Driving with an iPod

Hopefully, you don’t need anyone to tell you that operating your iPod while driving isn’t a good idea. You can imagine what might happen.

Actually, you don’t need to: some enterprising researchers at Drexel University have published the first-ever study of “portable music-player use while driving, focusing on interaction with an iPod while driving in a typical highway environment.” (Relax: they put test subjects in a simulator.)

You can download the complete report (PDF) but, for a quick overview, I direct you toward Adam Engst’s entertaining summary for TidBITS:

The primary finding of the study was that the act of making media selections from the iPod caused significant “lateral deviation” – in other words, the car swerved from the center of the lane. The amount of deviation for making simple selections on the iPod were comparable to what was observed in drivers dialing a cell phone (another dangerous activity that all too many people perform regularly), and making a complex selection on the iPod caused even more swerving than dialing a cell phone.

On the plus side, merely listening to audio and – I shudder to imagine this – watching video on the iPod while driving did not cause notable swerving, though test subjects who were watching video did slow down significantly, which probably accounted for why they could keep the car on the road. Selecting media on the iPod also caused drivers to slow down, which is good from the standpoint of reducing the mental requirements of driving, but bad if you consider that an unexpected reduction in speed is itself a traffic hazard.

Posted by Brian Chin at April 10, 2007 10:44 p.m. Category: March of progress

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