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## David Cantero. Journalist

Interview

*'I know older people who are very skilled at driving and I know young people who are absolutely incapable'*

*'Much work remains to be able to speak of good drivers, true awareness and proper driving', says David Cantero, presenter of Informativos Telecinco (3 pm). The journalist was interviewed by 'Road Safety for Seniors', Accident Prevention and Road Safety Area of Fundación MAPFRE, to discuss road safety, awareness, speed, radar, medical examinations and the elderly, among other topics. David Cantero is an avowed motorcyclist. 'Roads are not designed or built for motorcyclists but for cars' he says.*



First, how do you see Spanish drivers? Are they more conscientious? Do they commit fewer violations?

In Spain, in general, much work remains to be able to speak of good drivers, true awareness and proper driving. Possibly, there is more awareness about safety but in a way that is sometimes very confusing and misleading. The problem of road safety is not simply a matter of obeying speed limits like automatons. It must be done, of course, but with sense, with prudence and intelligence, and as citizens, drivers must require that those who dictate these rules do so with common sense, intelligence and wisdom. We must apply all possible talent to traffic, driving, good training, good judgment and expertise. Unfortunately, there are people lacking in all those things.

Do you think that the expected economic recovery increases road accidents? Is it inevitable?

I think the accident rate does not diminish because good drivers and good people are not being formed in school. Driver education should be a compulsory and prominent subject in schools. It will hasten the day when people are aware that it can happen to them and they will start driving smarter and more skillfully, more cautiously at the wheel. However, caution is not synonymous with fear, which is what they seem to want to instill, what they would have us believe.

What do you think should be changed to further reduce road accidents in Spain? Roads, enforcement, education, etc.

Again, it is primarily a matter of good training (vial and general). Of course, we should improve roads, invest in new roads and better maintain the roads we have. Some are a real disaster, with the surface in bad condition and poor signage. And on the subject of enforcement, it would be very interesting stop having that feeling of persecution that prevails today every time you go on the road, since they do not always go after those who pose the real danger with their recklessness and stupidity. Before, the Traffic Civil Guard was on the road to command respect and to help, and also to punish when necessary. Now drivers often see them as mere fine collectors.

The media provides traffic accident data every weekend but are we aware of the harsh reality of traffic accidents? Do they have the means bring this important issue to society?

Relatively. The usefulness of messages and campaigns is not entirely clear. I think most people do not even imagine that it could happen to them. They believe that what's on TV always happens to others. In my work, I have seen closely the cruelty of many fatal accidents, death and terrible tragedies on the highways, and despite all its horror it is not easy to transmit

the reality through the screen. And when you do it is not clear that it will have much effect.

You're a motorcyclist. Do you consider yourself passionate?

I have been passionate cyclist since the age of 14. I have ridden a motorcycle with absolute passion all my life and I have never had an accident. I have not had a car accident either, and have had a license since 1979. I have been driving cars and motorcycles for 36 years, millions of kilometers and I've never had an accident, not even a minor one. Knock on wood.

Do you consider that motorcyclists as a whole are less well protected than other road users?

Completely. The roads are not designed or built for motorcycles but for cars. They are full of dangers, especially guard rails which are much more than a threat, they are a real death trap in the event of a fall. Many streets and roads still have slippery paint, cracks, patches, oil stains, gravel, sand, stones, hazardous debris and deep potholes. Hitting the road on a motorcycle in Spain is a test of survival. All this without even considering that many drivers do not respect those who are on a motorcycle, or are unaware of their vulnerability.

What do you think of radar? Do you think it is for collecting fines?

Ah, but do they serve another purpose? It seems like a fine collection tool and a double-edged weapon used in a tortuous and completely wrong manner. Its current use is mainly for that, to collect money, to impose fines, in mass, the more the better, and raise hundreds of thousands, millions of euros quickly and very easily. They are placed in unnecessary, often absurd, areas in places where there is no danger or no need for lower speeds. I also believe that they cause traffic jams, irritate, mislead and disturb drivers. Many people are more focused on not being caught than on driving correctly. I think they should only be used in very limited areas, which are really dangerous, and with very different criteria than today.

Are you for or against raising the speed limits on the roads?

For. It is ridiculous to have to drive 100 or 120 on absolutely safe highways, and even more so with the safety and technology currently offered in vehicles. There is no danger in driving 140, at least on these roads, and of course always cautiously, wisely and with full attention. In fact, many people drive at that speed, though, more aware of the radar and not being fined than enjoying driving with safety and confidence. Reducing speed is not the solution. Going slow is not always synonymous with safety. On the contrary, I think those that go too slow cause driving hazards, create tension, impatience, improper passing, confusion and, in many cases, accidents. I think that since drivers have been taught that "walking on eggshells" is the solution people drive much worse. And so traffic jams are created each day. Poor planning of roads, funnels, stupidity and slowness cause traffic collapse, no doubt.

Do you consider it important that drivers continue to learn throughout their life? Do you think there should be mandatory training?

That is, or should be, a task for life, from school, and then especially for some individuals who I doubt who are trained to operate vehicles and so drive very cautiously. DGT exams are a kind of process to get a license or permit, and do not prove anything, do not prove that someone is really qualified to be a good driver. Many barely pass and that's it. After they let you out on the road and you have to manage, it is your job to gain experience and learn, something that does not always happen, not in all cases.

A lot of people claim that more extensive tests are made for the renewal of driving licenses, especially to identify health problems in older people. Do you think that current the examinations are too permissive?

We should do reviews that are more comprehensive from the beginning, and not just for the elderly. It would be good to be more vigilant of the possible health problems that could incapacitate drivers, of course, but we should also keep a very careful watch on the intellectual and psychological capacity of a person before allowing them to drive a car, be they young or old.

Many defend setting an age limit for driving.

That is an over simplification. I know older people who are very skilled at driving and I know young people who are absolutely incapable. That depends on each person, in each case. What we should do is not set age limits, but monitor the true capacity of anyone who intends to drive, but that, like almost everything mentioned above, is part of a kind of utopia. Much remains to be done so that most of those who drive are really good drivers. The wisdom, skill, agility, good training, mental and physical health, respect and empathy should be the norm, the real test for getting behind the wheel or handlebars of any vehicle.

Finally, a message for drivers.

That's the message. Respect and good training, driving skills, prudence and wisdom are what really matters. They are what could actually improve things and avoid accidents and not rules and outdated and unnecessary speed limits in many cases.