

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Topline Report of Findings From Eight Focus Groups to Explore Speeding Behavior and Assess a Range of Existing Taglines

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INTRODUCTION

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is at the exploratory stage for insights and understanding that will help guide strategic planning and messaging campaign development to curb dangerous speeding behavior.

For this stage, qualitative research in the form of focus groups was conducted to (1) gain additional understanding about speeders' attitudes and rationale for their driving behavior, and (2) gather their opinions about various communications taglines used in the past in anti-speeding efforts around the country.

For the focus groups, men 18 to 34 were queried. Additional screening criteria were used for participant recruiting to find drivers who matched the profiles of "regular speeders" and "sometimes speeders" as characterized in NHTSA's "2011 National Survey of Speeding Attitudes and Behaviors" study (contract #DTNH22-08-F-00129). Finally, of the eight groups, six were drivers of vehicles (primarily) and two were riders of motorcycles (primarily). One noteworthy finding in "hindsight" is that the participants were, indeed, "regular" or "sometimes" speeders based on their confessions and anecdotes shared during the groups' discussions.

Of the eight total groups, four were held in each of two cities. Each city was in a State ranking among the highest in the United States in terms of numbers of speeding-related fatalities.

Raleigh, North Carolina, September 15-16, 2014

- Three groups with drivers (n = 9 per group)
- One group with motorcycle riders (n = 9)

Dallas, Texas, September 22-23, 2014

- Three groups with drivers (n = 8, 9, and 6 per group)
- One group with motorcycle riders (n = 9)

Total number of participants across the eight groups: 68.

For the assessments of the taglines, simple boards with these 10 taglines were shown for discussion:

- Stop Speeding Before It Stops You.
- Obey the Sign or Pay the Fine.
- Speed Kills.

- Survive Your Drive.
- No Need 2 Speed.
- Take It Easy.
- The Heat Is On.
- Respect the Sign.
- Smooth Operator: We're Tough On Aggressive Drivers.
- Stopping the Aggressive Driver Before He Stops You!

As a result of very poor assessments in Raleigh for the last two lines in the list above, these lines were not assessed in the Dallas groups.

Taglines were presented to groups in differing orders to neutralize potential bias.

For some portions of this topline report, numbers of respondents are referenced. However, these are reported only to help illustrate the relative degrees of similarities and/or differences for particular findings when noteworthy; they are not intended to be statistical validations. Focus group research (due to small sample sizes and other factors) is qualitative – rather than quantitative– in nature.

For purposes of this report, “excessive speeding” is generally defined as drivers/riders who travel faster than other vehicles on a roadway. In terms of miles-per-hour, the actual, marginally higher rates-of-speed vary widely according to road type, road conditions, and other contextual factors.

TOPLINE FINDINGS – ATTITUDES AND RATIONALE ABOUT SPEEDING

(Note: There were no significant differences in attitudes and rationale between the two cities.)

Excessive speeding is the regular way of driving/riding. Not speeding is the exception, rather than the norm, for these men.

- Rural areas, in particular, are places where speeding is common, because there is less traffic and less law enforcement.
- Less-congested Interstate highways, major Federal and State highways and major arteries are also common road types for speeding. On congested roads such as these, the congestion factor slows them down only because it's physically difficult to speed, rather than safety concerns.
- However, a couple of situations when they tend to not speed are in school zones and neighborhoods/residential areas where children and/or other pedestrians are present.

Furthermore, excessive speeding is more than just about getting to a destination faster: it's a form of self-identity and an apparent expression of one's personality. Many participants appeared to take pride in their anecdotes, as well as their identities, as speeders. Not speeding is viewed somewhat derisively and as a source of frustration, something they don't want associated with them.

- Even in the “warm-up” questioning about things about other drivers that most annoy them, most participants spoke about situations that involve slower drivers.

Unique among motorcycle riders, excessive speeding is rooted in perceived pragmatism: by speeding around and ahead of other traffic, riders think they will be more visible and help drivers notice them.

Among both drivers and motorcycle riders, there is also a belief that speeding makes them “more aware and alert.”

Excessive speeders are quite cognizant of the risks associated with speeding, both in the event of a crash as well as the possibility of being cited. Further, they willingly accept those risks because they perceive such risks as extremely low – generally a 1-percent or lower chance of being in a speeding-related crash. Even the risk of being pulled over or ticketed by law enforcement is low – generally 5 percent or less.

In the geographical areas in which they live and travel, those who speed excessively employ various strategies to avoid getting ticketed. In some cases, such strategies may include slowing down to or just above posted speed limits, but only for temporary periods.

Some circumstances curb excessive speeding, but the contextual factors are almost always external.

- Those who speed excessively will almost always slow down when law enforcement is visible or anticipated.
- Curiously, in some situations, other passengers in the vehicle will cause a driver to not speed, yet other types of passengers will have no impact on a driver’s behavior.
 - Passengers such as a parent or child will slow them down.
 - For motorcycle riders, in particular, another person on the bike usually stems speeding behavior.
 - On the other hand, friends or peers tend not to diminish speeding behavior. Furthermore, in some instances, peers may actually “egg on” drivers to speed or cause drivers to feel pressured to speed or to “show off.”

Conversely (and ironically), speed limit signs tend to be counter-effective agents, in that excessive speeders use posted speed limits as their “benchmark” or “threshold.”

Speed cameras generally were not present in the geographical areas of the two focus groups, so little was expressed about their effectiveness, other than critical comments that they are used more for “money-making” purposes than for highway safety.

Motorcycle riders have peculiar beliefs about speeding. They believe:

- As previously noted, that by speeding around and ahead of other traffic, they will be more visible to drivers, and therefore they reduce the risks of drivers not noticing them.
- Law enforcement is less likely to chase a speeding motorcycle rider, versus a vehicle driver. And even when bikers are pulled over, that citations are rare.

- One thought is that bikers “can easily outrun a cop,” and, therefore, law enforcement is reluctant to even give chase.
- Another thought is that law enforcement is more empathetic toward bikers, rationalized by the thinking that many law enforcement officials are or have been riders, too.

Observationally, and based on circumstantial factors during the group discussions, those who speed excessively appear to share certain personality characteristics, such as:

- Competitive
- Intense
- Inner-driven/motivated
- Self-confident
- “Type A”

Excessive speeders have low consideration or regard about the potential of injuring or killing another person; instead, they tend to think about only themselves being at risk. As noted earlier, they are quite aware of and willingly accept such risk. This is especially the case among bike riders.

- Yet, there are notions of “conscience” and safety consciousness in selected circumstances, in light of a willingness to slow down in school zones, in pedestrian areas such as neighborhoods, and when certain types of passengers are with them.

TOPLINE FINDINGS – TAGLINES

Ten existing taglines were briefly assessed in Raleigh. In Dallas, 8 of those 10 were assessed (two were dropped due to significantly poor (and unhelpful) assessments in Raleigh).

Of the 10 lines, two were NHTSA lines, and the others were drawn from efforts from various States.

Overall, the two NHTSA lines were assessed more favorably than the others. Both lines had previously been vetted via qualitative research in 2006.

Because of time parameters in the focus groups and the number of different taglines, participants’ input and depth of discussion were limited to approximately 5 minutes or less for each tagline. Part of the assessment for each line involved getting each participant’s individual reactions to the line prior to group discussion; and part of that exercise asked each participant to give the line a grade in terms of its effectiveness when used with messages to remind people to not speed. For analysis and reporting purposes below, the grading scale was calculated as:

A = 4.0
 B = 3.0
 C = 2.0
 D = 1.0
 F = 0.0

(NOTE: The grade-point averages reported here are simply for comparison and directional purposes, and they are not considered statistically reliable or valid data. Nevertheless, the cross-group consistencies of findings for several indicate relative strengths and weaknesses of lines.)

While the two NHTSA lines were assessed most favorably, further consideration of modifications to either or both – plus consideration of one or more new lines – should be given, especially in light of the attitudes and perceptions of excessive speeders. When those lines were developed in 2006, the messaging efforts were geared for a broader group of drivers/riders. For this particular project, however, the target is a more refined group of “regular speeders” and “sometimes speeders” as noted earlier. Certain aspects of the existing lines have some strengths, but also some weaknesses.

In order of “GPA” assessment, starting with the most favorable:

#1: Obey the Sign or Pay the Fine

- GPA: 2.51
- Higher number of A and B grades than any other tagline (n=38)
- However, notably lower GPA among motorcycle riders – 1.89 – due to their beliefs about not getting ticketed as summarized above
- Major strengths:
 - Brevity
 - Rhyme (for “catchiness” and memorability)
 - A more realistic threat than being involved in a crash
 - Similarity to *Click It or Ticket*
 - The word “pay” refers to a definite, unwanted consequence
- Major weaknesses:
 - “Sign” could refer to any sign, not just speeding
 - (As noted earlier) less relevant to motorcycle riders, due to not perceiving much risk of being stopped or cited
 - The word “obey” – too authoritative
 - Not always relevant; “I always ignore speed limit signs, and I never get a ticket.” and “You have to catch me first.”

#2: Stop Speeding Before It Stops You

- GPA: 2.35
- Second highest number of A and B grades than any other line (n=33)
- Highest GPA among bikers – 2.33
- Major strengths:
 - Clever and thought-provoking
 - Clear about “speeding”
 - Causes you to think about consequences without being threatened
- Major weaknesses:

- Too long/too many words
- Scare tactic; “morbid,” “ominous” in tone

#3: Survive Your Drive

- GPA: 2.15
- Third highest number of A and B grades than any other line (n=24)
- Generally similar GPA among motorcycle riders, drivers 18-24, and drivers 25-3
- Major strengths:
 - Brevity, conciseness
 - “Catchiness” with rhyme
 - A good “general reminder” to drive safely
 - A good reminder that driving can be risky, dangerous
- Major weaknesses:
 - Too passive, weak
 - Doesn’t clearly address “speeding”
 - Would be a more effective line for texting, distracted driving, and/or drunk driving than for speeding

#4: Speed Kills

- GPA: 1.88
- Fourth highest number of A and B grades of all taglines (n=21)
- However, received 15 D and F grades
- Slightly higher GPA among drivers 18-24 (2.03)
- Major strengths:
 - Brevity, conciseness, directness
 - Provocative
 - Clearly refers to speeding
 - Word “kill” gets people’s attention
- Major weaknesses:
 - Reminder of anti-drug campaign
 - Not very credible (due to low perceived risk of being killed)
 - Other factors cause highway fatalities more than speeding

#5: No Need 2 Speed

- GPA: 1.50
- Received 14 A and B grades; 36 D and F grades
- Somewhat lower GPA among drivers 25-34 (0.94)
- Major strengths:
 - Simple, to-the-point
 - Clearly addresses speeding

- Major weaknesses:
 - Use of numerical “2” – “looks like they’re trying too hard to be clever” and “It’s like a message my mom would send me.”
 - Reminded participants of name of video game and/or movie
 - “I immediately remove the word ‘No’ when I look at it.”
 - Too passive

#6: Take It Easy

- GPA: 1.43
- Received 17 A and B grades; 37 D and F grades
- Major strengths:
 - Positively phrased reminder/advice
 - Not overly pushy or threatening
- Major weaknesses:
 - Encourages people to not stay attentive
 - “Makes you want to daydream;” numerous references to sitting on a beach
 - Not threatening: “I’m already comfortable with speeding.”
 - Too passive
 - Does not clearly address speeding
 - Reminded participants of song

#7: Respect the Sign

- GPA: 0.99
- Received 4 B grades (no A’s); 51 D and F grades
- Major strengths: none
- Major weaknesses:
 - Vague; “What sign?”
 - Per previous discussion about effectiveness of speed limit signs, this line would have no impact or relevance
 - Signs are not worthy of respect (compared to people)
 - Too passive, no apparent consequence
 - Does not clearly address speeding

#8: The Heat Is On

- GPA: 0.57
- Received 3 B grades (no A’s); 55 D and F grades
- This line had a notably lower GPA among motorcycle riders (0.17)
- Major strengths: none
- Major weaknesses:
 - Generally mocked by participants

- Ambiguous
- Has nothing to do with speeding
- Confusion about what the line is supposed to mean
- Reminded participants of weather
- Sounds more like a challenge than a threat

Two other lines were assessed in Raleigh, but both were removed from discussion in Dallas due to (1) extremely poor assessments in Raleigh, and correspondingly (2) virtually no useful comments or discussion. Both lines more directly addressed aggressive driving:

- **Smooth Operator: We're Tough On Aggressive Drivers.**
- **Stopping the Aggressive Driver Before He Stops You!**

Aside from them being more focused on aggressive driving than speeding, both taglines were also deemed by Raleigh participants as being too long, too confusing, and “silly.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted earlier, even though the two NHTSA taglines were assessed most favorably, further consideration of modifications to either or both – plus consideration of one or more new taglines – should be given, especially in light of the attitudes and perceptions of excessive speeders. When those lines were developed in 2006, the messaging efforts were geared for a broader group of drivers and motorcycle riders. For this particular project, however, the target is a more refined group of “regular speeders” and “sometimes speeders.” Both groups, collectively, exhibit peculiar attitudes, beliefs and rationalizations about speeding based on the findings of the focus groups. These unique attitudes, beliefs and rationalizations need to be carefully considered in refinement and/or further development of strategic messaging and taglines.

A potential direction to consider is appealing to the excessive speeders’ consciences about the costs, emotional pain, and suffering they would pass along to family members, should they ever be in a serious crash due to speeding. Because of their willingness to accept speeding-behavior risk (insofar as that risk affects them, personally), any sort of threat of cost or injury to them will have little effectiveness. In their discussions, however, they did say and/or imply that they valued family and the lives of other people around them. This could very well be the soft spot to cause them to pay attention to anti-speeding messages.