



People for Proper Policing in North Wales

Craig Bannister denies the speed was inappropriate after 115mph M4 crash

A police sergeant who crashed his patrol car on the M4 has gone on trial accused of dangerous driving. Craig Bannister is said to have been driving at 115mph when he lost control of his BMW in "appalling" weather conditions near Llangyfelach, Swansea. A Cardiff Crown Court jury heard **the advanced driver was not on an emergency call when his car spun off the M4 and skidded 200 yards after hitting water.**

Sgt Bannister admits the crash was his fault **but not that he drove dangerously.** **Prosecutor Michael Hammett** told the court that the weather was appalling, with heavy rain and spray, and the officer's BMW spun off the motorway after hitting a patch of surface water, in January 2008. **A black box recorder showed the car had been doing up to 122mph but had slowed to 115mph immediately before the crash.**

Mr Hammett said it was lucky Sgt Bannister suffered only slight injuries and even more fortunate that no one else was hurt. He said the sergeant, who is **grade two advanced police driver**, admitted the accident was his fault. **But he denied that his speed had been inappropriate for the conditions.**

Sara Lomax who was overtaken by Sgt Bannister's car told the court she could not do more than 60 mph because conditions were terrible, with heavy rain and poor visibility. She said **the police car had not been showing its blue lights.** After it overtook, she saw it swerve and then saw the reflectors on its side as it left the motorway. Her partner, Anthony Jones, said he saw the car flash past, then heard Sarah say: "Oh my God, Oh my god." He went down into the ravine and saw the BMW wrecked. Sgt Bannister was leaning against the passenger door, shocked but apparently unhurt.

PC Robert Tanner, who was one of two traffic officers called to the scene, said conditions were atrocious and that they had arranged for signs to warn motorists to slow down because of surface water and spray. He said that because of the conditions, **they would not have exceeded 85 mph.** The court also heard from **Sgt Gareth Morgan**, who supervised Sgt Bannister's advanced driver training. He described him as a model pupil - a very, very intelligent man **who set himself high standards.**

The PPP comments Traffic Police, they really are a legend in their own lifetime. The reality of this incident is...The maximum legal speed on this Motorway is 70 mph but some sections are limited to 60 mph for mere mortals because they have a high incident rate. The conditions at the time should have reduced the legal maximum speed to 50 mph. The physics of aquaplaning apply to all vehicles irrespective of the so called advanced driving qualification of the driver. The comments of the officer involved and the others that their speed was not inappropriate and 85 mph was acceptable(15 above the legal limit) are unacceptable and indicative of grave incompetence. BMW's and similar vehicles with very broad low profile tyres have to pump proportionally much higher volumes of water to prevent aquaplaning. These so called expert drivers seem totally ignorant of such FACTS. By pure chance this maniac failed to kill many other innocent road users. We expect the usual whitewash. Watch this space. How often are these black boxes checked for such excesses that don't end in crashes? NOTE in N.Wales in 2008 only 7 drivers were summonsed for dangerous driving!