

Press Release

Findings from the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2024

Self-staging in road traffic has high risk potential

- ▶ Street racing, posing, and rubbernecking often cause critical situations
- ▶ Social media have a negative influence on behavior in many cases
- ▶ Lots of likes can encourage imitation

Extreme speeding offenses are on the rise, especially in large cities and urban areas, and they pose an increasing risk on public roads. "Social media, which open up new ways of self-staging, are giving rise to such behavior," says DEKRA traffic psychologist Dr. Thomas Wagner. In the expert's opinion, likes earned by taking part in an illegal street race, for example, or the admiring glances of passers-by at a cool-looking or tuned vehicle during an "autoposing" session are a new currency for recognition, appreciation, and one's status in a social community. The DEKRA Road Safety Report 2024, entitled "Traffic Environments for People", explicitly addresses this issue.

The misuse of vehicles for special "kick experiences" has been an internationally known phenomenon for many years. For example, posing on the streets began in the U.S. as early as the 1970s. Older luxury sedans were lowered and equipped with hydraulic devices to make the vehicle jump. Driving with such cars, usually very slowly, represented an act of cultural identification. In this way, users documented their affiliation to a particular group as well as their social standing.

"In contrast to this, the primary motivation for deliberately breaking the speed limit – a risk behavior that is becoming increasingly common in everyday road traffic – is to expose oneself to competition and to live out the achievement motive in road traffic," says the DEKRA traffic psychologist. The urge to express oneself, in particular, is tantamount to a strong need for recognition, which can take on quite obsessive traits. It is not uncommon for speeders to be car fanatics who define their self-worth and identity by their use of high-performance vehicles, and they further enhance their self-staging by driving in a flashy and noisy manner.

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Different types of speeders

A DEKRA study conducted in Germany in collaboration with the Chair of Traffic Psychology at the Technical University of Dresden and the Berlin Public Prosecutor's Office examined what motivates people to take part in illegal motor vehicle races. Using complex statistical methods, three “types” of speeders were identified: performance-motivated, reactive, and dissocial speeders. Performance-motivated speeders are keen to beat their competitors, want to prove their driving skills or test the limits of their vehicle. The focus is on speeding and the search for the “ultimate kick”. Reactive speeders are often lone speeders. “Extreme speeding is a consequence of strong stimulus exposure, for example due to psychoactive substances or intense emotional states,” explains Thomas Wagner. Dissocial speeders, on the other hand, are – according to the study – significantly pre-disposed to traffic and criminal law, regularly come into conflict with investigating authorities, carry weapons in their vehicles and behave in an abusive or threatening manner towards the police. This subgroup has a hard time adapting to society.

Dangerous situations caused by “rubbernecks”

The DEKRA Road Safety Report 2024 also that highlights another risk, particularly on the freeway, is posed by “rubbernecks” who obstruct or prevent the passage of emergency services. “Rubbernecks” is a derogatory term used to describe people who view accident scenes as onlookers without providing immediate assistance. Injured people and crashed vehicles are often photographed or filmed, repeatedly hindering the police, ambulance, or fire brigade. Most of the “rubbernecks” do not even realize that by behaving this way, they not only obstruct the emergency services and other road users, but also endanger all of them as well as themselves.

“Even though there has been no systematic research into these dynamics to date, it can be assumed that a stronger need for social recognition appears to be the dominant driving force behind people actually breaking the law in their role as onlookers,” says the DEKRA expert. The aim is to be able to present themselves as a hero for a day on social media with the ultimate crash picture and to stand out from the everyday drabness. The constant availability of technical recording devices means that every observer becomes a potential reporter.

Negative influence of social media

The communication possibilities offered by social media in particular open up new ways of satisfying needs, for example with regard to social recognition, by simply

sending pictures or video sequences with a smartphone. “Likes, but also successes in participating in an illegal road race or the admiring glances of a passer-by at a tuned vehicle are an expression of positive perception by others,” explains Dr. Thomas Wagner.

As various studies show, the popularity of a photo in the form of many likes has a significant influence on the way the photo is perceived. The study subjects liked a photo more if it had received more likes from people of the same age. This effect was particularly pronounced in photos that the subjects themselves had provided. It was also shown that looking at photos with many likes compared to a few likes is associated with increased activity in brain regions related to reward processing, social recognition, imitation, and attention.

Further background information on this topic, as well as on many other aspects of “Traffic Environments for People”, can be found in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2024. It is available at www.dekra-roadsafety.com.



About DEKRA

DEKRA was originally founded in 1925 to ensure road safety through vehicle inspection. With a much wider scope today, DEKRA is the world's largest independent non-listed expert organization in the testing, inspection, and certification sector. As a global provider of comprehensive services and solutions, we help our customers improve their safety, security, and sustainability outcomes. In 2023, DEKRA generated revenue of EUR 4.1 billion. The company currently employs around 49,000 people who offer qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries on five continents. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.