

Can you tell when you're over The alcohol limit?

HALF the drivers tested for drink driving in Croydon over the Christmas period were arrested for being over the limit or failing to give a sample, a recent Croydon Advertiser story revealed.

The average for the capital was one in 10 drivers arrested, making Croydon one of the areas where arrest rates were highest. Of course the easiest way to make sure you are not caught out is not to drink at all. But some people will still insist they can down several drinks and be sober enough to drive home. So how easy is it to gauge when you have gone over the limit?

On a busy Saturday night we asked 11 revelers how intoxicated they thought they were. We then revealed our secret weapon, a Home Office-approved breathalyser. We used this to find out how good their guesses were.

Many of the 11 tested over-estimated alcohol concentration. But five of them guessed they would score *less* than they did. The legal driving limit is 35 micrograms (μg) per 100 millilitres (ml) of breath, which translates as 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100ml of blood.

Rob Weston, of Grant Road, Addiscombe, thought he would score 30 μg , but his breath was recorded at nearly double that at 52 μg . Back at work this week the 24-year-old civil servant said: "It will probably make me think about how much I'm having. It's a bit of an eye-opener." Rob, said, Maybe I might have thought I was clear, but obviously not.

"I started drinking at about 5.20pm and stopped at 7.30pm. I didn't start again until I got to the pub at about 9.20pm. I had had an hour off and 20 minutes sleep as well, so maybe that was a factor in my estimation. Normally I'm pretty good. I don't drink and drive. It must be to do with my size and things like that."

Sgt Jim McTiernan, a Met Police Liaison Officer for Drink and Drug Driving, said this was a common mistake.

He said: **"That's the classic example. You can't estimate it, no matter what you think. Your own personal view of things is not a good judge."** We have to advise people not to drink and drive at all. The rate at which alcohol leaves your system varies for each individual. But that rate is fixed; it makes no difference if you're asleep. And black coffee doesn't lower the rate, either."

As for the eight people who over-estimated what their result would be, or whose scores seemed unusually low for the amount of alcohol they had consumed, Sgt McTiernan said this was because the body was still absorbing the alcohol. He said: "If someone comes out of the pub and it's been an hour since they had their last drink the alcohol level would still be going up. So the rating you get half-an-hour later would probably be more."

A spokesman for drink addiction support and advice service Alcohol Concern said: "It's certainly reflective of a wider issue, because it's very difficult to judge how many drinks take you over the limit for drink driving. Obviously that depends on all kinds of different variables, which is why the message we always give, to be sure you're not over the limit, is not to drink at all before you drive. "Small amounts of alcohol in your blood stream can be enough to reduce your reaction time."

How volunteers fared in our street test

Sarah Chalkney, 39
Accountant, Gidd Hill, Coulsdon

Drank: One-and-a-half pints cider, two raspberry vodka shots, two double vodkas and two shots

- Guess: 70mcg
- Result: 30mcg

"I don't understand why it was so low. I've drunk loads today. I think it's my size."



Nicola Balwin, 39
Off duty barmaid, Gidd Hill, Coulsdon

Drank: Four double spirits

- Guess: 50mcg
- Result: 39mcg

"It won't change my drinking habits. I'm actually surprised that mine is as low as it is."



● The drink-drive alcohol limit is 35mcg of alcohol in 100ml of breath
● We tested revellers with a Home Office-approved breathalyser, as supplied by UKBreathalysers.com



Grace Worrell, 41
Nursery nurse, Woodlands Grove, Coulsdon

Drank: Four double spirits and one shot

- Guess: 60mcg
- Result: 43mcg

"I've eaten a meal before we came out. I'm surprised. I really do think it's people's size that makes a difference. I haven't drunk all day, just tonight, so I do feel it's about your body weight."

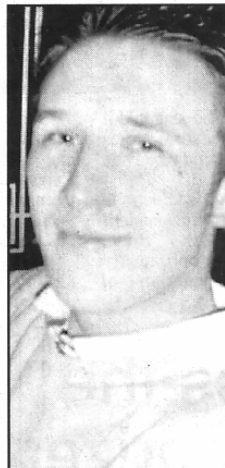


Rob Weston, 24
Civil servant, Grant Road, Addiscombe

Drank: Six pints

- Guess: 30mcg
- Result: 52mcg

"It means I'm well over the limit. It doesn't surprise me. I don't think I feel like I could get behind a wheel. I feel more tired than anything else."



Maria Tanborro, 39
Nurse, Sandown Road, Coulsdon

Drank: Four double spirits, two shots and a pint of cider

- Guess: 40mcg
- Result: 33mcg

"I think it should be higher. I wouldn't want to get in a car and drive now. I think it's that low because I've drunk over such a long period of time. I've eaten as well."

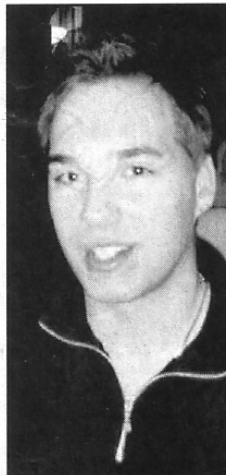


Mark Tillyer, 20
Salesman, Kenley

Drank: Three mixers and four glasses of wine

- Guess: 80mcg
- Result: 95mcg

"I wouldn't drive, but I don't feel that drunk. I would have thought I was more than double the limit to be honest. I have been drinking since about 7.30pm."

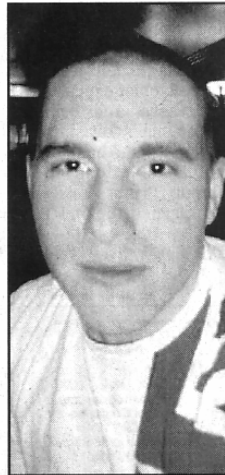


Alec Peacock, 20
Trainee paratrooper, South Croydon

Drank: Three pints of beer and four glasses of wine

- Guess: 90mcg
- Result: 38mcg

"Personally I wouldn't even ride a push bike home now. It all depends on the person. It depends how fit you are and if you drink all the time."

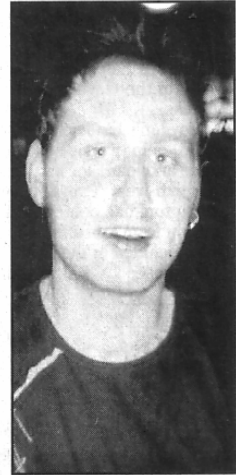


Colin Lock, 19
Student, Beddington Lane, Croydon

Drank: Three double vodkas and five glasses of wine

- Guess: 90
- Result: 48

"I've been drinking since 7pm as well. But I can handle my drink."



Jack Cronk, 20
Personal trainer, Spencer Road, Caterham

Drank: Three beers, half a bottle of wine and six shots

- Guess: 100mcg
- Result: 43mcg

"Is that all I am? I could nearly still drive then. I can't understand it. I've had about six shots and I'm still only just over the limit."

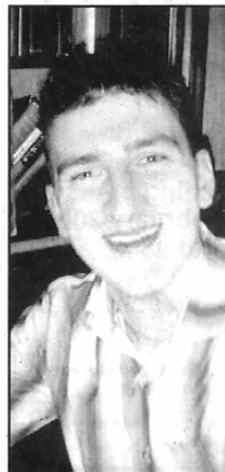


Shaun Matthews, 22
Tiler, Stafford Road, Caterham

Drank: Four pints and two shots

- Guess: 40mcg
- Result: 43mcg

"That doesn't make sense. To be honest I wouldn't drive now because I know I would be over the limit. I think I could drive all right but I wouldn't actually do it."



Claire Lynch, 18
Beautician, Great Park estate, Warlingham

Drank: Three mixers and one glass of wine

- Guess: 12mcg
- Result: 23mcg

"I can still drive though. I feel a bit tipsy but I don't feel drunk. I wouldn't feel safe driving."

