

What's That? Driving Diminishes Listening



You can drive while you talk, and talk while you drive, but you will perform worse at both.

It's long been proven that having a conversation, whether on the phone or with a passenger, while driving, can make you a worse driver. But now researchers from the University of Illinois have found that the opposite is also true – that driving can make you a worse listener.

“Someone who is driving has a harder time understanding conversation and analyzing language.” said Gary Dell, a psychology

professor and co-author of the study published in the *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*.

Previous research on the topic had failed to link driving to impaired listening, which surprised Dell.

The Illinois researchers used driving simulators to test their theory. In the experiment, a driver would try to remember conversations with a passenger in the car or with a person on the phone, using a hands-free headset.

The driver would be asked to listen to four stories, half while sitting in the car but not operating it, and the other half while navigating through simulated busy city traffic.

Then the driver was asked to retell the stories. Their ability to remember details and repeat what they heard improved if they were not driving when they heard the story.

“Drivers remembered 20 percent less of the stories they heard when they were driving compared with when they were sitting still and listening.” Dell said.

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