

Driving matters



Photography: Alamy

Adam Briggs, Deputy Chief Constable of North Yorkshire Police, is also President of TISPOL - the European Traffic Police Network. Here he explains why traffic officers should ignore the critics and work with their European counterparts to save lives.

There has never been a greater need for the co-operation of police across borders. To the public this may seem obvious in areas such as counter terrorism, internet crime or people trafficking. Just as important is co-operation between forces to combat road crimes that occur not just everyday, but every second of every day on the roads of Europe.

In 2001 there were about 8,000 people murdered in the countries that make up the present day European Union. In that same year over 50,000 people died on the roads. Officers with experience of road traffic accidents won't need me to tell them about the pain and grief that follows for the friends and

families left behind. The saddest part of all is that so many of these deaths are needless and easily avoidable.

The good news is that, thanks in large part to co-operation across borders, real progress is being made – though not as fast as we would wish.

TISPOL was established by the police forces of Europe as a way of working together to reduce death on the roads. We do this through education, enforcement and the sharing of best practice. Each year, TISPOL co-ordinates a series of simultaneous themed operations across Europe. These include speeding, drink and drug driving, people who fail to wear seatbelts as well as campaigns checking on the safety of coaches and trucks. The expansion of the EU has led to further challenges in protecting the safety and security of Europe's roads. We have also used officer exchanges as a way of assisting with translations and also spreading good practice.

Each year TISPOL's annual conference sees the leading experts in roads policing and design gathering together to pass on their knowledge and face questions from the floor. This year

the TISPOL conference takes place in Harrogate, North Yorkshire with Roads Minister Jim Fitzpatrick, agreeing to speak along with experts from the public and private sector drawn from across Europe and beyond. Details of this and other TISPOL activities can be found at www.tispol.org.

So we are making progress, though not at the rate we would like and there is still much work to be done. Saving lives on the road will never attract the headlines of a hunt for a serial killer. Ill-informed people will continue to see traffic officers as an easy target and fail to appreciate the critical importance of their role. But when they ask, "Have you not got anything more important to do?" we should ask them, "What is more important than saving lives?"

TISPOL: The Conference 2008 is a major European Road Safety event, with key speakers and exhibitors in the field of road safety and road safety enforcement from across Europe. The Conference will be held in Harrogate on September 30 and October 1, 2008