

CARAVANS CAMPING



In action: When placed in the correct position the Driver Alert will activate once the driver's head falls forward, potentially preventing an accident.

Be on alert for fatigue

CARAVANS & CAMPING

PETER POAT



With driver fatigue being one of the biggest factors responsible for traffic accidents in Australia, RV drivers trying to reach a destination in an impossible time frame are flirting with death.

To stay alert, frequent rest stops, at least one every two hours, are essential and should be allowed for when planning a trip, particularly long journeys.

Research by insurer AAMI has found that many motorists succumb to drowsiness behind the wheel, with as many as one in four drivers nodding off while driving.

Surveying 2818 drivers, the research found that 22 per cent were unlikely to stop for a break or "power nap".

It also found that one in 10 involved in road accidents admitted fatigue was a major factor.

Nearly half of the national survey's respondents admitted they were willing to drive for three or more hours without taking a rest, with one in 12 confessing they would drive for more than four hours without a stop.

I have heard of some narrow escapes as well as several accidents, particularly among grey



In place: The small device fits comfortably over the driver's ear.

nomads driving north each winter to far-flung destinations such as Broome.

And it is not a problem restricted to this group; it can happen to anyone at any time.

Although I would not recommend anyone to rely totally on any device as a substitute for well-planned rest stops, there is now an innovative micro alarm that can help detect when a driver starts nodding off.

Known as the Driver Fatigue Alarm, it has been designed to alert fatigued drivers when their head tilts forward in a potentially life-threatening micro-sleep.

A micro-sleep, the silent killer,

is a brief unintentional light sleep that typically lasts between two and 30 seconds, enough time to result in a potential disaster.

These short lapses are usually triggered with episodes of blank stare, head snapping and boring driving conditions.

The small device, sized and shaped much like an old-fashioned hearing aid, rests behind the earlobe and works on the principle of electronic balance.

A lightweight motion sensor is activated as the head drops forward below a preset angle, warning the driver to pull over for a spell. There is a choice of two models, one which emits a loud sound or another that strongly vibrates. I have tested both and found each of them effective.

The sensitivity of either model is easily adjusted simply by altering its position on the ear and I recommend that users test it to ascertain the correct ear position and battery strength each time before setting off.

I found it is important to have it placed correctly on the ear to ensure it gives off the warning signal as the head starts to tilt forward.

The unit takes three small watch-type batteries and is supplied with three sets (nine) and comes in a handy plastic storage box together with a set of instructions.

As yet, there few retailers in WA, however, the alarm can be

purchased by mail order with a 30-day money-back satisfaction guarantee.

For more information, contact Vision of Innovation, PO Box 590, Burwood, NSW 1805, phone (02) 9715 5100 or visit www.driverfatiguealarm.com.au.

SIGNS OF FATIGUE

- Heavy or sore eyes.
- Blurred vision.
- Impatience and not remembering the past few kilometres.
- Lapses in concentration.
- Yawning, stretching, winding down the window.
- Restlessness or turning up the music.
- Delayed reactions.

PREVENTING FATIGUE

- Plan rest breaks and overnight stops before leaving home.
- Plan the journey to ensure you take a least one rest stop every two hours.
- Get a good night's sleep before commencing a long trip.
- During the journey, eat light, fresh foods such as sandwiches and fruit. Avoid fatty foods which hasten the onset of tiredness.
- Avoid long drives after work or an exhausting activity.
- Ascertain whether any medicine you are taking may affect your alertness.
- Share the driving when possible.

Engineered for our tough conditions