Overconfidence, Assertive Behavior Common Among Drunk Drivers, Test Shows

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Drinking drivers who participated in an obstacle course at Cajun Field Sunday consistently showed overconfidence and assertiveness in driving, results show.

Sponsored by the Concerned Citizens chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, the Acadiana Safety Association and State Police, the demonstration was geared to show the effects of driving while intoxicated (DWI).

Drivers included Mayor Dud Lastrapes, City Council President Al Simon, District Judge Ronald Cox, Robert Jackson of KATC, Maria Placer of KLFY, Rick LeBlanc of KTVD, District Attorney Nathan Stansbury, Chief Administrative Deputy Hook Robicheaux and Charles Lenox of The Daily Advertiser.

Each of the eight participants drove the course three times, with the first round driven while sober to provide a base score of driving skills. The drivers were then intoxicated and tested on a breath-testing machine. They repeated the driving test at least two more times with minimum levels of .05 percent and .10 percent (the legal level of intoxication) blood alcohol content.

Variables in the test included foods the participants had eaten, age, weight, occupation, sex, amount of alcohol consumed and drinking habits, said Mary Lib Guercio of CC/MADD.

Without exception, she explained, with increased intoxication, the drivers became more relaxed, over-confident and assertive in driving the rounds. However, they performed the skills with markedly decreasing abilities, Mrs. Guercio said.

Blood alcohol content ranged from a low of .003 percent to a high of .124 percent.

Of the nine drivers participating, eight used seat belts before consuming any alcohol; seven used seat belts when intoxicated to .05 percent; and five used seat belts when intoxicated to .10 percent.

During a parking test, 32 cones were knocked down by the drivers before intoxication; 74 were knocked down at the .05 percent level; and 86 were knocked down at the .10 percent level.

The test showed what many of the participants claimed before it began: they can drive a straight line even after drinking. No cones were knocked over even after becoming intoxicated.

Steering around turns was a different story.

A turning test showed 17 cones knocked down when the drivers were sober; 26 cones knocked down when the drivers were at the .05 percent level; and 66 cones knocked down when the drivers were at the .10 percent level.

Mrs. Guercio said a second demonstration is being planned to take place during the Christmas holidays.