

What's Your Excuse?

Have you ever committed a traffic violation?...got a parking ticket, abandoned your car halfway on the pavement with double yellows with hazards flashing because you're "only going to be a minute"....or exceeded the speed limit?

It's a rare driver that hasn't. Most of us have done something like that. Lawyers and the police will argue that any one is as bad as the other – we all have our own thoughts on whether there is a difference and what that may be.

So rather than a lecture from the righteous, this article comes as a cry from the heart and a plea to your sense of community. There is a 20 m.p.h. speed limit in Buckland Brewer – it applies to us all, agricultural traffic, those who have lived here most of their lives and no outsider's going to tell them what to do, incomers who have been here a few months and "everyone else does it, so what?", the late for work, the "I didn't realise what speed I was doing"s, people coming home in the early hours thinking there's no one around so what can it matter (yes I've seen and heard you on a number of mornings) - everyone.

The limit is there for a reason. You are all smart enough to know what that reason is. But before you say – "oh, I'm in perfect control as I zoom up (or down) Tower Hill (which has a brow and thus blind spots) , or past the school, or by Rob and Linda's in Barton Road, I can stop at will" please let me leave you with the following short account about 3 events in my life and horrific images I still see now in my mind's eye.

The first was 50 years ago – I was in my parents car on a straight country lane on the boring Sunday afternoon drive, when a speeding car overtook us – I remember my mother shouting to dad "he hasn't seen him!". The "him" in question was a pedestrian walking the lane on the correct side of the road. He was thrown some 10 feet into the air – my mother sat by him while he died as my father went to get ambulance and police –no mobile phones in those days.

The second was thirty-ish years ago. I was on my way to work on a rural road, turned a corner to find a blood-spattered horse on its side being destroyed by a vet, a distraught rider on the bank and a bewildered driver standing beside a bent car.

The third was twenty five odd years ago – a mini in a ditch on a country lane, unconscious man in the driving seat, dead man beside him. For some reason the driver had lost control of the car on a bend that surprisingly had not sprung up overnight - police assessed he was speeding and not in control of his car. I knew both driver and passenger.

The common denominators were country roads, speeding and not considering what might reasonably be expected on any country road. In the two of the cases, the drivers certainly received prison sentences. The horse – well, who knows, I was not involved, simply an observer, but it was grim. Unnecessary wrecked lives in all incidents. And I don't want to be first on scene for a fourth. So it's up to you. Do you really think this could never happen to you? Next time you speed in this or any other community, is your excuse really going to be good enough if put to the test?

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