A multifaceted activity, driving requires experience and a number of skills and personality and motivational prerequisites. While it is the basic skills of controlling the car that are important in dealing with specific traffic situations (Levels 1 and 2 of the GADGET model), research has shown that such skills are not enough to ensure safe driving in the long term. These findings are in line with Näätänen and Summala (1974), who argued that driving is a self-paced task. It is fully up to the driver (their decisions and behaviour) to choose a driving style and the level of safety it entails (Levels 3 and 4 of the GADGET model). In addition to the driver’s performance characteristics, modern research into traffic psychology (Rothengatter, 1997) points out the role of personality traits and motivational factors: not only do the driver’s capacities (skills) need to be assessed, but also motivational and personality factors (what they want to do).

The above implies that greater traffic safety requires that road users’ behaviour should be assessed, anticipated, and influenced, i.e. the key is to focus on Levels 3 and 4 of the GADGET matrix. Given their educational background and work experience, traffic psychologists seem to be competent to assess and influence road users’ behaviour.

The present paper reports the results of a study of a group of 2471 Czech drivers who underwent psychological assessment of their fitness to drive in 2014. The reason for this procedure was their driving licence being suspended because of their reaching 12 points in the demerit point system or a single serious traffic violation (such as DUI and speeding). Another group comprised professional drivers with no previous problems in the performance of their work. Personality traits (personality tests – e.g. NEO-PI-R, PSSI, DBQ), personality characteristics (performance tests – e.g. VMT, D2, IST-2000-R), motivation, attitudes, values, and lifestyle (interview) were assessed. In this paper results for the NEO PI-R and PSSI are presented. The results of the tests were compared to their driving history (previous accidents and violations). The results indicate major differences in personality traits between the risk drivers group ( licences suspended) and good drivers group (professional drivers
with successful driving history). While less significant, differences in performance qualities were also demonstrated, with risky drivers showing better performance (perhaps attributable to the age factor).

In conclusion, driver’s personalities and their attitudes, motivation, values, and lifestyles are relevant variables in terms of traffic behaviour. Finally, traffic psychologists are equipped with sufficient expertise to measure these variables and subsequently predict and change risky driving.

References:

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