

Police Pursuits in NSW: Just the Facts...and figures

Kris Cooper

New South Wales Police Force

Abstract

Police pursuits are a contentious area of discussion and often lacks a firm understanding of the actual numbers involved. The NSW Police Force for calendar year 2017 engaged in 2543 pursuits. Each one of these pursuits was monitored, managed and recorded. These records and their analysis provide valuable insight as to who is involved in these pursuits, their duration and corresponding resources applied to them. This in turn informs development of policy and procedures for the NSW Police Force and enables a greater focus for training.

Background

The NSW Police Force engaged in 2543 pursuits for calendar year 2017. Data is obtained in relation to these pursuits as they are monitored.

The definition of a pursuit varies across jurisdictions and is generally tailored to suit the operational environment of the respective policing agencies and the policy framework of that agency. This mix of definitions can lead to misinterpretation of data supplied by various policing agencies.

Method

All reported pursuits recorded by NSW Police Operations Group and documented in real time are collated and reviewed by Traffic & Highway Patrol Command. The information available is generally self reported by the involved police at the time of the incident. This in turn can be subject to various means of verification through police "Event" reports sourced from the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) and review of in car video material. Through analysis of this information, a profile of pursuits and their conduct can be derived. This is then further supported by additional police holdings.

A pursuit is defined under NSW Police Force policy in the following terms

- A pursuit, regardless of speed, commences at the time a police officer decides to pursue a vehicle that has ignored a direction to stop.
- It is an attempt by a police officer in a motor vehicle to stop and apprehend the occupant(s) of a moving vehicle, regardless of speed or distance, when the driver of the other vehicle is attempting to avoid apprehension or appears to be ignoring police attempts to stop them.

A collision is recorded where there is any contact between any of the involved vehicles, the involved vehicles and other vehicles, or the involved vehicles and other objects.

An injury is recorded where any of the involved parties reports an injury, irrespective of its severity and prior to any medical assessment by a medical practitioner.

The very low threshold for defining where a collision or injury is incurred is designed to improve transparency and for ease of reporting.

Results

The average pursuit, from statistical data for 2017, occurs during the hours of darkness (on a Friday or Saturday (36% total). The originating offence will be a traffic offence. Traffic conditions will generally be light (88%) and weather will be good (96%). It is more likely that the pursuit will occur in a regional location (62%) than metropolitan (38%)

The pursuing officer will most likely be attached to Highway Patrol, be a senior constable of police (75%) and have between 6 to 10 years service (28.6%; mode is 10 years at 222(8.7%)). The pursuit is likely to be resolved in less than 2 minutes (69%) the most likely outcome is that the pursuit will be discontinued by the police driver (31%) or terminated by a police supervisor (25%) in accordance with the Police policy (56% total).

The likelihood of the pursuit involving a collision is less than 1 in 10 at (9%) with the likelihood of that pursuit collision giving rise to an injury at (2%).

Conclusion

The data available to enable review of pursuit incidents forms a key element for policy development and implementation of procedures to best govern how these incidents are managed and resolved. The information also allows improved focus on training needs for those police more likely to be involved in police pursuits.