

# Speed cameras and speed-camera detector laws

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## Speed cameras and speed-camera detector laws

In the UK, there are strict rules which outline how fast people can drive on different types of roads. One of the ways speed is monitored is the use of speed cameras which capture drivers travelling over the speed limit. Drivers can also maintain their awareness by using speed-camera detector devices.

But how many speed cameras are there in the UK? What rules govern the use of speed-camera detectors? In this guide, we look at the rules of speed-camera detectors and speed cameras so drivers can monitor their driving habits safely and legally.

### What is a speed camera detector?

A speed camera detector is a device that can be mounted on the dashboard of your car. It's designed to help you stay within the legal speed limits by alerting you to fixed and mobile speed cameras while you're driving. The most modern devices can also detect speed laser guns and traffic light cameras. Some speed camera detectors are also available as smartphone apps.

Used correctly, speed camera detectors can help you monitor your speed, tell you to slow down when you're going too quickly and encourage generally safer driving habits. However, some people argue that they enable reckless drivers to get away with speeding, safe in the knowledge that they'll be alerted before they get caught.

### How do speed camera detectors work?

A speed camera detector can be used to help you drive safely by:

- Alerting you to nearby speed cameras
- Warning you about accident blackspots and congestion zones
- Reminding you of the legal speed limit



### Types of speed camera detector

- **GPS Detector** – uses a database that contains the locations of fixed speed cameras, accident blackspots and even schools. It will let you know if you're approaching any of these using your GPS position and warn you of potential dangers.
- **Radar and laser detector** – picks up on radar or laser transmissions from police speed-detection devices to warn you of their location.

- **Laser jammer** – used to detect and block radar and laser signals from police speed cameras so they won't be able to register a driver's speed. Laser jammers are **illegal in the UK** and most other countries.

### **Are speed-camera detectors legal in the UK?**

#### **GPS detectors**

GPS-only detectors are legal in the UK because the information they use is widely available to everyone.

#### **Radar/laser detectors**

For now, radar and laser devices are legal in the UK. But there has been debate in Parliament about banning them, mainly because some drivers use them to avoid getting caught for reckless driving.

Radar and laser detectors are banned in most EU countries, and the ongoing conversation in the UK has already led to many retailers, including Halfords, taking radar and laser-only detectors off the shelves.

#### **Laser jammers**

Laser jammers are illegal in the UK and most other countries. If you're caught using one, you'll be prosecuted. You could get a heavy fine or even face a prison sentence for perverting the course of justice.

### **Are speed camera detectors legal in Europe?**

Speed-camera detection devices are illegal in most EU countries including France, Spain and Italy. You could end up with a heavy fine just for having one in your car.

France, in particular, is very strict about speed-camera detectors. It's illegal to have a speed detector device in your car, even if you're not using it. This includes your sat nav if it's displaying fixed speed camera positions. Penalties are high – you risk a fine of up to 1,500 euros, confiscation of your vehicle, and could even have your UK driving licence confiscated by French police.

GPS systems are allowed in some European countries though, including Spain and Italy, but it's important to check on the specific rules for each country you're travelling in to avoid getting on the wrong side of the law.

If you're driving to Europe and have a speed-camera detector, it may be a good idea to leave it at home, even if it's legal to use in the UK. And make sure you turn off all fixed speed camera alerts on your sat nav. The law varies between countries, but in some places, including France, all speed camera detection technology is illegal.

### **Did you know?**

Even if you do 31mph in a 30mph zone, you're breaking the law. Although most drivers think they'll get away with a 10% leeway, it's up to the police to decide whether to penalise or not.

### **How many speed cameras are there in the UK?**

There are around 7,000 known speed cameras in the UK, the fifth highest of any country. Some of the top countries with the most known speed cameras are shown below.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of known speed cameras</b>
Brazil	16,997
Italy	10,787
US	7,366
UK	Around 7,000

### **Why do we have speed cameras?**

The most recent data from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents shows that, in 2020, drivers travelling too fast contributed towards:

- 13% of total collisions
- 16% of collisions where a serious injury occurred
- 27% of fatal collisions

Driving at higher speeds gives motorists less time to react to whatever situation unfolds around them. Despite this, the most recent government statistics show that amongst car drivers:

- 52% complied with the speed limit on motorways
- 89% complied with the speed limit on national speed limit single carriageways
- 49% complied with the speed limit on 30mph roads

Speed cameras are often set up in areas where the rate of collisions and casualties is higher, especially where they are speed related. Over the years, studies have consistently shown that speed cameras reduce speed and prevent crashes - therefore saving lives.

An independent, UK-based review of over 4,000 speed cameras, undertaken over a four-year period, found that:

At fixed camera sites:

- The number of vehicles speeding was reduced by 70%
- Excessive speeding, defined as travelling at 15mph or more above the limit, fell by 91%
- The number of people killed or seriously injured was reduced by 50%

At mobile camera sites:

- The number of vehicles speeding was reduced by 18%
- Excessive speeding fell by 36%
- The number of people killed or seriously injured was reduced by 35%

A later report looked at 51 permanent average speed camera sites installed between 2000 and 2015. During that time:

- Fatal and serious injury collisions fell by 25-46%
- Personal injury collisions fell by 9-22%

### **Speed camera laws**

Driving faster than the speed limit is an offence under section 89 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

The first speed camera in the UK was introduced in 1991, when the Road Traffic Act 1991 allowed:

- Highway authorities to install and maintain cameras approved to detect speeding offences
- Courts to accept evidence of speeding from these cameras
- Police to acquire information about a driver's identity
- A conditional offer of a fixed penalty to be sent to a driver through the post

## Types of speed camera

- **Fixed speed cameras**

Fixed speed cameras light up the car, number plate, and the white lines painted on the road. They take two photos to compare the car's position relative to the white lines, which show how quickly the distance between them was travelled. They were the first type of speed camera to be installed in the UK and are usually easy to spot due to being painted bright yellow.

There are two main types of fixed speed camera. Gatso cameras are rear-facing so the flash won't dazzle drivers and, ironically, cause an accident, while Truvelo cameras are forward-facing, with an infra-red flash that drivers can't see. Unlike Gatso cameras, Truvelo cameras capture the person who is driving.

- **Average speed cameras**

Average speed cameras like the SPECS camera, which was introduced in 1999, use a technology called Automatic Number Plate Reading (ANPR) to record the date and time you pass between two cameras. From this, the computer can work out your average speed.

- **Variable speed cameras**

Similar to average speed cameras, variable speed cameras are normally found on motorways where the speed limit has been reduced in response to hazards or congestion, and are not in constant use.

- **Traffic light cameras**

Traffic light cameras detect when a car passes through a red light. They turn on when traffic lights switch to red and photograph any car which continues driving.

- **Mobile speed cameras**

Mobile speed cameras can be mini Gatso cameras, laser guns, or hand-held radar equipment, but they all hold the same purpose: to catch people speeding in areas where accidents have consistently happened over a period of three years or more. They are often run by local police forces and are situated in cars or vans parked off the road. These vehicles can be marked or unmarked.

## **Speed camera statistics**

The government's most recent data shows that, under free-flowing traffic conditions in 2021:

- 51% of car drivers exceeded the speed limit on 30mph roads
- 48% of car drivers exceeded the speed limit on motorways
- 11% of car drivers exceeded the speed limit on national speed limit single carriageway roads

The same research shows that the percentage of car drivers exceeding the speed limit by more than 10mph was:

- 10% on motorways
- 5% on 30mph roads
- 1% on 60mph roads

Generally, speed limit compliance has remained steady throughout the decade between 2011 and 2021. Slightly lower levels of compliance were seen in 2020, but this is due to atypical traffic caused by the pandemic.

## **Other ways to monitor your speed**

Thanks to car safety technology, it's easy to monitor your speed without the need for a speed-camera detector.

### **Dash cams**

A dash cam is an in-car camera which records the road ahead during your journey. This footage can be used as video evidence if you have an accident or need to settle a car insurance claim. Many dash cams also include GPS, which can show your vehicle's speed and alert you to fixed speed cameras in the area.

### **Sat navs**

Many modern vehicles are now equipped with sat nav features via smartphone apps like Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Android Auto uses Google Maps, which gives alerts for speed limits and fixed speed cameras.

### **Black box telematics**

Black box telematics devices or apps are particularly useful for young drivers. The black box monitors how well you drive. If you drive safely, you may get a discount on your car-insurance premium. Monitoring your driving habits can encourage you to stick to the speed limit and improve your general road awareness.

### **Speed limiters**

A speed limiter, also called Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA), is a new safety feature that is now mandatory on all new vehicles sold in the EU from July 2022. The Department for Transport has yet to implement the same rules, but some believe they will follow suit in the coming years.

### **Speed awareness**

Although technology could help you monitor your speeding, the best way to stay safe and avoid a fine and penalty points is to drive responsibly and be aware of your speed at all times. Safe driving habits and no driving convictions to declare can also help keep your car insurance premiums down, as there'll be less risk of you having an accident and making a claim.

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November 2022