

ROAD SAFETY at IBZ GIMBORN

Thanks to IPA, and the Arthur Troop Scholarship, I recently had the opportunity to travel to Germany to study first-hand the methods employed to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on the roads of Europe. It was a fascinating trip, and I learned great deal.

I was delighted to receive the scholarship, and honoured to represent Australia overseas. I chose to attend IPA's IBZ Gimborn training centre for a seminar on road safety on European roads. I also value-added to that by arranging to spend time observing the operations of the Autobahn Polizei of Baden-Wurttemberg in Freiberg. This was courtesy of my German IPA friend and colleague Christian Hummel.

As a highway patrol policeman in Melbourne, Victoria, I wanted to see what I could pick up from European Police Officers that might be transferrable to my own jurisdiction. We in Australia take road safety and traffic policing very seriously, and are in fact considered leaders in the field, but we can always learn more, and look at new ways to do things. Christian's unit is based in Freiburg, near the French and Swiss borders, and after landing in Frankfurt, I made my way there by train, for an immediate start.

I joined one of the autobahn crews, and my education began. The basics of road policing in our two countries are very similar. The unit attends and investigates collisions, conducts specific traffic operations, uses a laser to detect speeding offences (not all German roads are autobahns with no speed limits!) and issues tickets. They have their problems with jurisdictions (international rather than interstate in my case, but quite similar with regard to enforcement difficulties when drivers come from, and cross over, borders). However, there are significant differences. Many relate to legislation, and the specific powers which can be employed by officers. Drink and drug driving laws are particularly different, and German Officers were quite surprised by the laws to combat impaired driving introduced in Australia. Our powers to impound vehicles are very strong in a number of circumstances as well.

German Police are somewhat restricted in their ability to enforce road laws because of the legacy of the Second World War, when the Nazi German state did whatever it wanted to the people under its control, with terrible consequences. The post-war German society understandably rebelled against such power, and German police officers today are kept on a fairly tight leash. Take the fact that there is no random breath testing; an officer must first have evidence that the driver is affected by drugs or alcohol. They can then invite a person to provide a breath test, but the person can refuse. The driver can still be under an obligation to return to the Police Station to provide a blood test, taken by the duty doctor, but the officer has to be justified in the reasons he made the demand, or the driver has grounds to sue that officer. The process is more complicated than I am used to, but the Autobahn Polizei makes it work. Interestingly, university town Freiburg has a particular problem with intoxicated bicycle riders as well.

The gentler approach also manifests itself in the use of a tremendous tool at the Germans' disposal, an unmarked road vehicle with permanent cameras front and rear. It is able to measure the distances between vehicles as well, and record it all to a hard drive. Sounds great and it is, but the only problem is that they are not allowed to start recording until they observe an offence. Often

the offence is done before the camera can be engaged, but that is the law and the expectation. The camera car is still very good for many offences and I enjoyed seeing it working first hand.

On our travels we slipped across into France, an easy action in the age of a united Europe, with border controls a thing of the past. However, it is one of the bigger problems faced by the police of any European country, Germany included. Police in Europe still generally operate on a nation-based level, albeit with ever greater levels of cooperation, but they are dealing with a population and economic system that is ever more internationally focussed. Police have to work within that reality, and one way they do that is by utilising a system where fines are literally 'on-the-spot'. If you cannot pay, your truck (or your car or your motorbike) stays where it is until the money can be paid. If the police let that vehicle go, the money is never paid. The trucking system in particular operates at a continental level, and my German colleagues had a major focus on trucks and ensuring safety standards are maintained.

The increasing fluidity of road traffic and populations themselves is becoming an issue in Europe, and one reason deaths and serious injuries on the roads are on the rise. There has been a big influx of people migrating to Germany, and thus there has been in the last few years a large variation of the quality of vehicles on the roads, and in the ability of the people driving them. In some cases people have obtained valid motor vehicle or motorcycle licences in countries with far less strict training levels than in Germany, with obvious problems. This creates issues with licences as well, with suspensions in Germany being circumvented by slipping across into Poland or some other European nation and getting one there.

Think of German roads and the mind immediately thinks of autobahns, and the sight of a stream of cars travelling at speeds that would have their vehicle impounded in my own country is an amazing thing to behold. Mostly it works pretty well, but when it comes unstuck, it can be catastrophic. Collisions involving multiple vehicles and more than one victim are quite common. It is not widely known outside of Germany that autobahns carry a 'recommended' speed limit of 130, and insurance companies can play hard ball with drivers who are at fault in collisions and who are travelling above that speed. A new innovation has helped cut the toll – areas immediately around towns and cities now have speed limits of 120kmh to allow for people coming onto and off the autobahns in these locations.

It was interesting to note that the greatest issue faced by road police in Germany is largely the same as it is in Australia; the increasing number of collisions involving vulnerable road users, otherwise known as 'people outside the car'; motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians. There is also a rise in the number of elderly people involved in fatal collisions; during my time with the unit there was a double fatal collision when an older driver smashed into a café, killing two people. With crossing borders no longer an issue for people, more recreational bike and motorcycle riders are utilising the excellent German roads, and more are coming to grief there than ever before.

At one such collision, I had to step out of observer mode and chip in. On the way to an operation in the fabled Black Forest near Freiberg, we came across a car vs bicycle incident. While my colleague attended to the collision itself, I quickly donned a Polizei vest and controlled traffic at a blind corner. The officer in charge of the unit attended the scene, and snapped a photo of me doing so! He later thanked me for assisting, but I was happy to help.

Overall, I had a tremendous time, and picked up a lot of useful information. One or two things I could potentially bring back to Victoria Police, and will be making those known. The greatest enjoyment however, was in the warmth of the welcome from my German colleagues.

This welcome was continued at Gimborn, the home of IPA in Germany. To say that IBZ Gimborn is a nice place is akin to saying Aston Martin produces nice cars: True, but woefully understating the reality. As a physical structure, Schloss (castle) Gimborn is an impressive sight, even in a country and a continent blessed with an astonishing array of stupendous architectural marvels, but it is also a brilliant training asset. With the help of the German government, IPA has turned the place into a modern educational facility, and continues to improve it – the recent addition of a gym and sauna is testament to that.

It is a lovely thing to sit and contemplate life outside the Gimborn hotel, where meals are served to participants, or to wander the local paths – something I couldn't actually do, given that I was still suffering the effects of a work-related ankle injury. Maybe next time, if Gimborn accepts my offer to host a seminar on kangaroos!

IBZ Gimborn put on an excellent examination of road safety issues for participants, from 9 to 13 May 2016. It was, of course, primarily considering European issues; appropriate as it was held in Germany with yours truly being the only non-European present, but the topics were general enough to be relevant to me.

There were a range of speakers, from Germany and the UK, covering a range of topics.

It kicked off, after introductions by participants, with a presentation on detecting and prosecuting impaired drivers. This discussed drink/drive limits and enforcement across the UK and Europe, and included the field impairment test and the effects on the body of different illicit drugs were examined. The 'fatal four' came up in the next discussion – drink/drugs, phones, speeding and no seatbelts – the common threads in most fatal and serious collisions across Europe, and you can add Australia in there as well. The different UK partnership programs were discussed, involving driving instructors, schools, employers and others to embed safer driving habits in new drivers. 'Learn to live' is an innovative program which uses real people involved in different stages of traumatic collisions presenting to young people to make it a more 'real' experience. Finally, the 'my red thumb' program was discussed, where red thumb rings were given to drivers to remind them not to use mobiles while driving.

Motorbikes were the focus on the Tuesday, discussing different ways to combat the high rates of death and serious injuries among motorcyclists. One is operation 'achilles' which established where motorcyclists were coming to grief and used marked and unmarked bikes and intercepting vehicles to prosecute offences there. Offenders could either be prosecuted normally or diverted to a rider education scheme.

We all know that technology is playing an increasing role in both driving and the investigation and prosecution of collisions, and this topic was discussed at length at the seminar. There are many new driving technologies making their appearance, with many others in the wings. What are they? How do they work? Will they assist in lowering the rates of death and serious injury on the road? Will drivers find ways around them? What happens when they don't work? All interesting topics!

One technology being put to terrific use is ANPR (automatic number plate recognition). It is used in Australia, but not for active policing ('denying criminals the use of the road') as it is in the UK, and I believe there is great potential for expanding its use in my own jurisdiction, from what I heard at the seminar.

Technology was also a key point in discussions on the role of the forensic collision investigator, another topic at the seminar. Many of us present have been at collisions requiring considerable work to determine and prove fault, and the intricacies of such investigations as employed by professional collision investigators is highly impressive. A related highlight was a demonstration of the capability of drone technology as used by police in southern England, which really showed how useful it is in a road investigation context. Disaster victim identification procedures were also examined in a road death related case study full of interest.

The seminar included a field trip to Dusseldorf and a briefing from TISPOL, the European Road Safety Network, a collaboration of European road policing agencies to ensure that efforts to reduce death and serious injury on the roads of Europe are co-ordinated and effective. Overall Europe is aiming towards zero harm on the roads, a goal which mirrors my own force's 'road to zero' project. It also has a more immediate goal of halving the number of deaths on European roads from 31000 in 2010 to 15000 in 2017. Unfortunately, there's doubt over whether they will be able to achieve it, as recently the figures have risen slightly. The rise is mainly due to increased numbers of pedestrian collisions and greater distraction by drivers (and pedestrians) using mobile phones and other devices.

The most startling thing about the presentation by Jürgen Marten in Dusseldorf was the fact that he interrupted it to ask what a certain jurisdiction was doing in the field of road safety. That particular jurisdiction was mine! He had heard that an Australian was present, and wanted to get a first-hand account from me. This caused something of a scramble among the German members of the contingent, who unexpectedly had to reach for their headsets as the interpreters had to switch from translating German into English, to translating English (well, Australian anyway!) into German. I gave a little bit of a summary, which was well received.

The interpreters were in fact one of the marvels of the week. Truly "wunderbar and fantastische"! If a speaker was German, they listened, and then in a seamless flow put that into English while simultaneously listening to what the speaker was saying next and continuing to translate that into the headsets of the English participants. For an English speaker, the process was reversed. It requires great dual language skills and high levels of concentration to do, and it is one of the most marvellous things I've ever seen.

That explains the official part of the week, the reason we were all there, but any summary wouldn't be complete without a mention of 'craic', our Irish chairman Sean's favourite word. Any time a group of police officers gets together a good time is to be had, and this week was no exception. Gimborn boasts its own truly wonderful bar, and I personally had a terrific time exploring the castle, including its fabulous police hat collection, and its history. For any future attendees, see if you can find where the drawbridge used to be! We swapped stories with colleagues, gained some new contacts and Facebook friends, and generally had a great time.

Thank you to IPA for making my amazing Arthur Troop Scholarship trip to Freiburg and Gimborn possible. It was an unforgettable experience, which I believe will go on delivering benefits for years to come.

Jason Doyle

IPA Australia

ATS awardee 2016





