

Dealing with NZ's stressful roads



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When are you most relaxed at work? Let me guess, when you do not feel undue stress and can make calm, considered decisions? When we are stressed, our body's main stress hormone, cortisol, rushes into our brain and produces negative feelings such as anxiety and fear.

In our industry, one of the stresses we have to deal with every day comes about due to the state of the roads we are expected to drive on. I know this is not the first time I have written about this issue, but for our people behind the wheel every day, the parlous state of our roading network is making an already challenging job far more difficult than it needs to be.

Over the last few decades, vehicle designers have made great strides in safety. Sophisticated crumple zones, airbags, and electronic braking systems are now pretty standard in trucks. It's high time our roading network kept up with these technologies.

The Government has promised a rollout of median barriers, which will be great where they exist, but there's much more to do. More passing lanes, wider shoulders, and better run-offs are the minimum of what we should expect. People make mistakes, so let's cater for that and redesign our roads so that they do not inflict unnecessary harm. The road transport industry has been championing



It's fair to say that everyone learns something from a Rollover Prevention seminar

these upgrades for years and due to the amount of RUC we pay, I think we're within our rights to demand better.

I'm sick of NZTA putting up signs saying 'slippery when wet'. It's no secret that New Zealand is a pretty wet little country so there really should be no excuse for not designing and repairing road surfaces that aren't unnecessarily slippery.

Unfortunately, none of these issues will be solved overnight, so here are some tips for reducing your stress while on the road and making sure that despite all the frustrations you encounter, you get home safely:

- **Stop rushing:** The reality is your despatchers are juggling multiple units, so while you are sitting in a queue running behind time, just remember we are all doing our best.
- **Share the road and be sympathetic to other road users:** It's difficult at times but the driver tootling along at 70km/h

in front of you doesn't know you're in a hurry or is driving to the speed they are comfortable with. Take a deep breath and relax until you can safely pass.

- **Be forgiving:** Imagine the vehicle that has made a stupid passing manoeuvre, which you narrowly avoided, is your son or daughter learning to drive. If it happens continuously, report it via *555.
- **Eat and drink intelligently:** Take nutritious food and drink in the cab with you. Every truck driver in the country knows it's not easy to park a 23-metre HPMV at the local cafe.
- **Learn to laugh:** Even if you're having a bad day, if you can find humour in something, it will help relieve stress.

Those of you who have attended one of Jeff Fleury's excellent Rollover Prevention seminars will already know this, but one of his key messages is that you, as a truckie, are a professional driver and are expected to drive to a higher standard than all the amateurs around you. While the state of the roads, increased traffic congestion, and bad driving are frustrating, it's our duty as professionals to do a professional job and that means dealing with the stresses of the job just as professionally. ■