

## Road Rage

**Fairfax County, VA.** Mark A. Blowe, 46, was sentenced to 3 ¼ years in prison for involuntary manslaughter and the felony hit-and-run of Bryan E. Johnson, 52. Three prosecution witnesses testified that Blowe suddenly roared up behind Johnson, tailgated Johnson's Toyota Camry, cut in front of the Camry and then braked hard twice in front of Johnson. Johnson's car swerved into a concrete barrier and flipped twice in the air, killing Johnson as Blowe sped away in his Dodge Intrepid. Testifying on his own behalf in a Fairfax County courtroom earlier this month, Blowe claimed that Johnson initiated the hostilities on the Washington Beltway during a brief downpour about 7:45 p.m. on July 4th, 2001, first by flashing his lights at Blowe, then by pulling alongside and gesturing obscenely. Blowe acknowledged catching up to Johnson's Camry, getting in front of it, and hitting his brakes hard twice. A Virginia state trooper testified that Blowe later said, "I wanted to teach him a lesson." Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney and former staff attorney at NTLC Penney S. Azcarate told the jury, "It is your turn to teach the defendant a lesson. A lesson that if you drive your vehicle in such a reckless manner—as a lethal weapon—you will be held responsible."

In order to further understand and quantify the extent of the road rage problem, the American Automobile Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAA) commissioned a survey of 526 motorists. The analysis, carried out in 1995 by Matthew Joint, MSc, BSc, MCIT Head of Behavioral Analysis, found that almost 90 percent of motorists had experienced "road rage" incidents during the preceding 12 months. Sixty percent admitted to losing their tempers behind the wheel.

Additionally, in the mid-1990s, AAA commissioned Louis R. Mizell, Jr. and his firm, Mizell & Company that maintains databases of crime reports, to research all incidents of violence that involved traffic altercations and the use of vehicles as weapons. He reviewed 10,037 incidents based on newspaper coverage, police reports, and insurance reports for the period January 1990–September 1996. The study was purposely limited to only those incidents deemed to be especially violent.

According to Mizell's report, an average of at least 1,500 men, women and children are injured or killed each year in the United States as a result of "aggressive driving." The study clearly illustrated that anyone can be targeted and victimized. The study further noted that in most human behavior there is a stated and unstated, or conscious and unconscious, motivation. As Mizell discussed, the motivation for traffic disputes is no exception. While the event that sparks the incident may be trivial, in every case there exists some reservoir of anger, hostility, or frustration that is released by the triggering incident.

Anyone can become an aggressive driver. People who have maimed and murdered motorists during traffic disputes have been old and young, male and female, rich and poor, well dressed and poorly dressed. They have been white, black, Asian, and Hispanic. Do not underestimate the potential for violence in any driver. Prosecutors and law enforcement officers need to be vigilant to the motivation and ensuing behavior surrounding "road rage" incidents. The behaviors common in one-on-one confrontations between individuals, as in a bar fight, may also be present when the perpetrator and victim are traveling down the road in their own vehicles.

For copies of the above referenced articles contact the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety at [www.aaafoundation.org](http://www.aaafoundation.org). For assistance in prosecuting road rage incidents, contact the National Traffic Law Center.

## Arresting Developments

**Tennessee.**—A grand jury indicted an 82-year-old great-grandmother on charges of reckless driving, evading arrest, failing to obey a police order and several counts of assault. A Tennessee Highway Patrol Officer arrested Oci Evelyn Wilson after a two-vehicle collision in Andersonville. According to the Highway Patrol, when the officer attempted to serve her with a citation for failure to yield, Ms. Wilson began to fight with officers and refused to be placed in the patrol car. While disagreeing on those details, the two sides also disagree on the woman's size. Her son says she weighs 109 pounds and is 4 feet 9 inches. Her arrest paperwork states she is 131 pounds and 5 feet 7 inches.

**San Diego.**—Officers James Clark and Ernesto Pinedo were patrolling an East Village neighborhood when they noticed a van weaving wildly. They pulled over the vehicle, only to find the driver and his wife hysterical because their 2-month-old son was not breathing. The couple was heading home from a post-surgery checkup at Children's Hospital when the infant stopped breathing. In their panic, they got lost. Officer Clark performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and got the infant breathing again. Paramedics arrived and took over from there. Officer Clark has been credited with helping to save the infant's life.

**Upstate New York.**—Sixty-five-year-old Martha Horde had never ridden a snowmobile in her life. Two minutes into her first ride as a passenger, the snowmobile hit a tree. Horde was gravely injured and died a short time later. Family members had gathered at a local tavern and coaxed the woman into riding with a family friend. The driver of the snowmobile, Robert C. Meyer, has been charged with driving while intoxicated. Additional charges may be filed. Neither the driver nor the victim was wearing a helmet.