

Citizen Control of the Citizen's Business

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Motoring Safety

Story No. 3

Story No. 2, in this series, contained some statistics taken from the report of the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles of the State of Connecticut with a view to illustrating the results of operation of one type of "Safety-responsibility" legislation. In this report, some of the more important aspects of the law and its enforcement are set out for the information of the Bureau's readers.

Connecticut has a population of 1,650,000, compared with Ontario's 3,229,000. In 1928, Connecticut had 319,829 motor cars registered, compared with Ontario's 484,140. Thus Connecticut had 19.3 cars per hundred population; somewhat higher than Ontario's 15 cars per hundred.

Connecticut fronts on Long Island Sound and is bordered on the west by New York State and on the east and north by the State of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Through it lie the highways leading from New York and the West to Boston and the Atlantic Coast, and also through it runs one of the main routes to Canada. Consequently, like Ontario, it has a large motor tourist traffic in the summer months.

Connecticut has long been in the forefront in its study of motor vehicle problems. Its record of accidents has been kept longer than in any other State and it was one of the first to impose penalties upon reckless drivers. Much of the progress in this connection is due to their Commissioner of Motor Vehicles, a man trained in the law, who through his interest in the subject accepted the position at the request of the Governor in 1917, and has remained in it since.

The law of Connecticut under which the Commissioner is working states in effect, that every motorist is expected to drive carefully and observe the laws, and so long as he so conducts himself he is free from governmental interference. The moment, however, he drives while drunk, is involved in an accident and runs away without leaving his name and address, or drives recklessly and endangers property or life, the Commissioner steps in. **The Commissioner states that although he has an annual appropriation for his department of \$650,000, in order to keep expenditure within that, he has to confine his safety activities to the control of reckless drivers and not dissipate his efforts by interference with the motorist who is careful.**

The law of Connecticut is primarily intended to be a law to improve the driving conditions upon the roads of that State and to reduce accidents, with provisions to make more sure the payment of damages to those who have suffered from accidents not due to their own negligence. The methods by which the law is enforced and for keeping track of motor accidents by the Commissioner in Connecticut are of interest. The following are some features in this connection:

1. The law requires that where a motorist is brought before a magistrate or court, for violation of motor vehicle laws, a certified copy of the court record be sent to the Commissioner. The Commissioner enters a record of the judgment upon a permanent record card, bearing the name of the offending motorist and any subsequent offences by the motorist are recorded in the same manner. The Commissioner has power upon each offence to administer an appropriate penalty, including suspension of license, temporary or permanent. In the event of suspension, the offending motorist is notified to return his markers to the department and, if he does not do so immediately, the police take them up and bring the motorist into court. The markers are restored after the Commissioner is satisfied regarding the future conduct of the offender. An accumulation of minor accidents, indicating carelessness, etc., is treated as one more serious offence.
2. The law also requires that every accident involving damage to persons or property to the extent of \$25.00 must be reported within 24 hours to the Commissioner by both the offending and injured

persons. A clipping bureau is maintained in the department in order to keep tab on all motor accidents, so that accidents not reported are quickly checked up and properly signed statements by the parties obtained. These reports are analyzed by specialists in the department, who classify the nature of the accidents, decide who was to blame, whether the accident was a minor or major one, and so forth.

3. The Commissioner, under the Connecticut law, in addition to other discipline he may administer to the offending motorist, shall, if a person is involved in a serious breach of the law, such as driving while drunk, or driving recklessly with damage to persons and property, require such person to give security for any future damage and a guarantee that he will pay for any damage already done. **In other words, in such cases the motorist is required to show financial responsibility.** This can be done by a deposit of securities, a mortgage upon real estate or by the deposit of an insurance policy for an amount within limits of \$5,000 for one person and \$10,000 for two or more, with \$1,000 for property damage. The Commissioner's report shows that in 1928, 18,650 were required to show proof of financial responsibility.

In addition to calling upon the offender to produce such an insurance policy, the Commissioner grades the offenders into Classes A, B and C. Those guilty of minor offences are put in Class A, and insurance companies are required to increase their rates by 10% above the premium charged the ordinary motorist; those in Class B, 25% above, and the most serious offenders (i.e.) those in Class C, are charged 50% above the ordinary premium. If the offender has no accident for a year, he may, upon application, step from Class C to B, or from B to A, or from A to the ordinary motorist's rates, as the case may be.

4. Pin maps, for the purpose of recording every accident in the cities, towns and country districts throughout the State, are kept by the Commissioner. In this way danger points are indicated and steps may then be taken to correct any conditions which contribute to the frequency of accidents. The Commissioner also works out improvements for traffic control.
5. Every application for license or renewal of license is checked with departmental records and any person having had his license cancelled or suspended cannot obtain a license unless such suspension or cancellation has been lifted.
6. The penalty of suspension or cancellation of licenses applies to all cars owned by the offending party.
7. A monthly bulletin is issued by the Commissioner pointing out common defects in driving and steps that should be taken to overcome these defects. This bulletin is freely copied by the newspapers.

The Connecticut report shows that in 1928, 79.5% of the motor accidents there were caused by the operator of the car. Such causes being listed as follows:

Inattention	12.7%
Miscalculation	20.8%
Failing to grant right-of-way.....	17.5%
Skidding	8.0%
Driving on wrong side of road.....	2.2%
Careless backing	3.6%
Inexperience	0.9%
Failing to signal	1.6%
Following too closely	2.0%
Too fast for conditions	4.3%
Intoxication	1.8%
Miscellaneous	4.1%
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	79.5%

All these causes are attributable to the motorist and can be remedied by him. The fact that inexperience accounts for only .9% would seem to show that the setting up of a costly and elaborate annual examination of every motorist before issuing a license for the purpose of testing driving ability would not wholly remedy the accident situation. Reckless drivers would probably pass such an examination.

This report also shows that, although there were many accidents in 1928 only about 8% of the cars licensed were involved in any accident either by damage to persons or property.

The law of Connecticut is framed with the idea of concentrating attention upon the comparatively small proportion of motorists who are involved in accidents and gradually take off the roads all those who do not drive safely and with consideration for others. The effect of every such removal from the roads should have an excellent effect upon the large body of motorists who drive carefully. By such a system of dealing with offences as they occur, coupled with careful issuance of new licenses, it should be possible in time to permanently put off the road those who are physically or mentally unfit to drive.