

ONE FOR THE ROAD IS TOO MANY

Two men leave a bar. One is drunk and the other has had two beers. The drunk man drives just below the speed limit, carefully staying in his lane. The other man recklessly weaves in and out of traffic at high speed.

The drunk man should be stopped, of course. But that leaves the daredevil driver on the road. A new study suggests that this type of driver the moderate drinker--can be just as dangerous as the heavy drinker.

What You Think Can Hurt You

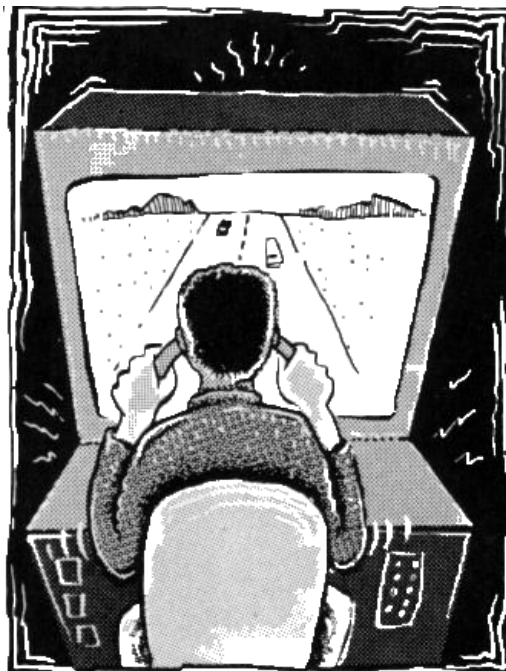
Two psychologists at Mississippi State University watched 39 young adults play a driver-simulation video game before and after drinking. Some were given a moderate amount of alcohol. Some had a lot of alcohol and some drank no alcohol at all. Half of the participants were told that they had consumed more or less alcohol than they actually had.

The psychologists measured these drivers' risk-taking behavior by counting the number of cars they passed while playing the video game and the amount of time they drove at highest speed. The results were surprising.

Their willingness to take risks was unaffected by the amount of alcohol that the people drank. Instead, it was what they thought they had consumed that changed their behavior.

Whether they drank a little or a lot, the ones who thought they'd consumed a moderate amount of alcohol took more risks. They passed four times as many cars and drove at high speeds longer than others in the test.

Perhaps those who thought they



had consumed moderate amounts of alcohol became overly confident behind the wheel. Researchers speculate that those who thought they had consumed a lot of alcohol may have compensated by driving more slowly and taking fewer risks.

How to Spot Drunk Drivers

Alcohol is involved in about half of all fatal accidents. It slows reaction time,

blurs vision, impairs the ability to judge distances and fools drivers into thinking they're driving better than they actually are.

If you don't drink, you don't have to worry about drinking and driving. But you still have to watch out for other drivers who may be drinking. Here are some clues to help you identify someone who's driving under the influence of alcohol:

- Weaving or swerving.
- Very slow speed.
- Inconsistent signals.
- Braking erratically.
- Stopping without apparent cause.
- Accelerating or slowing rapidly.
- Drifting.
- Speeding.
- Nearly striking an object or vehicle.
- Driving with head out the window or window down in cold weather.
- Driving into oncoming or crossing traffic.
- Driving with tires on the lane marker.

Risky Times to Drive

Keep in mind that the most dangerous time to drive is on Saturday or Sunday mornings after 2 a.m., when people are leaving bars and parties are breaking up. Holidays are also high risk times, with New Year's Day holding the record for alcohol-related fatalities.

Whenever you drive, remember that a "moderate" number of drinks can be as hazardous to your driving as getting totally drunk. Stay sober when you know you're going to drive home, or find some other way to get there.