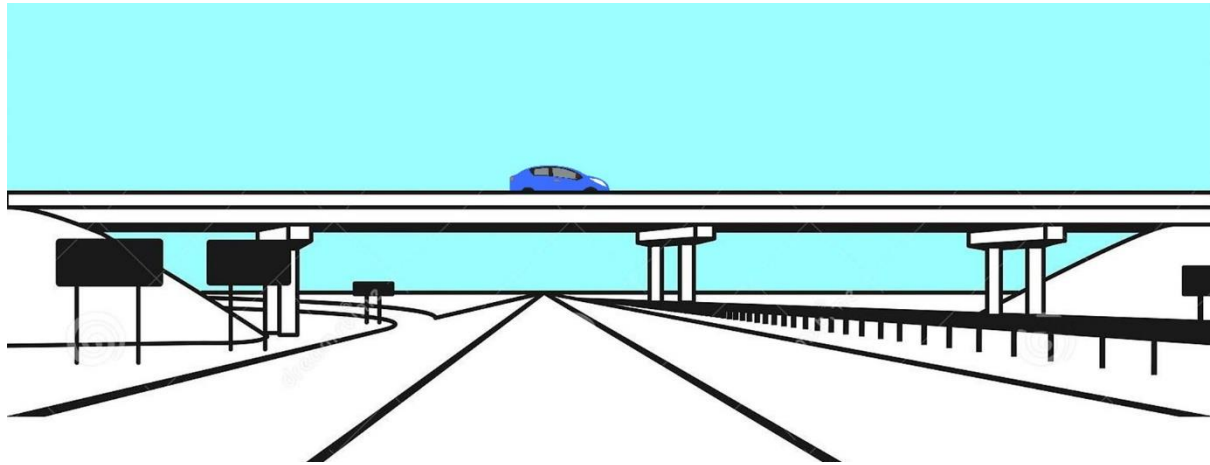


The Motorway Bridge 'Mystery' Car – why is it there?

Shôn Ellerton, July 7, 2022

What is it with those 'mystery' cars and vans positioned on top of motorway bridges?



On occasion, I have those moments when I observe something trivial that's seen over and over not knowing why and yet, never bothering to find out. For me, one of the most peculiar and mysterious moments of inquisitiveness came back to me like a spark whilst visiting the UK earlier this year. The seemingly abundant number of 'mystery cars' positioned in the middle of road bridges over busy motorways. Parked near the kerb, obviously.

Has anyone else noticed this? And, particularly so, why in the UK?

Having an innate sense of paranoia of being caught running through speed cameras, of which there are so many, my initial reaction when spotting a car or van on top of a motorway bridge is to slow immediately down to 70 mph. Invariably, everyone else driving alongside will do the same as well. This, of course, makes an impact on the flow of traffic along the road causing 'shock waves', a phenomenon creating a ripple effect on the road when observed from above when traffic moves freely and then crunches up tightly at regular intervals. The pattern is especially obvious when time lapse photography is used to speed it up.

Indeed, the police often set up speed traps on top of motorway bridges; however, they are usually, if not always, quite conspicuous. Brightly coloured cars marked with big words, 'POLICE', along with a policeman in a bright yellow HV vest behind a camera mount is a pretty good indicator that this is a speed trap. Unfortunately, with some of the ultra-long-range speed cameras the police have access to these days, by the time you spotted him and slowed down,

it's probably too late. In any case, these days I'm a boring old fart and rely on cruise control bumbling around at 75 mph. I'm in no rush to get anywhere nor do I feel the thrill of driving fast knowing that I'll simply get punished for doing so.

But what of those *other* cars and, notably, white vans, perched on top of motorway bridges? Living in Adelaide, I've become quite accustomed to the stealth tactics of those contracted by the police using unmarked cars to zap speeders with radar guns, much like that iconic American sheriff hiding behind roadside billboards. The difference being, the sheriff will make himself known and chase you down and may even give you an opportunity to explain yourself, whereas the guy that zaps you in his unmarked car sits there cowardly while filling his share of speeding fine quotas. Some have been found *sleeping* in their cars as the cameras are often triggered automatically. However, most of these 'mystery' cars and vans simply turn out to be regular people either sitting in them enjoying a sandwich and a flask of tea, or standing on the bridge parapet seemingly taking great delight in watching the flow of traffic with enormous interest. Let me just add that these are not isolated one-off events. There have been many a time I've observed this when I lived in the UK.

Now, the British are well-known for pursuing quite odd hobbies and interests, such as running down hills at breakneck speeds risking ankle injuries or worse while chasing great wheels of cheese; running half-naked across deep muddy estuary salt flats up to their knees in the middle of winter; and standing at the end of busy railway platforms for hours on end taking note of the number of every train, and sometimes every carriage, that rolls by them, presumably much aided now by the assistance of video cameras. But what of this strange pastime of lurking on top of motorway bridges? I struggle to find a worse place to be on two counts. First, the sheer noise. The noise levels from a busy motorway are astoundingly high, especially those with concrete surfaces. Even more so when wet. You can hear one of Britain's busier motorways for miles and miles away in the open countryside. Second, the drivers below are being distracted out of fear that they are being clocked by speed radar guns, which has the immediate effect of creating those traffic shock wave patterns, much like those caused by rubberneckers slowing down to peer at an accident out of morbid curiosity.

But, perhaps this is all conspiracy using volunteers hired by the police in an effort to slow down traffic much like a similar conspiracy of British Rail in the 80s to hire very slow caravan drivers to form immense tailbacks on primary

roads during bank holidays in an effort to entice everyone to use the trains. You can read that particular article [here](#) if you so wish!