



the encounter begins, the officer has pulled you over due to your suspicious driving

By MELYNDA JARRATT

The Fredericton Police Department must really have known what they were doing this week when they assigned Constable Danny Copp (yes, Coppl) and Constable Dave MacLaggan to show me around the Fredericton Police Station and assist me in writing an article about Alcohol and the Law. When I first arrived, I wasn't sure what kind of a reception I would get, never having been to a police station before and having been subjected to too many re-runs of Hawaii 5-0. Nevertheless, all my worries were dispelled when upon my arrival I was greeted by Constable Copp and we proceeded to talk in great depth about the many problems caused by alcohol-related crime. Perhaps the most common of these is the Drinking Driver, and it was with him in mind that Copp and I began the interview. My purpose in going to the station was two-fold. First, I wanted to know the exact procedures one goes through upon being suspected of DWI (Driving While Intoxicated), and second, I wanted to show the students of UNB and STU what REALLY happens to you when caught driving while drunk.

Sure, we all have stories about friends or relatives who have had the misfortune to get themselves caught drinking and driving. To a lot of us, spending a few nights, free of charge, in the Crowbar Hotel doesn't really mean that much. Oh sure it can be an inconvenience, but it is more of a joke that they were stupid enough to get caught in the first place. A fine, your license revoked, maybe a few nights in jail, is all that ever arises out of drinking and driving, so what is there to worry about?

They couldn't be more wrong.

Drinking and driving is no joke, and there are countless numbers of people who would attest to that fact if they could only rise out of the grave and speak their two cents worth. Drinking and Driving Kills! and let us not forget that.

Therefore, with this in mind, Constable Copp and I, along with Constable Dave MacLaggan decided to go through the whole procedure and series of steps that one goes through upon being suspected of Drinking and Driving. With this knowledge, I hope that even one of you will think twice about putting that key into the ignition after a night out on the town.

We began our little "theatre" in the parking lot behind city hall. I pretended throughout that I was the one who had been caught DWI, and Cons. MacLaggan ever so eloquently played his role to the "T". Mind you, he has had a lot of practice at this sort of thing, so I will cry unfair when my time comes up at the Oscars. Sitting in Cons. Copp's mini-Austin (for lack of any other car), I waited nervously as I saw Cons. MacLaggan approach my door. As I rolled down my window to speak with him, I couldn't help but think of the literally thousands of people who go through this



a test of your balance ensues, and as you waver you realize how obvious you are.



you're read the Demand For Breath By An Approved Screening Device

procedure every year. It's kind of embarrassing to be stopped on the side of the road where every passing car stops and stares at you. It's a kind of feeling that you aren't in control of your own life and that is hard to shake off. But since their objective is to catch Drinking Drivers, and my objective is to cram as much as I can into this small space, I shall reduce the following procedures to a series of steps which will enable you to follow me as I go through a journey in the shoes of a drinking driver.

It looks like I've had too much to drink, and I shouldn't be driving but I go out into my car anyways and look what has happened! I've been stopped by the police. Egads! Will he notice how much I've had to drink? He introduces himself as Constable MacLaggan of the Fredericton City Police, and asks me for my license and registration. As I hand it to the constable, he asks me if I have had anything to drink. Noticing that I had been driving kind of slow, he asks me if I would step out of the car for a few observational tests.

Drinking, driving and the law



the Alert test is administered



you haven't fooled anyone as the red light confirms the officer's suspicions

Allowing myself to indulge in this reverie, I step out of the car, and proceed to walk a straight line heel-to-toe. I close my eyes and lean backwards without falling, a feat comparable only to Olympic Javelin Tossers. (I wonder if I have passed or failed.) It looks like I have raised the suspicion of Constable MacLaggan, and he therefore reads me the DEMAND FOR BREATH BY AN APPROVED SCREENING DEVICE - the fateful Alert test which serves to filter out the drinkers from the kind of guy who just ran a red light. Under the suspicion that I may have alcohol in my body, Cons. MacLaggan demands that I "accompany" him to his cruiser and "provide forthwith such a sample of your breath as in my opinion is necessary to enable a proper analysis of your breath to be made by means of an approved screening device". (ie. the Alert, a small inconspicuous looking orange box which has the capability to detect alcohol in your system.) It's not the Breathalyzer, but it's the next best thing to it. You just blow into a little tube like contraption.



you're brought to the station for the Breathalyzer



your phone call to tell relatives of your self-imposed predicament

and a shiny light will appear indicating either a pass, warning, or failure. If you pass the Alert, then all is fine and you can go home, a bit humiliated for getting stopped on the side of the road. But if you fail the Alert, like I did, it's an all expenses paid side trip to the Breathalyzer Suite at the Crowbar Hotel.

Before I actually have the test, I am allowed to make one phone call to my lawyer - but whether or not he tells me to go ahead and do the test, I'll still have to take the Breathalyzer. If I refuse to do so, I will receive a 24 hour suspension and I can expect to make an appearance in court. Being the co-operative type, I decided to willingly take the Breathalyzer test. Ideally, it should be administered within two hours, but if fate intervenes, and that is not possible, the boys at the Lab in Sackville have some scientific way of deducing how much alcohol was in my system at the time I was apprehended. Simply stated, there is no way I can get away with it. Neither the

the encounter ends, you're the day alone to deliberate the actions of



Photos by Alan Brown

passage of time, nor other devious tricks can loosen me from the grips of Justice. So it is in this little room with lime green upholstery and cold cement floors that my fate shall be decided. If I pass the Breathalyzer, then the worst thing that can happen to me is a 24 hour suspension for failing the Alert. Oh yes, perhaps I will be a little pissed off for all the inconvenience and the embarrassment of being hauled down to the police station, but at least I'll still have my license the next day. Constable Copp prepares the test, I blow into the little tube and wait for what seems to be forever. Trying to pass the time with a little friendly conversation, I ask Constables Copp and MacLaggan what it is like to work in the Breathalyzer room. They both thought that it was the worst part of their job as officers in the Traffic Division. People scream and yell, accusing them of ruining their lives, their job, their family, the wife, the husband, the kids, everything, for that matter. Because it takes a while to administer the test, they said, they often find themselves as the subject of a lot of antagonism and hostility, for the drinking driver cannot see in his state of inebriation, that it is he, not the police, who is responsible for being in that cold and impersonal room where lime green upholstery and cement floors glare ominously at you through fuzzy eyes. Then, the verdict. I have failed the Breathalyzer test. What next? If I was really drunk, they would put me into one of their suites located down the back of the Breathalyzer room to sober up. But since I am not, I can go home to my worried family with one less license and a date with a judge.

Not all drinking and driving offenders end up in the clinker as we have tried to make you believe. Despite the fact that the Fredericton Police have noticed a sharp decline in the number of people caught drinking and driving since new legislation was announced by Justice Minister John Crosbie, you can read nearly everyday in the Courts that a lot of people are still choosing the High Way To Die. It's this kind of person who fails the Breathalyzer, who has to think a lot about his drinking habits and to worry-worry about what the family will say, what the neighbours will think, and what to do when his name is emblazoned upon the back page of the Fredericton Gleaner under *Breathalyzer*. Perhaps the sheer embarrassment, plus a fine and the revoking of his license is enough to make him smarten up - but mortality rates on our highways prove the opposite. The new legislation has seen to it that the net will draw ever so tightly around suspected drinking drivers. The Alert test, for one, is a subtle reminder that the police take this matter seriously. So what are you going to do about it? As the television commercial says, Let's open a dialogue on drinking. Let's think about driving while under the influence of alcohol as a serious offense. It's only when we change our attitude towards DWI that it will become socially unacceptable behaviour as it is in many, many other countries.