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RISK INSIGHT – POLICE PURSUITS

Management & Control

In this inaugural 'Risk Insight' article, Edison Motor's Stuart Gemmell takes a look at the on-going concerns regarding UK Police Force vehicle pursuits, an issue which has previously been a cause for concern to UK Police Forces and appears to be raising its head again.

Edison Motor has its own views on how this situation can be approached and is happy to work with any bluelight fleet to better understand the root causes and develop bespoke risk control measures that specifically target a fleet's issues.

In 2007, following raised concern over the level of deaths and injuries involving Police Force vehicles, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (now replaced by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)) commissioned an in-depth review of Police Force road traffic incidents (IPCC, 2007).

From this review 29 recommendations were made with the intention of improving Police Force driving performance. That 2007 report stated that: **"Approximately 40 people die each year in RTIs involving the police with the majority of deaths being the result of a Police pursuit"**

The graph to the right demonstrates that whilst some reduction was indicated briefly from 2011, the upward trend has reestablished itself since 2014. We can see the number has fluctuated over the past 11 years, but these latest figures from the IOPC represent the third highest number of fatal Road Traffic Incidents (RTIs) recorded since 2007/08 (IOPC, 2017/18). These numbers do not include Police Officer deaths (e.g. for 2017/18 2 Officers died in pursuit-related crashes, bringing the total to 31 deaths).

"When a situation falls within the definition of a pursuit, officers need to decide whether a pursuit is justified, proportionate and conforms to the principle of least intrusion"
COLLEGE OF POLICING (COP), 2013



Fatal RTIs – Source: IOPC 2017/18





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As in the other years, pursuits account for the majority of the deaths in Police Force vehicle incidents. Collisions are classified as 'pursuit-related' if they involve a pursuit, or if the Police Force vehicle was driving in the same direction as the target vehicle.

Since the original IPCC report in 2007, much attention has been paid to producing more clearly defined policies and practices for managing pursuits, not least of which are the COP Authorised Professional Practice Standards on pursuits (See College of Policing (2015) Authorised Professional Practice on police pursuit). There is also the Police Force National Decision Model (NDM), which is used by Police Forces to assist operational officers, planners, advisers and commanders in managing their response to a situation in a reasonable and proportionate way. The NDM must be applied when consideration is being given on whether to pursue a vehicle, and continually evaluated during the pursuit. The NDM provides a framework for recording command decisions and the rationale behind them.

The Authorised Professional Practice (APP) requires officers to give due regard to the purpose and justification of initiating and continuing a pursuit. Preventing the pursuit must be a primary consideration – the key consideration is whether the pursuit is necessary, balanced against threat, risk and harm for which the target is being pursued.

Authorisation to engage in a pursuit can take different forms; as a basic requirement, it should be obtained from designated control centre staff. However, officers may self-authorise and justify later as per the NDM. In such cases, officers must inform control of their driving authority, Police Force vehicle used and details of the target vehicle. Officers are trained and required to make dynamic risk assessments throughout the pursuit and cease if the risks become too high, either to themselves or to the public.

The APP and NDM of course assume that rational, calm decisions will always be made by the officers involved in a pursuit. Unfortunately, experience and studies into Police driving behaviour demonstrate quite clearly that emotional influence can override rational thought and adherence to rules, this is despite the high level of skills training that is provided to pursuit-authorized drivers. It is easy for officers to succumb to these influences and become 'target focussed' in certain situations.

To try and minimise the risk of 'emotional' effect on pursuits and maintain an objective perspective, Police communications centre supervisors are trained in monitoring and controlling pursuits. They have overall control of the pursuit and the authority to require discontinuance of it if they judge it is becoming unsafe to continue. However, they are of course remote

“Officers should not place undue pressure on themselves or risk public safety beyond their capabilities or those of the vehicle they are driving”

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OFFICER IN PURSUIT

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and are reliant on the incoming communication from the pursuit vehicle's crew. They have 7 elements they must consider:

- Overall control of the pursuit.
- Constantly risk assess the activity, based on information and intelligence received.
- Approve the initial and continued authority for pursuit.
- Ensure tactical drivers have been assigned to support where practicable.
- Identify and agree pursuit commander.
- Consider current level of authority in light of available information and advice from other qualified persons (i.e. tactical advisor).
- Order additional units to assist if deemed necessary.

Police Forces are required to de-brief, review and report on each pursuit to gather reliable data and learning. This process is still maturing in Police Forces but there is no doubt there are signs of improvement. A common area of weakness identified through discussions with training and operational officers may be low levels of communication on pursuit experiences out to front-line officers. Edison Motor believe a learning tool to maintain awareness of the risks and the need to remain cognisant of the requirements of the APP and NDM is crucial.

REFERENCES

College of Policing . (2013). Authorised Professional Practice for Police Pursuits. College of Policing.

IOPC . (July 2017/18). Deaths during or following Police contact, Statistics for England & Wales . London: IOPC IPCC. (2007). Police Road Traffic Incidents: A Study of Cases Involving Serious and Fatal Injuries. London: IPCC.

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Pursuits carry a level of danger, this cannot be completely removed. The public expect the Police to protect life and property and maintain law and order. Training provided to Police drivers in relevant skills for pursuits is world class, however the statistics indicate there is still work to be done in terms of addressing the human factors and behaviours that can override skills in some situations and that some officers are more prone to emotional effect than others.

Effective and sustained reminders to officers – over and above routine refresher training – are one essential element of pursuit risk control that will maintain officer awareness of the risks involved.

At Edison Motor, we are working with various Police Forces across the UK to encourage improved and more sustained communication of all driving risks to front-line supervisors and officers.

We are developing educational resources with our partner suppliers which will enable us to deliver supplementary training to insureds that target specifically the human factors and behaviours which can be the root cause of RTIs.

Our Risk Control Services are proven to improve and enhance risk control measures that can lead to a reduction in accident frequency. We believe in truly embracing risk control at Edison Motor and are always available to discuss our clients requirements to develop wholly tailored risk control programmes where required.

LEARN MORE ABOUT EDISON MOTOR

To find out more about the advantages of working with Edison Motor contact a member of our team or visit our website:

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