

than in the US. This is why the US experience is informative. Until recently there were vociferous denials that increasing the cost of fuel had any effect on how many miles were driven. It took the 40% increase to convince them that basic economic laws do apply, and are likely to apply even when changes in miles driven are too small to be clearly observed. Increases in the price of crude oil are likely to lower fatalities in many countries, but the reductions in the US will be far larger. This will improve the safety performance of the US compared to other countries, an improvement that could negate the conclusion in the chapter *The Dramatic Failure of US Safety Policy* in my book *Traffic Safety*.² That conclusion was that the safety performance of the US is abysmal compared to that in other countries. The data in Figure 1 additionally supports that conclusion.

The graph tracks the number of traffic deaths in the US and Britain since 1972, with the 1972 totals for both countries set to x100. In 2007, traffic deaths in Britain dropped below 3,000 for the first time since records began in 1926, a 62% drop from the 1972 total. To record a 62% drop in fatalities, the US would need to record less than 25,000 road fatalities. For US traffic deaths to drop to 37,000 is a notable achievement, but the US has clearly an enormous way to go

to catch up with Britain (and other countries).

It is commendable for traffic deaths in Britain to drop below 3,000 in 2007. However, 3,000 people dying every year is no cause for celebration - all countries have a long way to go. All the effects above have been the result of changes in driver behaviour, showing again that it is the behaviour of drivers that overwhelmingly determines the number of traffic deaths. These changes may have resulted from reduced driving, but there are many proven ways to sharply reduce deaths without reducing mobility. The goal should be not to reduce driving, but to reduce driving drunk, reduce driving too fast, and reduce driving in ways that pose threats to the driver and other road users.

Competition: Leonard Evans has kindly offered a copy of his highly acclaimed book *Traffic Safety* (see review *adiNEWS* July 08) to one lucky reader.

Q: What year was the national 55mph limit introduced in the US? First correct answer out of the hat wins. All entries to the usual addresses on page 3 by 20th October.

References:

1. Michael Sivak, The University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Report No. UMTRI-2008-39, July 2008
2. Leonard Evans, *Traffic Safety*. Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, USA: Science Serving Society; 2004. More information at www.ScienceServingSociety.com

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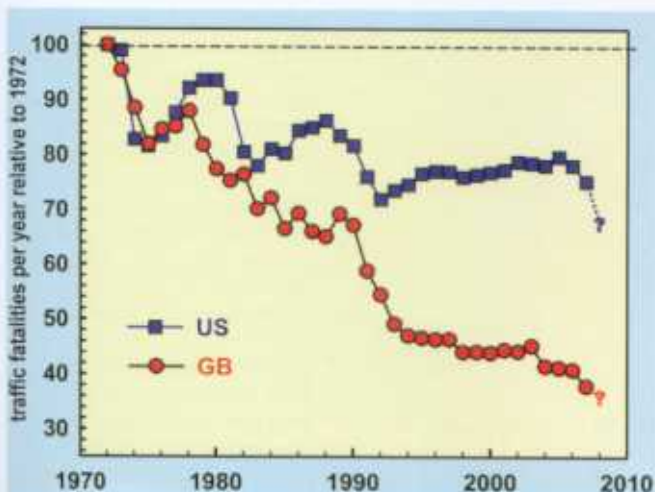


Figure 1. The number of traffic deaths in Britain and the US relative to their 1972 totals. In 1972, the US recorded 54,589 traffic deaths and Britain recorded 7,763. For 2007, the US recorded 41,059 (a 24.9% decrease from 1972) and Britain 2,943 (a 62.1% decrease from 1972).