



Lords Hansard – extract from proceedings on 25 March 1999

Police Vehicles

9.36 p.m.

Lord Campbell of Croy ... A recent incident some four weeks ago brought the subject to the headlines. A well-known television presenter, Sheena McDonald, was, as a pedestrian, hit by a police car with its blue lights flashing and siren wailing. ... **A recent development that may reduce the turmoil among the traffic affected by a speeding police car is a new kind of siren called the "Localizer". It apparently indicates the direction from which the police car is coming. Noble Lords will immediately see the advantage of this if they have experienced the sudden, deafening start of a siren nearby. It is impossible to tell whether the police are coming from behind or from either side at a crossroads. Drivers try to react helpfully, but perhaps do so in the wrong direction or bump into each other.**

The West Yorkshire Police who are carrying out trials with the new siren have so far reported favourably. Where other traffic is concerned, their figures are these. There has been a 15 per cent. reduction in what are described as "panic" manoeuvres, and a 20 per cent. increase in signalled manoeuvres, while the police car has experienced an 8 per cent. reduction in lane changes. That is the way that the success of the experiment so far has been described. I suggest that this directional siren should be an improvement. The noble Lord, Lord Hoyle, may care to comment in that respect. ...

10.1 p.m.

Lord Cope of Berkeley: ... I reinforce what my noble friend said about sirens. It is an important question and I find it difficult to tell from which direction some of the modern whistling, wailing sounds come. It makes it more difficult to keep out of the way or take appropriate action in a car or

vehicle. In urban situations the sound reverberates from the buildings and as the vehicle moves, the sound appears to come from different directions, and it reverberates differently. Careful thought should be given to the problem and **if new types of sound would be of benefit, they should be adopted as soon as convenient.** When crashes occur, they are not necessarily all the fault of the police drivers. It may be that others react in an unpredictable way, not least because they misunderstand where the sound is coming from.

10.6 p.m.

Lord Hoyle (replying for Her Majesty's Government). ... Before I discuss those matters in more detail, I wish to deal with some of the points raised here tonight, particularly those made by the noble Lord, Lord Campbell of Croy....

Various aspects of police vehicles were referred to, including police sirens. **White noise sirens have been developed by the University of Leeds.** The noble Lord, Lord Campbell of Croy, referred to this. **The noble Lord, Lord Cope of Berkeley, said that if there was a better type of siren it would be a great advantage because very often one did not know from which direction the police car was coming. The white noise Localizer siren operates on a broader sound frequency and enables people to determine not only the presence of the emergency vehicle but, more importantly, the direction from which it is coming. I believe that that is a great advantage.** The noble Lord, Lord Campbell of Croy, accurately summed up the results of the experiment in West Yorkshire. **The new siren has resulted in a 15 per cent. reduction in the incidence of panic manoeuvres, a 20 per cent. increase in signalled manoeuvres and an 8 per cent. reduction in lane changes.**