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What You Can Learn by Riding with a State Trooper on I-95: Cameron on Transportation

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[Shawn Mansfield](#) drives Interstate 95 for a living, occasionally at 120 miles an hour.

Five days a week, you'll find him in his super-charged muscle car, sipping a coffee and listening to his FM radio, driving up and down the highway starting at 5:30 a.m.

Mansfield is a Connecticut state trooper.

"I love my job," he told me during a recent ride-along in his unmarked car as I was squeezed next to his on-board computer and wearing an under-sized bullet-proof vest.

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Mansfield has been a trooper for nearly three years following a stint as a corrections officer and six years in the [U.S. Navy](#), including a deployment to Afghanistan.

“Six years in the Navy and I was never on a ship,” he said as we raced down the interstate en route to an accident.

It’s 8:30 a.m. on a recent weekday morning and the southbound highway is bumper-to-bumper, yet Mansfield weaves through the cars, choosing not to drive in the breakdown lane.

“There’s too much debris there,” he said, adding he loves to issue tickets to impatient motorists who think the “emergency rescue lane” is their express way through the delays.

He’s also quick to ticket trucks driving in the left lane. But his favorite targets are distracted drivers, especially people on their cellphones. Sure enough, we stealthily passed a Colorado van with the guy oblivious to our unmarked police vehicle.

Mansfield pulled him over and the driver immediately confessed.

“Honesty is always the best policy,” said Mansfield, who issued the driver a \$150 ticket for his first offense.

We made four stops — mostly rear-end accidents in congested I-95 traffic and one on Super 7 — over a four-hour span.

In addition to tickets for “following too close,” several stops found unregistered vehicles or unlicensed drivers.

“She won’t be going anywhere today,” Mansfield said as a tow truck removed her car from the highway.

Mansfield said undocumented immigrants, who can obtain Connecticut driver’s licenses, should not fear state troopers.

“We don’t toss anybody to ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement)” he said.

Mansfield uses his laptop to check license plates and driver’s licenses. He writes up his accident reports on the scene with his dispatchers at Troop G in Bridgeport able to follow every keystroke. They also know his every move, thanks to the GPS transponder mounted on his roof — the only sign his super-charged speedster is a [State Police](#) vehicle.

In each case, the motorists involved in the accidents were patient and friendly, some of them even shaking hands after receiving their citations.

“You can be a nice guy and still do your job,” Mansfield said with a smile.

But there are other times when he needs to break up fights or speak to someone who doesn't understand English.

"My Spanish isn't great," he said. "But one time, I used Google Translate to talk with a Korean gentleman."

Part Two

[This article was originally published in two parts. Darienite.com presents it here in one piece.]

My recent ride-along with State Trooper Shawn Mansfield was a real eye-opener to see the road from his perspective as we answered accident calls and pulled over at least one motorist for talking on his cellphone.

Mansfield works five days and then gets three days off. He gets to bid for his favorite shift, which for him is starting at 5:30 a.m. Mansfield also gets to drive "his" car home each night.

Mansfield's car is an unmarked, super-charged beast that easily hit 80 mph as we zoomed to assignments, its hidden lights flashing and siren wailing. He said his favorite patrol is to drive in the middle lane and wait for unsuspecting speeders to pass him on the left. The day I rode, he sounded disappointed.

"I can't believe nobody was trying to blow my doors off," he chuckled.

Our patrol included visits to the DMV in Norwalk and a stop where we walked through an Interstate 95 service station.

"I like to be visible," he said as travelers and merchants nodded his way.

But when we were back on the road, the post-rush hour traffic was moving at the usual 70 mph.

"Aren't we and most of these vehicles violating the speed limit?" I asked.

I wanted to know what the real speed limit is on our interstates and how troopers decide when to pull someone over.

"I can't comment on that," he said, noticing my pen poised to quote him. But he did offer what seemed to be a logical and fair answer: "I'm looking to catch the people whose driving might cause an accident."

In other words, if you're going with the flow a bit over the speed limit, but using your turn signals and not hogging the left hand lane, you're probably OK. But when you start weaving between lanes or driving much faster than the rest of the vehicles, Mansfield will get you. At least that's what I think he was saying.

"We can't use radar on 95. There are just too many cars," he said. "But I do have a laser speed-gun, which is very accurate."

But the best way Mansfield catches motorists is to compare his car's speedometer (calibrated monthly) as he catches up to an offender. That's how your speed is most often clocked.

Going too slow or not staying in-lane is also suspicious, often leading to DUI arrests. The trooper said he's seeing more DUIs tied to drug use, not just alcohol.

A person's car can be searched if the trooper has probable cause — an aroma of marijuana, for example. If a driver refuses a search, troopers can always call out the canine unit whose olfactory skills are finely tuned.

Mansfield said a highway stop last year led to the seizure of 10,000 tablets of fentanyl — an opioid 50 times more powerful than morphine.

I was duly impressed with Mansfield, an earnest young man who takes his job of protecting the public very seriously. Driving on I-95, I even feel a bit safer knowing he and his colleagues are out there.

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