging an armed threat in a shootout. Vision is a big part of what separates world class soccer players, target shooters, and drivers from other elite performers in their respective fields. Smooth patterns of visually scanning your environment help with earlier identification of threats. This is important since **being surprised dramatically slows reaction times and often results in making the wrong decision**. Looking down the road, scanning, and thinking ahead for “what’s next” limits surprises; plus it helps officers avoid a startle response. This is a critical skill/tool in dealing with dynamism – having to make fast choices in a rapidly changing situation – and why fighter pilots are so vigilant about scanning their surroundings.
- Looking far enough down the road (5 – 15 seconds) or through a corner so you can see your exit can assist in overcoming “target fixation” or freezing that results when an unexpected threat/hazard appears (e.g., deer, car pulling in front of your path, or a roadway obstruction like a truck tire carcass in the road). Your typical driver will drive right into the threat they were hoping to avoid because they stared it down until impact. Example, you’ve probably had a squirrel run out in front of your car. You visually “lock-in” on it hoping to avoid it as it runs in front of your path. You then notice your car is drifting toward the squirrel and you’re about to run him (or her) over. Had you simply looked down the road and taken a “wide angle” lens view of the situation there was plenty of room for an easy escape by turning behind the squirrel’s path. The bottom line is once your eyes “stick” on an object, the hands follow. Your car will usually go where the eyes are focused. *It’s a natural reaction to look at the threat. The key is to recognize as quickly as possible that your eyes are “stuck” in the wrong place and you need to move your vision down the road.* This is also called using a zoom lens, according to author and expert on visual attention when driving, Kenneth C. Mills, Ph.D. You then need to zoom out to use your wide-angle view to see the big picture and find an escape route or best available action. If you have no visual plan, you will freeze.

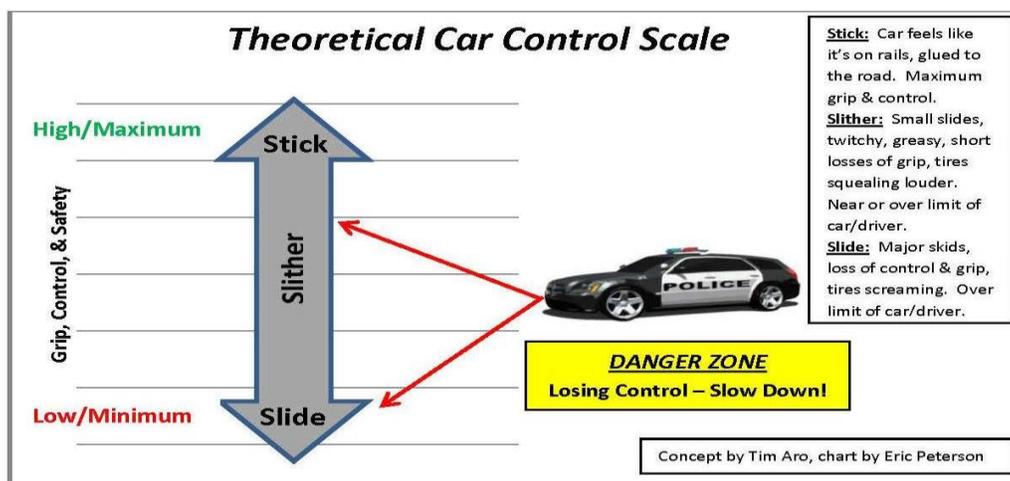
Not looking far enough down the road or looking just off the hood of the patrol car, can make things happen much faster, much like a blur. If you’ve ever gotten to a call and can’t recall much about your trip to the scene,

there's a good chance you were not looking or thinking ahead. Not looking ahead and thinking about "what's next" on the road can start or add to the negative physiological and psychological impacts and perceptions that officers have to battle.

- Since practice leads to automatic behaviors, looking ahead, learning to not fixate on threats, and looking for escape routes are all things officers can monitor and practice while on patrol. **These habits need to be practiced at slow to normal speeds. Officers should exercise caution whenever trying new visual routines as you can cut corners off, have a collision, or make other mistakes while getting accustomed to using new visual patterns!** Using your time during driver training is an excellent and safe place to experiment in developing this skill. Hazard perception and continuously looking ahead takes effort and work to turn it into a habit.
- 2 - 2 second rules (Recommendations from driving expert and researcher Kenneth Mills, PhD):
  - ✓ Look for two seconds in each direction to ensure you are getting a clear sight picture when making a left or right turn (e.g., pulling out from a side street to major intersection). This is critical, especially if you are in a hurry, because you are more likely to suffer from inattentive blindness and not see a car, bike, motorcycle, or pedestrian as you pull out. Also, today's newer cars have much larger A-pillars that often block converging traffic. This problem is compounded in patrol cars equipped with radar, MDTs, and video systems.
  - ✓ Don't ever take your eyes off the road for more than two (2) seconds at a time. Actually, one (1) second glances are preferred, yet your car can travel 80.67 feet in that one second if you are going 55 MPH. Add that to your reaction distance 1.5 seconds or 120.9 feet), brake engagement distance (0.3 seconds or 24.2 feet), and physical force distance (134.4 feet), it will take you 360.27 feet before you stop – a lot can happen over the length of a football field plus the end zones.

### Sliding and tire squeal: Warning signs of trouble

The "stick, slither, and slide" scale is referenced during Hillsborough's driver training classes as one way to monitor if you are getting too close to the limit of control (either yours and/or the vehicle's). The car should always be in the "stick" mode, feeling like it's on rails or glued to the pavement. This is where the driver has maximum control of the car. Once the car starts to move around (such as sliding, experiencing understeer/push, or oversteer/loose conditions) these are good indicators the driver is on the verge of losing control.



Tire squeal is another sign the driver/car are close to or actually over the limit (theirs and the car's). This is a signal the driver needs to slow down. It's easy to get the car "slithering" as cognitive overload and distractions impair driving capacity (e.g., not looking far enough down the road and being caught by surprise, braking too late, turning too late, entering curves or road features too fast). In the racing world, drivers are often taught to keep the car in "slither" mode, but they have the luxury of driving in controlled environments with an abundance of safety devices and runoff room. Officers have little or no room for error in the real world – impacts with light poles, trees, and other vehicles are unforgiving. A "slide" condition is the type of driving one would see on the Dukes of Hazard TV series or movie. While it looks cool, it is slow, and dangerous. This should be avoided at all costs. Slow and composed inside the cockpit does not mean you are losing time. In fact, it's a good indicator that you are under control, ready for the unexpected, and likely to arrive at the call swiftly and safely. When an officer starts to feel like they are pushing hard to get to a call there is a good chance they are going beyond their limits as a driver, given the conditions of unpredictable citizen drivers and the negative effects from cognitive overload. Remember – "slower is faster"!

An officer's batting average for saving themselves mid-skid or taking evasive action at the last second to avoid a car that pulls in front of you is low! Hence the reason for one of the HPD school mottos: **"It's easier to stay out of trouble than to get yourself out of trouble."** One of the most impressive skills a police officer can develop as a driver is the ability to maintain a safety buffer or "reactionary gap" to deal with unexpected situations as well as anticipate and avoid trouble when behind the wheel. This is simply done by 1) watching your speed and getting on the brakes earlier than you need to, especially when entering "danger zones," 2) scanning, looking, and thinking ahead for "what's next."

## **Section 5: Advanced Skills for Police Driving (Mental & Physical Control)**

### **STEP-UP (Self-Talk for Enhanced Performance Under Pressure)**

According to Dr. Michael Asken, with the Pennsylvania State Police, and Loren Christiansen (retired police officer and attorney) who authored Warrior Mindset with Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, there are several important aspects to understand in using tactical self-talk to your advantage:

- ✓ Self-talk is our internal monologue always occurs before you say or do anything.
- ✓ It's fast and though you are often unaware of it, it's there.
- ✓ Changing your self-talk can modify or improve your response and performance.
- ✓ Being able to STEP-UP is like having your instructor or coach sitting on your shoulder talking you through critical situations, such as running a Code 3 call or a deadly force encounter. Actively using self-talk to improve performance is called STEPPING-UP.

An example of STEPPING-UP is using the well-known acronym BRASS for shooting: Breath, Relax, Aim, Sight, Squeeze. Effective STEPPING-UP should always be positive, describing what you should do, not what you should not do. Terms should be short and action/results-oriented.

Artwohl and Christensen state in their book Deadly Force Encounters, **"The more complex a motor skill behavior is, the more likely it is to be forgotten or bungled under extreme stress."** Due to the complexity of police driving, juggling many tasks negatively affects an officer's ability to safely operate the vehicle. Therefore, developing a simple STEPPING-UP acronym, cue words, phrases, or mantra to use during the "heat of the moment" can be a

major help in effectively executing this task. Officers wanting to do this should develop whatever helps them focus and execute the key tasks necessary for a safe arrival. Examples below include one acronym and two phrases:

- ✓ **SBB** - **S**can (look and think ahead to avoid surprises)  
**B**rake Early (to enter all danger zones under control)  
**B**reathe (to relax, maintain clear thinking, and clear vision)
  
- ✓ “Slower is faster”
  
- ✓ “Slow in, safe out”

### **Combat Breathing**

Officers need to do something to break the cycling of escalating stress and tension that brings along performance robbing effects, such as tunnel vision, other perceptual distortions, and slowed cognitive reasoning. Breathing is effectively used in scores of situations to improve performance (e.g., martial arts, combat situations by military and SWAT teams, Olympic athletes, race car drivers, basketball players before taking a free throw, public speaking, platform diving, yoga, and Lamaze just to mention a few).

A typical method taught in law enforcement is the 4-4-4 method, slowly inhale through your nose for four seconds, hold for four seconds, and release the breath over four seconds. Perform three to four cycles of this routine. There are many variants on this technique. Officers should explore what method works best for them. Remembering to breathe during an emergency response or pursuit has been cited by officers as a key to helping them remain calm and performing well under pressure. Practicing your preferred technique while on routine patrol makes it more likely that you’ll remember to implement this effective tool during an actual response.

### **Balance: Thinking about the Call v. Your Driving**

Should an officer focus 100% on driving and getting to the call safely? Or, should 100% of their focus be on what they may be facing and how they’ll respond upon arrival? The correct answer is that each officer needs to find their own balance on how to allocate their focus when responding to a call. Fixating exclusively on driving means an officer may arrive unprepared for the events awaiting them. Thinking about the call (i.e., “living the call”) can be so distracting that it puts the officer at a greater risk of a collision. Clearly, both extremes are not safe.

A veteran officer shared this insightful observation about his driving during the early years of his career - he was having a lot of near collisions when responding to calls. His self-analysis revealed that he was spending too much time imagining what the call would be like, often pulling from his library of experience (i.e., maybe it will be like domestic calls x, y, or z). The officer determined he was getting into too much detail in his thoughts about preparing for the call. He scaled back the detail and simplified his thoughts in preparing for the call while in route and focused more on driving. Specifically, more attention was directed to looking ahead and breathing. Since making that change in he’s noticed a dramatic difference and rarely has a “near hit” on the way to a call.

### **Skill & Confidence**

Confidence must be balanced by good judgment. Self-efficacy or having confidence can improve one’s performance and lower stress, up to a point. The downside is risk of overconfidence leading to an officer getting in over their head (i.e., going too fast) and leaving no margin for error or gap to deal with the unexpected. Multiple studies have

shown that officers who have recently taken a driving school where car control skills are the primary focus have higher accident rates. Overconfidence occurs when officers believe their perceived higher skill level will allow them to push the car closer to its limits – in the unpredictable world of police driving, this is a dangerous and potentially deadly assumption to make. Being confident doesn't make you immune from the laws of physics, unexpected situations, and citizen drivers who are oblivious to you even when you're operating emergency equipment. Confidence and trust in the skills you've developed is a good thing (e.g., looking/thinking ahead, combat breathing, slowing down for danger zones, and others). Learning and establishing limitations for what you can safely handle is critically important. The bottom line when it comes to lessons or car handling skills learned from driver training: "use it, don't abuse it." Hence, police driving schools should emphasize judgment, decision-making, awareness, and incorporate scenario-based situations to practice these skills under stress.

In the United Kingdom (U.K.) police officers are required to take three weeks of driver training in the academy. They are required to take another three weeks once working with an agency before they can even run emergency traffic. Then, an additional three weeks before they can partake in pursuits or high-speed responses. In North Carolina, most cadets get one week of driver training during Basic Law Enforcement Training. After graduation, many officers rarely or never receive further training. It is not financially feasible to provide the U.K. system of training to officers in most agencies in the United States and North Carolina, even though the extreme hazards of operating a police vehicle warrant the thorough and impressive training provided in other parts of the world. So, the reality of the situation is determining how to get the most "bang" from our precious training hours.

***"You don't rise to the occasion,  
you sink to your level of training."***



Driving is a perishable skill, meaning that it erodes without regular practice. Since police officers can't train all the time paying particular attention to the following priorities during your driver training will help you maximize benefit when you're able to train:

- ✓ Decision-making (are you making the right choices)
- ✓ Discipline and emotional control
- ✓ Awareness of the performance robbing effects of stress
- ✓ Environmental awareness
- ✓ Scanning or looking for "what's next" to avoid surprises
- ✓ Braking early and entering all "danger zones" under control (i.e., slower is faster). Slow in, safe out.
- ✓ Breathing
- ✓ Leaving a safety buffer or reactionary gap to deal with the unexpected. The busier things get, the more the officer needs to slow down due to the negative impacts of "cognitive load" from multi-tasking.

- ✓ Encouraging officers to use imagery as a way to keep their skills sharp, even if they can't make it to the track to practice driving and decision-making skills. Use imagery to picture yourself looking ahead, scanning, peeking through the corner to make sure your exit is safe, braking early to enter turns and intersections under control, breathing, slowing your response when the environment gets more congested or the call priority is downgraded, etc.

### ***Discipline & Decision-Making***

Few other jobs require the ability to respond in such dynamic and changing environments, with life and death consequences, as a police officer. The necessity to respond quickly and appropriately to such diverse situations and dangerous situations is one reason so few are capable of doing the job well. Police officers generally have a higher comfort level with risk (see risk homeostasis theory by Dr. Gerald Wilde) which helps them perform well in many difficult situations. On the flip side, it can result in officers getting complacent or not recognizing the danger in other situations, such as driving a patrol car too fast for conditions.

Many collisions are not due to insufficient driving skill or knowledge - it's a lack of discipline, decision-making, and emotional control (even if these lapses occur just for a moment). Certainly, being on cognitive overload or being impacted from stress can play a role in these situations. The urge to drive fast or push harder when responding to a call is natural and it can be powerful. Controlling or overriding those factors can be difficult, but that's why few people are qualified to be police officers. If it was easy anyone could do it.

### ***Discipline: What Does "Fast" Feel Like*** ***Calm in the Car = Car on the Scene***



*If your car is sliding around like the "Dukes of Hazard" and/or your ESC is activating regularly: 1) your adrenaline and the negative effects of stress are hurting your ability to drive safely, 2) vision may deteriorate - things may start to appear like a blur, 3) you are losing control of the vehicle, and 4) you are not calm and prepared for what awaits you on scene.*

*Your car should feel like it's "on rails" or like you are "going to the grocery store" (i.e., calm and controlled).*

Training, experience, demonstrations, and information from in-car data systems used in patrol vehicles cars and race cars proves that "slower is faster." It is important to know these facts because during the heat of a critical response everyone will have the urge to push faster. Race car drivers have this urge as well, but they know in certain conditions they have to exercise discipline to slow down and drive in control. For instance, racing in the rain, on low

grip surfaces, or on slow/tight corners they too have to use the “slower is faster” concept. Inexperienced and less disciplined racers drive too fast in these conditions, often skidding and sliding through turns, thus losing time, spinning, or wrecking. The best drivers literally override their instinct to push hard and drive slower into these “danger zones.” The result is they do a better job of keeping the car on the track, not wrecking, and having faster times.

*Putting discipline to the test: “rescue fever.”* One of the most urgent calls an officer can respond to is a call for help from another officer. This is a classic scenario that puts the officer in a dangerous predicament – the need to respond quickly but ensure they arrive to render aid. To have an in-route collision just makes the situation even worse. The complexity of this situation compels a savvy officer to think and plan out how they will respond beforehand. This requires thought, discussion, and mental rehearsal through Tactical Performance Imagery to help override the immense emotional pressure officers will feel at this time. You know that “slower is faster” via data, training, and experience so you have to make your intellect override strong emotional reactions. As Kure Beach Lt. Andy Everhart says in the “Slower is Faster” video, you’re not a help to anyone, if you don’t get there.

### **Tactical Performance Imagery (TPI)**

Stress increased during situations where officers have not had enough training and/or lack experience. There are many situations that occur infrequently, yet officers are expected to handle them in spite of having little training or experience. What’s the best way to prepare for these types of situations? Many officers rely on Tactical Performance Imagery to prepare and improve critical skills. According to Dr. Michael Asken) - TPI is the use of your imagination to improve specific military or police skills, it’s also called “crisis response rehearsal.” A large number of Olympians, elite athletes, race car drivers, police, military, firefighters, and others use visualization (similar to TPI) to maximize their performance under pressure – it’s proven to work. One veteran officer was quoted in a book that to prepare himself before each shift, he closes his eyes and visualizes three things, this first is an emergency response or pursuit - what he will/won’t do in particular situations.

Pre-planning, thinking beforehand about what you situations you may face behind the wheel prepares officers to make rapid decisions in a quickly changing environment. Being prepared through TPI or even periodically running through “what if” scenarios can help filter out some of the negative impacts of emotion. Don’t forget, stress can slow down cognitive process and forebrain functions during a call (i.e., your ability to think quickly and clearly).

A major advantage of TPI or visualization is that it reduces surprises and uncertainty. Reaction times slow, whether it’s in a driving or deadly force situation, when once is surprised or unsure how to react. Sports Car Club of America solo/autocross racers get no practice runs on a course before competition starts. They are only allowed to walk the course beforehand and never run the same course twice. Needless to say the course looks much different when driving at 10 to 30 times the speed they walked it. Their very first run on the course counts. Olympic downhill skiers face a similar challenge. Therefore, using one’s mind to rehearse rapidly evolving situations is critical to success. Therefore, the use of imagery allows national-level autocrossers and downhill skiers to perform on their first run as if they run the course dozens of times before. Taking advantage of this training method is important for officers 1) in those areas that are critically important, and 2) for those they get limited practice or real world experience. Elite shooters are most effective in replicating conditions during their mental imagery. These results repeated in many other types of examples studies.

When it comes to TPI and driving, the most important areas to practice in your imagery are:

- ✓ Safely navigating key danger zones in your jurisdiction, such as curves and intersections.
- ✓ Slowing down when you start to get overloaded with tasks/distractions, or deteriorating conditions.
- ✓ Entering dangerous features in a controlled manner (“slow in, safe out”).
- ✓ Controlling emotions
- ✓ Vision: 1) scanning, 2) looking ahead, and 3) rehearsing/practicing where you will focus your vision when something unexpected happens to avoid the startle response or “target fixation.” In other words, quickly moving past the “oh shit” stage that will naturally occur. For example, your self-talk may be something like the following: “Oh shit, that car just pulled out in front of me. Stop looking at the car, look ahead for an escape route (i.e., from zoom to wide angle lens).” This is a critical and advanced skill that requires regular practice and monitoring to develop. Being cognizant of what and when you are looking at something (especially potential threats) while on routine patrol – this is an important step in developing these skills. Using TPI to improve your visual routine and skills increases the likelihood of reacting optimally during a panic situation. Race car drivers actually visualize where and when they will be looking at certain cues on track during their runs.

### **Quick Survival Techniques for the Road**

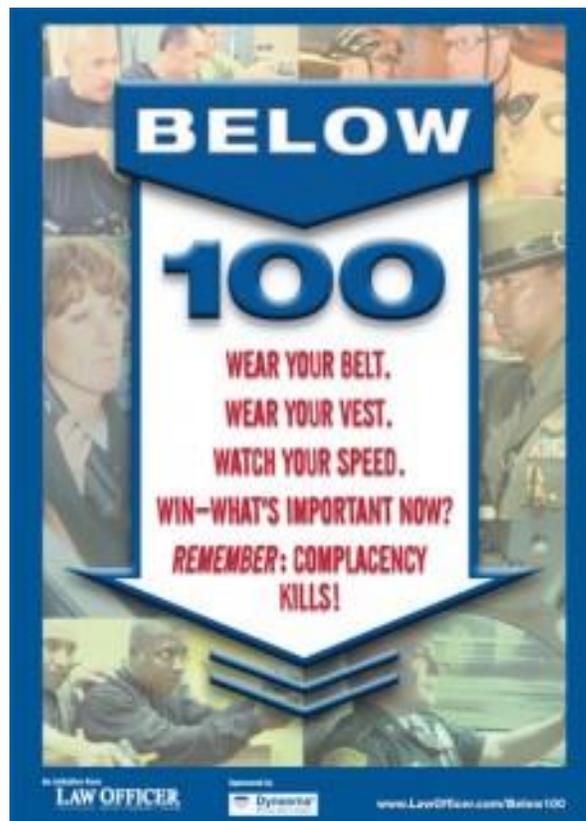
- Two hands on wheel as often as possible. Driving with one-hand offers less control of the vehicle, especially if multiple steering inputs are required in different directions, such as an evasive maneuver or counter steering to correct a skid. The driver also has less feel for what the car is doing. Slowed or delayed response can occur due to bi-lateral symmetry. One side of the body wants to do the same thing as the other. Hence, it is common when quick steering movement is needed for an evasive maneuver for the one-handed driver to wait until the second hand can grasp the wheel before steering input takes place. In addition, to greatly slowing the officer’s response the undesirable “startle” reflex can kick-in. When you have to drive one-handed recognize that you have less control of the vehicle and need to increase your safety buffer by slowing down.
  - ✓ 2 hands = prepared and relax.
  - ✓ 1 hand = unprepared and less control = slow down!
- Pre-shift inspection of car, especially tire pressure and tread depth as both factors make a huge difference in traction and stopping distance, especially in wet weather. If you start a pursuit or emergency response you want to know the condition your tires to factor in your decision-making process through the event.
- Have a plan (e.g., I will or will not pursue or drive fast in certain situations/conditions).
- Learn from each other: talk about driving and response strategy with fellow officers. Add driving as a weekly topic at shift briefings, debate videos, stories, and articles you’ve seen with each other.
- Talk to fellow officers about seatbelts, speed, and other driving issues - this is how real changes occur in police departments.
- Sign up for the Officer Down Memorial Page notices at [www.odmp.org](http://www.odmp.org). Please all our fallen heroes to continue sharing lessons from their service. The notices, while sad and sobering are invaluable reminders to officers to follow the key principles covered in this curriculum as well as the five tenants of Below 100.

1. **Wear Your Belt** - It might sound simple to you, even unnecessary, but the truth is too many agencies don't mandate belt wear. And even among those that do, many officers ignore policy because the culture doesn't value it. The truth: Seatbelts save lives.

2. **Wear Your Vest** - We know vests save lives. We know that bullets can fly when we least expect it. Add to that the fact that body armor can improve your likelihood of surviving a car accident or other traumatic event and you quickly see why you must wear it. Always. Period.

3. **Watch Your Speed** - Why do cops drive fast? Because they can, right? Well, driving faster than what conditions warrant is a sure way to get in trouble. Of course there are times when getting on scene quickly is critical. But these times are rare. Too often, officers are speeding—just because they can. In the process, they are putting themselves and the public at perilous risk for no good reason.

4. **WIN—What's Important Now?** It's a simple question that can elicit profound results. It's a question that will lead to deliberate action, not reaction. If you are constantly prioritizing what's most important, you won't have time for the distractions that can get you in trouble, hurt or killed.



## ***Police Driver Safety Resources (Updated 4/3/15)***

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- Officer Down Memorial Page: [www.odmp.org](http://www.odmp.org)
- North Carolina League of Municipalities
  - ✓ “Slower is Faster” video and discussion points
  - ✓ “Slower is Faster” on-line course
  - ✓ High Speed, Pursuit Guidelines & Emergency Response Training
  - ✓ 2-day driver safety course for instructors/trainers, designed to share ideas departments can implement when developing or updating their police driver safety program
  - ✓ Training seminars
  - ✓ Consulting and risk analysis from NCLM staff
  - ✓ Article: “Police Driver Training Seminars Aim to Help Save Lives, Careers, and Money,” April 2012 issue - Southern City
  - ✓ Article: “Seminars Emphasize Police Department Policy on Driver Safety,” May 2012 issue - Southern City
- [www.policedriving.com](http://www.policedriving.com) Operated by Tulsa Police Major and Below 100 co-founder Travis Yates. Mayor Yates is a former law enforcement trainer of the year and one of the leading experts on police driving. The website is an outstanding resource for information, articles, etc.
- ALERT International (Association of Law Enforcement Emergency Response Trainers): [www.alertinternational.com](http://www.alertinternational.com)
- North Carolina Justice Academy and North Carolina Community Colleges
- Below 100: [www.below100.com](http://www.below100.com)
- Cognitive Command (C2) [www.see-too.com](http://www.see-too.com) website for publications and training by Dr. Jonathan Page, author of “NeuroCop” and soon to be released [www.PoliceOne.com](http://www.PoliceOne.com) column by the same title. Neuroscientist specializing in law enforcement training. Has worked with agencies in London, Pennsylvania, Baltimore, Hillsborough, and others. Has also presented at the ALERT International and ILEETA (International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers) conferences. Extensive experience with maximizing performance in regards to police driving and use of force.
- [www.policeone.com](http://www.policeone.com)
- [www.lawofficer.com](http://www.lawofficer.com)
- [www.ileeta.org](http://www.ileeta.org)

### **Publications**

- *NueroCop, The Science of Using Automatic Thinking to Guide Tactical Behaviors*, Jonathan W. Page, PhD. Order via [www.see-too.com](http://www.see-too.com)
- *Keeping Cops Safe on the Road, Why Police Driver Training Needs to be a Community Priority*, Public Management Magazine, September 2012, Captain Travis Yates and Eric Peterson
- *Disciplined Attention, How to Improve Your Visual Attention When You Drive*, Kenneth C. Mills, Ph.D.
- *Mindsighting, Mental Toughness Training for Police Officers*, Michael J. Asken, Ph.D.
- *Warrior Mindset, Mental Toughness Skills for a Nation’s Peacekeepers*, Michael J. Asken, Ph.D, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, and Loren Christensen
- *On Combat, The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and Peace*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman
- *The Bullet Proof Mind*, by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman
- *Deadly Force Encounters*, Dr. Alexis Artwohl and Loren Christensen
- *Sharpening the Warrior’s Edge, The Psychology & Science of Training*, by Bruce K. Siddle
- *Training at the Speed of Life*, Kenneth R. Murray