

Footage shows driver on phone narrowly avoid hitting police in HGV 'supercab'

But what he didn't realise was the vehicle he almost hit was a Highways England unmarked 'supercab.' – and there were two police officers inside.

Near-miss as driver on phone at the wheel

The recent footage, taken on the M40 by Warwickshire Police, captures one of over 21,000 offences recorded by officers in the Operation Tramline HGV cabs since the national safety initiative was launched by Highways England.

In another clip captured by the force, a lorry driver is seen looking down and texting on his phone as he travels along the motorway. When he spots the police officers in the next lane he simply shrugs and puts his thumb up.

Driver sending texts is caught on camera

While a car driver, oblivious to the police officers in the HGV cab alongside him, has a mobile phone in his right hand in this incident – until he hears the police siren sound behind and puts the phone down.

Caught on camera – car driver using mobile phone

The Highways England HGV cabs are now being used as part of a multi-agency Week of Action on the M6, taking place from Monday 24 May to Sunday 30 May, which aims to reduce the number of incidents on the motorway and highlight the risks of dangerous driving.

Under the banner of Operation Vertebrae, the campaign takes place along the length of the M6, the longest motorway in the country. Highways England deals with around 180 reported incidents on the M6 every day. These include a large number of traffic collisions with 4,222 reported on the M6 in 2019.

Since the launch of Operation Tramline in 2015, more than 21,600 offences have been recorded. The most common offences have included:

- Using a mobile phone – 6,073
- Not wearing a seatbelt – 6,253
- Not in proper control of vehicle – 1,501
- Speeding – 1,199

In total, 19,564 vehicles were stopped in Operation Tramline between July 2015 and April 2021.

Highways England Head of Road Safety Jeremy Phillips said:

The Operation Tramline cabs are an important part of our commitment to tackling dangerous driving and those who take unnecessary risks

with their own safety and that of others on the road.

The number of people found using their mobile phone while driving is quite alarming. You are four times more likely to be in a crash if you use your phone and, if caught, face a £200 fine and six points on your licence.

Through this week of action on the M6 we want to make all of our roads safer by raising awareness and encouraging motorists to consider their driving behaviour.

The Operation Tramline 'supercab' which patrols motorways and major A roads

From their elevated viewpoint in the unmarked HGV cabs, police officers are able to spot people driving dangerously – whatever vehicle they may be in.

Among the incidents witnessed during Operation Tramline was a driver steering a lorry with his knees while eating lunch on his lap and also using his phone in the East Midlands. While in West Mercia, officers saw a driver eating lasagne with a knife and fork while driving along a motorway.

Surrey Police spotted a HGV driver boiling a kettle on the dashboard and another eating pickled gherkins from a jar with his elbows on the steering wheel.

One driver was caught twice in one day – in the morning and afternoon – using their mobile phone while driving along the A38 in Derbyshire.

Consequences for the drivers range from warnings to fixed penalty notices, court summons or even arrest. In addition to the supercab patrols, partners taking part in the M6 week of action will be present at motorway services offering advice to drivers such as what to do in a breakdown and ensuring load safety.

Vehicle checks will also be carried out involving the DVSA, Health and Safety Executive and the Home Office. Six forces are taking part in Operation Vertebrae – Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Cheshire, Warwickshire Police and Central Motorway Police Group, as well as the North West Commercial Vehicle Unit.

Police forces across the country have been patrolling in the supercabs since 2015

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Roads Policing Chief Constable Anthony Bangham said:

Operation Tramline is a successful collaboration between the police and Highways England.

We remain committed to tackling those who take unnecessary risks with their own safety and the safety of others on our roads by allowing themselves to be distracted while driving. The consequences of these actions are often devastating. We will continue to work alongside Highways England on Operation Tramline and will prosecute drivers who ignore the risks.

Marian Kitson, DVSA's Director of Enforcement, said:

DVSA's priority is protecting everyone from unsafe vehicles and drivers. We're delighted to be a part of this key road safety exercise. During the week, DVSA will be carrying out safety checks on caravans and small trailers as well as our normal commercial vehicle and driver inspections.

Many caravans and small trailers have been parked up over winter, so we're urging drivers who are new to towing or haven't towed for a while to carry out some simple checks

The DVSA caravan and small trailer checks, that we'll carry out as part of Operation Vertebrae, should take around 20 minutes each. We'll check safety features including lights, tyres, breakaway cable and brakes. If a caravan or small trailer isn't safe, the driver will be unable to continue their journey until the defect is fixed.

HSE Transport Sector spokesperson Nina Day said:

Employers must ensure that drivers, other workers, and members of the public are kept safe when vehicles are used for work. There are legal requirements for employers to have robust procedures in place to manage vehicle safety, including ensuring suitable procedures are in place, providing workers with appropriate training and equipment, maintaining equipment and vehicles, and supporting drivers when they raise concerns.

HSE works closely with our partner agencies to help vehicle operators and load consignors understand their legal responsibilities.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448

and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.