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## Driven To Distraction

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16 September 2009 at 00:00 hours

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### Annual Report on Motoring identifies the worrying extent of in-car distractions

Over a third (39%) of UK motorists become seriously distracted when driving, according to the 2009 RAC Report on Motoring<sup>1</sup>. Young drivers (17 to 24 year olds) are the most likely to lose concentration behind the wheel with over half (55%) confessing that they become 'seriously distracted'.

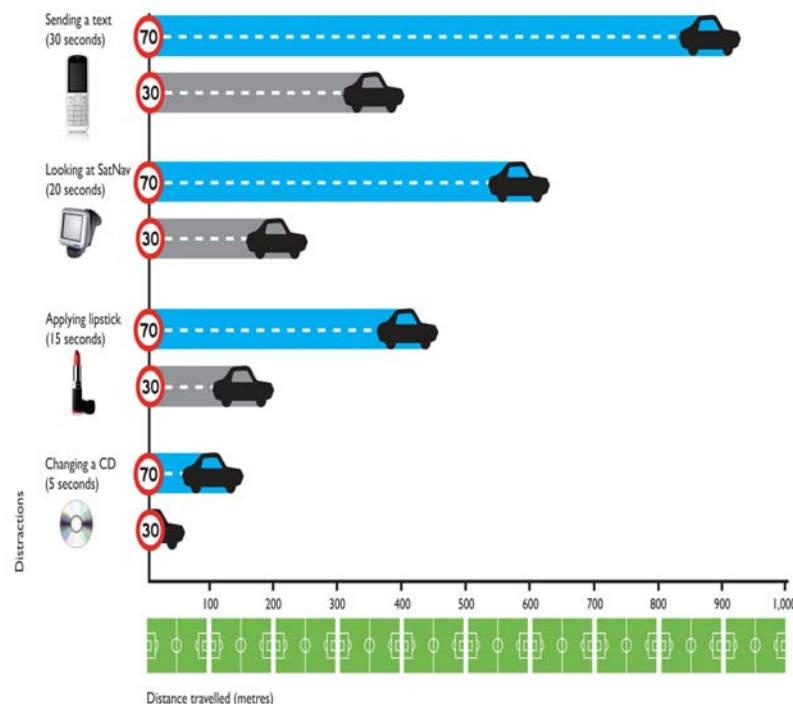
Remarkably, one in five young motorists said they drive while listening to music through headphones, and 16% even admitted to putting on make-up behind the steering wheel. Although over a quarter (26%) of drivers between the ages of 17-24 admitted to texting while on the road, just 3% of the same group actually considered this behaviour acceptable.

Motorists were also asked which of their in-car gadgets and technologies they found to be most distracting, the top five were:

1. In-car music/changing CD and radio controls (57%)
2. Sat-Nav systems (41%)
3. Mobile phones (32%)
4. Air-con controls (31%)
5. Dashboard warning lights (21%)

The research also looked at the impact in-car distractions can have on driving performance and the potentially fatal distances that vehicles can travel when motorists avert their eyes from the road for just a few seconds.

The diagram below illustrates the distance a car can travel when engaging in common in-car activities such as re-programming a Sat-Nav device<sup>2</sup>. **Fig.1: In-car distractions and distance travelled**



For example, during the five seconds it takes to change a CD when driving at 70mph, a car will have travelled the length of nearly two football pitches (156m) with the driver largely unaware of their surroundings and the behaviour of other road users.

When you add this to the typical stopping distance of 96 metres<sup>3</sup>, it could even be as far as 252 metres (almost the length of three football pitches) before the driver is able to bring the vehicle to a complete standstill.

In response to the findings, David Bizley, RAC director of technical said: "This clearly shows that in-car distractions continue to be a significant road safety issue, especially for the new generation of drivers. While in-car gadgets do make journeys easier and more entertaining it's important that they are used appropriately. Even a split second distraction can have potentially disastrous consequences.

"Legislation to limit certain distractions is in place, but it's evident that many of the Government's messages are not getting through to motorists. The number of fatalities as a result of in vehicle distractions has increased 50% over the last three years<sup>4</sup>. You only have to consider the number of motorists that continue to text and drive to see that greater awareness of how to use in car-technology responsibly is needed."

To tackle the issue of in-car distractions, RAC is calling for the focus of safety campaigns to be widened to include all potential in-car distractions, such as adjusting the radio or heating and air-conditioning controls as well as the dangers of using mobile phones.

### Further distraction statistics

More than one in three (35%) drivers over 24 admit to becoming seriously distracted behind the wheel

79% of motorists over 65 say they never become seriously distracted by using in-car instruments, equipment or other gadgets while driving

The region most easily distracted is the South West, with 45% of motorists often losing concentration while behind the wheel

The region with the greatest focus is Yorkshire, where this figure drops to just 32%

Londoners (55%) are the most likely to be distracted by their mobile phone. Scottish drivers (22%) are the least likely

### RAC tips on how to focus on the road

1. Get everything ready before you set off - select your favourite CD or radio station, adjust your seat, check your mirrors, set the temperature, and programme the Sat-Nav before you even release the handbrake.
2. Familiarise yourself with your car instruction manual so you can recognise the dashboard warning lights. This way you'll know which require urgent attention, and which you can ignore until you reach a suitable place to stop.
3. Put your phone on silent, or even better turn it off while you are driving. That way you won't be distracted by incoming calls and text messages.
4. If you need to have your phone on then either use a hands-free device or pull over to a safe place to make or receive calls.
5. If you are using a Sat-Nav and need to make a change to your journey, pull over in a safe place before reprogramming.
6. If your passengers are distracting you, remember you're the one in the driving seat so you're the boss. It's fine to ask them to sit still or keep the noise down.
7. However, your passengers can also help you out by doing those simple things such as changing the CD or adjusting the temperature.

**- Ends -**

### **Notes to editors**

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<sup>1</sup> In total, 1,109 British motorists were surveyed (i.e. those who hold a current driving licence and drive at least once a month). The survey was conducted in April 2009, with the questionnaire taking around 20 minutes to complete.

<sup>2</sup> This diagram illustrates how far a car will travel at a specific speed whilst distracted for a precise amount of time.

<sup>3</sup> Stopping distances are taken from the Department for Transport - *Official Highway Code*.

<sup>4</sup> Figures from the Department for Transport show that the number of fatal accidents on UK roads involving a distraction in vehicle as a "contributory factor" increased 50% between 2005 and 2007.

### **About RAC**

With around seven million members, RAC is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's roadside assistance, insurance, vehicle inspections and checks, legal services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information - RAC is able to meet motorists' needs.

RAC is committed to providing the very highest levels of service to its members and has been ranked first for customer satisfaction by J.D. Power and Associates' UK Roadside Assistance Study for the last three years.

Aviva bought RAC in May 2005. The acquisition brings together RAC's powerful brand and customer base with the expertise and leading position in motor insurance of Aviva UK Insurance (formerly Norwich Union Insurance). Aviva is the UK's largest insurer with a market share of around 15 per cent.

RAC is part of Aviva, the world's fifth largest insurance group which operates in 28 countries.

RAC's news releases and a selection of images are available from the internet press centre at [www.racnews.co.uk](http://www.racnews.co.uk).