

Speeders from page 1A

Drake roads. The speed limit there is 55.

"Once we start, it gets fast and furious," Cranston warned officers at a briefing before the operation on Friday morning.

Special stop watches

With seven police cars lined up in "the chute," on the shoulder of I-696, and Halliday and Cranston in the air, officers pulled over the speeding motorists in rapid-fire fashion.

They use special stop watches on vehicles going through marked and measured quarter-mile-long timing zones to come up with the speed in miles per hour. They then describe the car or truck to officers below and "talk them into their bumper."

"We leave it up to the officer stopping them as to whether or not to write a ticket," Cranston

'The speed limit is 55 and we aren't ticketing anyone who's going below 75. . . Here's a guy driving 101 in a 55 (zone). Suppose he comes up on a woman with a couple of kids in her car. I mean, that's ridiculous.'

David 'Doc' Halliday
Michigan State Police pilot

said.

Halliday, who works with police agencies throughout southeast Michigan on traffic detail during the summer, said speeders are not ticketed unless they are driving at least 20 miles above the speed limit.

"The speed limit is 55 and we aren't ticketing anyone who's going below 75," he said.

Even then, there aren't enough officers available to catch just those motorists driving faster

than 80 mph.

"Here's a guy driving 101 in a 55," Halliday said. "Suppose he comes up on a woman with a couple of kids in her car. I mean, that's ridiculous."

Hundreds of missions

After hundreds of such operations, Halliday can fly, time and talk while guiding the small Cessna 172 that he flies out of New Hudson on this particular morning.

The air is choppy and bad weather is coming from the west, but the veteran pilot is cool as a cucumber. In fact, Halliday, who joined the state police in 1982, almost seems bored.

"OK, Car 57," he says. "I've got a real zoomer for ya."

When the officer reports back that the car is driving in excess of 90 mph and is equipped with a radar detector, which is useless against air speed timing, Halliday clenches his fist as a clear sign of victory, about the only emotion he's going to show. He knows that this ticket will stick.

"We've had people who say we're picking on them and that we know who they are," he said. "We just have the officer (on the ground) point out our plane and ask if they can see who we are."

The police have not lost a case based on air speed timing.

"We even had a physics teacher from Grand Rapids take us to court," Halliday said. "We won the case."

Why then don't police use the method more?

"This is through a program funded by the federal government through the state," Cranston said. "There aren't enough resources to do this all the time."

Troy, Southfield and Farmington Hills are the three police departments that will work with the Michigan State Police during the summer for only a few days to catch motorists using the technique.

But it is so effective — and it lets motorists know that even a radar detector and no sign of po-

lice are not a guarantee against being caught — that police organizations will use air speed timing whenever they can.

"In the 1980s, alcohol seemed to be the biggest problem associated with accidents," Cranston said. "We have better laws in place now to deal with that. So the federal government has been shifting to speed enforcement. Excessive speed has been the biggest cause of accidents in the '90s."

Cranston also said about 40 percent of the more than 300,000 vehicles that travel I-696 exit onto streets in Farmington Hills, whether they are going to residences or businesses. "It's part of our responsibility to enforce speed laws in our community the best way we can," Cranston said.

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