

## 'Alcohol, Drugs and Using the Road'

**Rob's Reflections**

I have always thought of myself as a good driver. Passed first time, only 10 lessons, a natural.

I am observant, I can predict other people's manoeuvres and I can parallel park like you would not believe!

I am also a keen supporter of the law and police. After studying law for a couple of years I came to respect what it stands for and I respect the job the police are trying to do. All of this made it even more disastrous when I became a statistic for both.

The police breathalysed me in the morning on my way home. I hadn't drunk that much the night before and felt absolutely fine. To be honest I felt I should have pulled over because I was tired if anything. I was over the limit.

Before I go on I would like to explain why I have decided to write this article. I deeply regret my mistakes and am absolutely ashamed that this has happened. There are still close friends that I haven't been able to bring myself to tell. However, I didn't "drink and drive" out of malice, out of two fingers up to the law but out of misinformation. Lack of education meant I didn't know I was still over the limit. I do not see this as an excuse and believe I broke the law and completely deserved my punishment. It is something I will live with for the rest of my life.

I write this article in the hope people will learn from my mistakes before they make their own, and make people think twice before they get in a car after consuming any alcohol.



As part of my sentence I was sent on an "alcohol awareness" course. I was dubious and nervous about going, probably because I just wanted it all to be over! As a less open-minded celebrity apparently said "I don't wanna be sat in a room full of criminals"

I recognised I was one of these criminals now and attended. Head hung as it had been for months.

I know that everyone reading this knows drink driving is wrong, but in research I have asked my group of friends what they know about drink driving. It is terrifying how little this cross section of society (which included me until the course set me straight) actually knows.

Does anyone know the limit? As soon as I ask this question, people inevitably say "1 glass of wine" or "1 pint". This is a guideline. And it is wrong. The limit is 35 micrograms of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath. That's it. No units, no number of pints. The reason is, we all absorb alcohol differently, depending on sex, build etc. For the blokes amongst you, that "1 Pint" guideline is for a 3.5% lager. I bet you can't name one under 4%!

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Another big one is how long you are over the limit for. This is really quite frightening as even the people who knew how many units were in their drinks, and how long a unit took to get out of your system, they didn't put two and two together. What I mean is this. As a rule, 1 unit takes an hour to be dealt with by the body, plus the first hour of drinking, as it takes an hour to get into your system. When done logically, this tells you how long you have to wait before you have no alcohol left. 1 pint of 5% lager (which is what most we buy are) contains just under 3 units. That means, after 1 pint, you cannot safely drive for 4 hours. How many pints do we drink on a night out? If you have 4 and stop drinking at midnight, you can't safely drive until 1pm the next day.

That's how most people (including me) are caught. Society has trained us that we go to sleep and when we wake up we're "fine". A cup of coffee "sobers us up". Milk "lines the stomach". This is all nonsense.

For those who "risk it", let me tell you, it's not worth it. Putting aside the most glaring risk of being involved in a fatal accident, there are all the consequences of getting off lightly with a standard conviction. I spent 12 hours in a police cell. Locked up with everyone who had been arrested the night before.

I had my mug-shot and fingerprints taken. All standard and deserved but what we don't necessarily think about, despite the government adverts, is what this conviction means.

I have a criminal record. If I ever get caught in a car with alcohol in my system again, I go to jail. Getting a job is a nightmare. I can't drive so all of the high-end jobs are out and forget ever having a company car. When I get my own car, insurance is going to be through the roof.

The nature of the conviction is "most dangerous" category and is transferred to my passport, which means travelling is bordering on impossible. The list goes on.

After the course was finished I was glad it was all over but I felt somewhat cheated. This course was fantastically educational and in just a few hours put to bed all the myths and told me the facts. The reason I felt cheated is that I had to make a mistake before being given this information. If I'd have known half of what I know now I wouldn't drink for days before I drove. Education is the key.

I will NEVER make the mistakes I made that day again but will live with it for the rest of my life. And my hope is that one day, drink driving will be a thing of the past after it is taught to us along with the basics of clutch control.

Robert Sheppard (25)

