

NSW drivers are worst rear enders

New South Wales drivers have more accidents than any other state as a result of failing to give way to other vehicles, new data from leading national car insurer AAMI has found.

NSW drivers are also finding themselves in nose-to-tail collisions more often than any other type of crash, and have the second highest rate in the country, outranked only by Victoria.

Analysis of almost 250,000 accident insurance claims between October 2012 and September 2013, show the top five types of accidents occurring on NSW roads are nose to tail (28.7 per cent), failed to give way (22.5 per cent), parked car dings (20.6 per cent), collision with a stationary object (13.8 per cent) and collision while reversing (9.9 per cent).

"Worryingly, NSW is above the national average when it comes to nose-to-tails and crashes from failing to give way, so it's vital for NSW motorists to be aware of the driving behaviours that lead to these particular types of accidents," AAMI spokesperson, Reuben Aitchison said.

According to Mr Aitchison, impatience is often overlooked as one of the leading factors behind accidents on our roads and can adversely affect our judgement when we need it most.

"Fender benders and prangs from failing to give way tend to happen because of inattention and driver impatience, with the latter often leading to tailgating or following too closely behind other vehicles," he said.

Mr Aitchison said drivers must make a conscious decision in heavy and congested traffic to slow down, keep a safe distance between them and the car in front and resist the urge to weave in and out of lanes.

New measures aim to save pets' lives

The State Government hopes fewer pets will be euthanased as a result of new measures to reunite lost pets with their owners and reduce the number of dangerous dog attacks.

Amendments to the Companion Animals Register will encourage people to buy de-sexed animals from pounds or shelters and help councils to improve microchipping.

Member for Orange Andrew Gee said modernising the register would mean more animals will be reunited with their owners, and encouraging owners to de-sex their pets would reduce the number of unwanted animals.

"The measures will also encourage people to purchase animals from rescue organisations; provide more funding through council grant programs to tackle pet overpopulation; and help councils better manage dangerous dogs in their area," he said.

"A primary school-based awareness campaign about how to keep children safe around dogs will be expanded to pre-schools and families expecting new children.

Mr Gee said each year an unacceptably high number of dogs and cats are euthanased in NSW pounds and shelters.

"Of animals that enter these facilities, some 60 per cent of cats and 30 per cent of dogs never leave alive.

"Last year 50,000 dogs and cats were euthanased in NSW. These numbers are distressing and that's why we've taken action.

Mr Gee said these measures are in response to the Companion Animal Taskforce.

"The NSW Government has already taken action on dangerous dogs by creating a new category of "menacing dog" and tougher penalties for irresponsible dog owners to help safeguard the community," he said.

Rider to return to headline polo event



Jessica Paton-Kirkpatrick will return to Mudgee to compete in Polo in the Paddock at Bunnamagoo Estate Wines. 040214/JESSPOLO

By ORLANDER RUMING

Mudgee girl Jessica Paton-Kirkpatrick will soon be returning home for the first Polo in the Paddock at Bunnamagoo Estate Wines.

Polo in the Paddock, to be held on Saturday, March 1, will feature local and regional players, alongside gourmet food from local suppliers.

Special guests will include television personalities Scott Cam and Mark Ferguson, and country and western star Lee Kernaghan.

Events manager Olivia Morgan said ticket sales were already indicating the event's popularity.

"I'm sure it's made even more special by the involvement of a local like Jessica," said Ms Morgan.

Ms Paton-Kirkpatrick said she knew straight away that she wanted to be involved in the event.

"Word spread around the Sydney Polo community quickly so it was easy for me to get a team together," she said.

"Other players are excited about it too and looking forward to getting a great new event off the ground as much as I am."

Polo was previously perceived as an elite sport, but Jessica said more people were now seeing the excitement and adrenaline of the game.

Ms Paton-Kirkpatrick, who was eight when she begged her parents for her first horse, learned to ride in Mudgee and was involved with dressage and the local pony club as a girl. It wasn't until she moved to Sydney five years ago that she started playing polo.

Ms Paton-Kirkpatrick and Ms Morgan agreed Mudgee is the perfect place for the sport.

"We can both see the huge opportunity for an event like this in Mudgee. In terms of social sporting events, polo is an untapped resource," Ms Morgan said.

For tickets and information go to www.poloonthepaddock.com.au

Gymnastics coach backs campaign

By Orlander Ruming

Less than 40 per cent of New South Wales children at a grade 4 level can master basic motor skills, according to new research by the Audit Office of New South Wales.

The information has prompted the Gymnastics NSW state sporting Association's "Start Here, Go Anywhere" campaign, which is encouraging children to learn gymnastics as a way to develop key motor skills.

Gymnastics NSW Marketing Manager Nicholas Carroll said it is alarming to think the large majority of NSW's year four students are unable to master basic skills such as jumping, catching, kicking and throwing.

"We want parents to know that these basic movement skills can be developed from a very young age which helps lead children to live a healthy and active lifestyle in the long term," said Mr Carroll.

Coach, judge and co-ordinator at Mudgee Gymnastics, Sacha Etherington, said gymnastics was a fantastic sport for developing motor and other skills, which aid in numerous areas of development.

Ms Etherington, who has been

doing gymnastics all her life, opened Mudgee Gymnastics in 2011. The club has classes open to boys and girls starting at two years of age, continuing until the end of the school years.

Ms Etherington said parents are becoming busier, and focus is shifting to computers and online games, resulting in children spending more time sitting rather than getting actively involved outdoors.

Since opening Mudgee Gymnastics, the number of registered members has risen to almost one hundred, but Ms Etherington said parents still need to be educated about physical activity, and the options their children have available.

"I think we just need to get the word out there. Parents want for their children to have those basic skills like to run and jump," Ms Etherington said.

At Mudgee Gymnastics the kinder and general gym classes use props, such as balls and hoops, which also aid in the development of hand-eye coordination.

"They don't have to enter competitions or train for the Olympics. That one hour a week could be



Harriet Etherington, Jemima James and Tandia Briggs at Mudgee Gymnastics. 050214/GYM

enough to develop those skills."

However, Ms Etherington said gymnastics provides more than just physical benefits.

"Gymnastics is such a mental sport. You're developing focus and determination as well as time management and all of those other aspects that aid with school work

and homework."

"I think if you can learn those skills early on you're much better off in all aspects of life," Ms Etherington said.

Information on classes and signing up for gymnastics can be found at the Mudgee Gymnastics website www.gymisfun.com.