



Putting the brake on 'Britain's most unloved drivers'

Alan Plumley takes to the road to find the nation's most disliked motorists and how vehicle telematics can change their behaviour for the better

So who are our most unloved drivers? From a report published in 2013 by motor dealer, ColinAppleyard.com, certain types of drivers and drivers of certain makes of vehicle were identified as qualifying for this unflattering description. The report also included comments from a sample of the 1100 people canvassed across the nation, with some amusing results. There have now been further developments so, this is an updated report into why particular drivers are viewed as Britain's most unloved.

From the survey feedback, it seems that most of those interviewed regarded the following careless or downright dangerous behaviour as among their pet hates: drivers following too close; not indicating; overtaking and cutting in front; pulling out of side streets right in front of them, and hogging the middle lanes on motorways. Of these, drivers who tailgate were top of the list.

Road to ruin

When it comes to the types of vehicle driven, those in charge of the ubiquitous white van or commercial vehicle were seen by many as major culprits. As we are well aware, this is due largely to the number of daily deliveries that many such drivers are assigned and which have to be completed within a certain timeframe. Recent reports indicate that crashes have risen as delivery vans rush to fulfil orders placed online: a 19% increase in such incidents in south-east England alone over the last five years.

Other complaints from road users about 'white-van man' included that of following too close, especially when the driver in front is driving at the designated speed limit. One motorist mentioned that when she was caught in a traffic queue, the white van behind was tailing her so closely it set off her rear parking sensors. A failure of white van man to give way, especially when approaching traffic calming measures such as chicanes, was another issue to which motorists objected.

White van man also took stick for speeding, especially along narrow country roads that are unsuited to large vehicles. Perhaps inevitably, the common use of mobile phones for voice calls and texting was a common complaint, as was the lack of indicating: one person surveyed asked if indicators were optional extras on white vans! Intimidation was also seen as an issue, particularly by those being tailgated. Countermeasures included slowing down, hoping the van will either take the hint or overtake and be caught by a speed camera!

Changing behaviour

However, all this may be changing because organisations are now adding vehicle telematics to their delivery fleets. The technology - a fusion of telecommunications and informatics - has evolved to send, receive and store data relating to vehicles via telecommunication links. The telematics umbrella also embraces the integration of Global Positioning System (GPS) technology, computers and mobile devices. With this resource, the location, movement, status and driving behaviour of a vehicle or fleet of vehicles can be remotely monitored



White-van-man finds himself the target of most complaints from road users

in real-time. Such information can help businesses optimise vehicle routing, control fuel costs, reduce labour costs and boost overall safety and productivity. Telematics provides complete, up-to-the-minute knowledge of fleet activity via a centralised, web-based interface.

There are a number of organisations manufacturing and supplying telematics solutions including GreenRoad, Intelligent Telematics, Masternaut and Ctrack. Such solutions will typically monitor vehicle performance, delivery status and driver behaviour and tell the fleet manager if a driver is exceeding the speed limit, or braking/accelerating too harshly. By using these and other indicators, companies can encourage drivers to improve their behaviour. This has had a remarkable impact on fuel and maintenance costs. In fact, reports from users claim that the cost of installing telematics to their vehicles can be recouped within a year. Needless to say, more and more businesses are investing in the technology for both economic and safety reasons.

The future of the technology looks bright, with Ernst & Young predicting that 88 percent of all new cars will feature embedded telematics by 2025, a figure that amounts to 3.5 million new cars in the UK alone. With the advent of driverless vehicles, telematics will play an increasingly important role in making them smarter, safer and better-connected. Vehicle condition monitoring and diagnostics is another area that will benefit from telematics and help fleet managers anticipate and plan downtime.

Biggest challenge

Driverless cars, fleet vehicle optimisation and lower insurance premiums are just the beginning: the opportunities for telematics innovation are truly limitless. Right now, the industry's biggest challenge is to create



Smart Motorways, such as that currently being engineered between Junctions 2 and 4a on the M3 (pictured) will increasingly utilise telematics to optimise traffic flows. Photo: Highways England



Speeding along unsuitable country roads can prove a costly business

new platforms to manage the enormous volume of real-time data generated by telematics reporting, then develop effective systems for translating such data into actionable intelligence.

Such systems could feed into those that gather and monitor the condition of road networks in real-time. Currently, drivers use smartphone apps such as Waze for traffic alerts and alternative route planning, but with the wider use of telematics connected to smart highway systems, HGV drivers will be able to locate roads suited to their vehicles and be advised of safe, congestion-free routes.

While 'white van man' currently remains at the top of 'Britain's most unloved drivers' list, his tenure may be short-lived as more and more organisations adopt telematics. Will he be replaced by others on the list such as sales execs rushing around in their BMWs and Audis? School run mums with screaming kids in the back? Or taxi drivers looking for more fares?

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