Navigating iPod while driving shows same or worse effects as cell phone use

By Jacqui Cheng | Published: April 04, 2007 - 09:11AM CT

It’s no surprise that many of us have used our iPods in our cars before (and it is a surprise that a number of you who are not me have actually had them fly out of your windows while driving as well, at least according to my inbox). But how safe is it for us to be using these little devices while driving, anyway? We all tend to overestimate our ability to multitask, but everyone knows that everyone else thinks they’re the best drivers on the road too. How does this all come together?

Four researchers from Drexel University’s Computer Science department set out to measure exactly how impaired we become when we mess with our favorite music players. The study (PDF) revolved around the iPod due to its ubiquitousness in the market, but the conclusions can easily be applied to any digital music player. What they found was that “selecting media on the iPod had a significant effect on driver performance.” People who were distracted by selecting music and/or videos (videos!?) while driving had a certain degree of lateral deviation from the center of the lane—that is, they were swerving and drifting on the road.

Incidentally, the report points out that the actual listening and/or watching of video content did not affect lateral deviation, but watching videos did affect car-following speed.

The worst part of the report comes from this observation: “the effect was comparable to previously reported effects of dialing a cellular phone.” In fact, when broken down, only the simpler iPod-navigating tasks were on par with that of cell phone dialing—“the effects for more complex selections were even larger than those found for cell phone dialing,” says the report.

I say "worst" because as we know, some cities and states have begun to ban the use of cell phones while driving due to studies such as this (I have a friend who lost his license on his first time of being pulled over for using the phone while driving). Evidence to support the fact that people are showing the same effects while using an iPod... Well, I don't want to imagine what a road trip would be like without my iPod.

Filed under: iPod, mobile phones, study, driving, more...

Reader comments

Daros

quote:
(I have a friend who lost his license on his first time of being pulled over for using the phone while driving).
You know, if your friend was drunk, he'd still have his license and be in fine shape.

In the end, it's not cell phones or iPods that make people drive worse... it's simply morons who are allowed to drive. Answering a cell phone and talking is really not that distracting, particularly if you're not dealing with traffic. Dialing a cell phone while you're stuck at red lights when everyone else is getting out of work and the streets are crowded is retarded, and should get you a ticket.

License revoked, though? Bullshit... true safety violations (drunk driving, reckless driving, blocking intersections) don't do that, so why should this?

April 04, 2007 @ 09:30AM

larsd

quote:
  it's simply morons who are allowed to drive. Answering a cell phone and talking is really not that distracting,

Yeah. It's always the other people who shouldn't be allowed to drive.

April 04, 2007 @ 10:04AM

johnbaxter

This is why my "road" iPod is a shuffle. (Original shuffle with ONE selected podcast, or new shuffle with music.)

Set and forget.

April 04, 2007 @ 10:06AM

Otis Wildflower

IMHO it's "DWD" (Driving While Distracted) which should be penalized, not any specific device.. That includes cellphones, iPods, DVD players, newspapers, unruly children or friends, etc. If someone's observed driving distractedly they need to be pulled over and ticketed.

April 04, 2007 @ 10:29AM