

Published May 29, 2019

Moraga a top town for speeding citations

By Vera Kochan



Corp. R. Douthit points his speed gun at traffic on a Moraga neighborhood street. Photo Andy Scheck

According to the Lamorinda Weekly's police blotter section, in the last month the Moraga Police Department handed out over 70 speeding tickets, and Moraga Police Chief Jon King stated that 624 speeding citations were issued in 2018.

When KPIX Channel 5 conducted a survey in 2013 to determine "which Bay Area town hands out the most speeding tickets," the small quiet town of Moraga came out on top, handing out more speeding tickets per capita than any other municipality in the Bay Area.

When asked what the highest speed ever clocked was, King said, "I don't know the highest, but I have seen citations issued for speeds in excess of 90 mph on Moraga Way." It's common to see citations for reckless driving listed in both the Lafayette and Orinda police blotters as well.

Teen drivers don't fare very well when caught speeding, King added. "Newer drivers who have a provisional driver's license can receive additional penalties, as they also violate the terms of the provisional license when they violate the Vehicle Code."

MPD vehicles come equipped with two speed tracking devices. Speed guns, the very same ones used to determine a pitcher's fastball, operate by Doppler radar, which performs speed measurements. These radar speed guns, like other types of radar, consist of a radio transmitter and receiver. They send out a radio signal in a narrow beam, then receive the same signal back after it bounces off the target object.

Speed guns go through a calibration process using a tuning fork before each and every working shift to ensure accuracy, and before and after being used to detect each speeding violation. Dash mounted speed reading devices are also installed in MPD cruisers which can read objects coming or going.

Who determines Moraga's posted speed limits? According to King, an independent entity of traffic engineers, not affiliated with the town, makes those determinations.

Tony Bizjak's "Back-Seat Driver" column says, "When traffic engineers do their surveys, they are told to disregard the speeds of the fastest 15 percent of drivers on that street driving during free-flow traffic conditions. That's because the law figures those people are probably driving too fast. Some drivers are going too slow, as well. So the law says: Look at the speed that drivers near the 85th percentile are going, and set the limit there." Bizjak adds, "That speed, engineers point out, is one standard deviation about the average speed for all cars on the road. It's a speed that is considered reasonable, given what's actually happening each day on the street."

King stated that Moraga has recently had a traffic survey performed and the currently set speed limits are accurate with considerations given to lane width, curves in the road, areas where children congregate and any other detrimental road conditions or hazards.

Anyone who's been pulled over for speeding tries to get out of a ticket by coming up with a unique reason for doing so. "Everyone has an excuse. Unless you are in the midst of a dire emergency or trying to prevent one, excuses aren't usually too effective," says King. He added, "Just because an officer stops you does not mean you are automatically going to receive a citation. However, there are studies that have shown that the preventative effect of a citation is much greater than a simple warning. So, in trying to change driving habits and get people to slow down, a citation is more effective than a warning."

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