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Speed limits proposed for German Autobahn

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18th March, 2007

THE ARTICLE

Speed limits proposed for German Autobahn

A proposal by the European Union's environment commissioner Stavros Dimas to introduce a speed limit on Germany's Autobahn has split opinion in the land of Porsche, Mercedes and BMW. The idea is designed to reduce the amount of CO2 emissions by driving more slowly. Environmental activists in Germany said speeding on the Autobahn wastes energy, and that a speed limit could reduce by three per cent the amount of pollution spewed out by gas-guzzlers. They criticize speed-lovers for caring more about driving thrills than the future of the planet. Although Germany is one of the "greenest" countries in the world, the speed limit idea is controversial and almost represents an attack on German culture. Driving at breakneck speeds has until now been pretty much a German motorist's inalienable right.

Several suggestions have been put forward. A poll carried out by Germany's ZDF television showed 54 per cent of Germans favour a speed limit of 130kmh, while another ten per cent prefer a limit below that level. Surprisingly, Chancellor Angela Merkel opposes a speed limit, even though climate change is one of her most pressing priorities as president of the European Union. She also has to weigh up the harm a speed limit might do to her country's motor industry. Germany's biggest car makers pride themselves on producing powerful, safe and fuel-efficient vehicles. They fear speed limits would take the gloss off of owning one of their cars and thus reduce sales. The answer may have to wait for a high performance hybrid car to come along, satisfying speed freaks and environmentalists alike.

WARM-UPS

1. CARS: You are a car. Decide which one. Walk around the class and talk to the other “cars” in the classroom. Ask them about their life as a car. What do they think of the humans who drive them? Sit with a new partner and share your stories.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

proposals / European Union / speed limits / CO2 / Porsche / BMW / Mercedes / speed / climate change / car safety / motor industry / hybrid cars / speed freaks

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. DRIVING: With your partner(s), talk about which of the things in the table are (would be) most important while driving. Rate them from 1 (essential) to 10 (not at all important). Explain your ratings to your partner(s).

- speed
- leather seats
- 16 speakers
- car navigation system
- a sunroof
- a powerful engine
- airbags
- other _____

4. GREEN LEADER: Imagine your country has a new super-green leader. He/She has passed the laws below. With your partner(s), discuss how they would change your life. Which are the best and worst two laws?

- speed limit of 80 kph on all roads
- new taxes for any car that enters any city centre
- only cars with passengers allowed on the fastest highways
- car engine size limited to 1000 cc
- all cars to carry computers that record driving speeds
- long prison sentences for people driving 20 kph over the speed limit

5. QUICK DEBATE: Have this fun quick debate with your partner(s). Students A think speed limits are unnecessary; students B think speed limits are very necessary. Change partners and topics every two minutes.

6. AUTOBAHN: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the Autobahn (or any other super-highway). Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. The United Nations has called for speed limits on German roads. T / F
- b. Driving more slowly could reduce CO2 emissions by 3 per cent. T / F
- c. Germany needs to catch up with the world's "greener" countries. T / F
- d. Driving fast is seen by Germans as a part of their culture. T / F
- e. Over half of Germans polled by a TV station want speed limits. T / F
- f. Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel is pushing for a speed limit. T / F
- g. German car makers worry that speed limits would hurt car sales. T / F
- h. A new high performance hybrid car is now on sale in Germany. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. proposal | excitement |
| b. emissions | consider |
| c. spewed out | absolute |
| d. thrills | discharges |
| e. inalienable | fusion |
| f. put forward | urgent |
| g. pressing | emitted |
| h. weigh up | propose |
| i. gloss | plan |
| j. hybrid | shine |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. ...has split | out by gas-guzzlers |
| b. reduce the amount of CO2 | the harm a speed limit might do |
| c. the amount of pollution spewed | and environmentalists alike |
| d. caring more about driving | off of owning one of their cars |
| e. Driving at breakneck | emissions by driving more slowly |
| f. Several suggestions | pressing priorities |
| g. climate change is one of her most | opinion in the land of Porsche |
| h. weigh up | thrills than the future of the planet |
| i. speed limits would take the gloss | have been put forward |
| j. satisfying speed freaks | speeds |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Speed limits proposed for German Autobahn

A proposal by the European Union's environment _____ Stavros Dimas to introduce a speed limit on Germany's Autobahn has _____ opinion in the land of Porsche, Mercedes and BMW. The idea is designed to reduce the amount of CO2 _____ by driving more slowly. Environmental _____ in Germany said speeding on the Autobahn wastes energy, and that a speed limit could reduce by three per cent the amount of pollution _____ out by gas-guzzlers. They criticize speed-lovers for caring more about driving _____ than the future of the planet. Although Germany is one of the "greenest" countries in the world, the speed limit idea is controversial and almost _____ an attack on German culture. Driving at breakneck speeds has until now been _____ much a German motorist's inalienable right.

Several suggestions have been _____ forward. A poll carried out by Germany's ZDF television showed 54 per cent of Germans _____ a speed limit of 130kmh, while another ten per cent prefer a limit below that level. Surprisingly, Chancellor Angela Merkel _____ a speed limit, even though climate change is one of her most pressing _____ as president of the European Union. She also has to weigh up the _____ a speed limit might do to her country's motor industry. Germany's biggest car makers _____ themselves on producing powerful, safe and fuel-efficient vehicles. They _____ speed limits would take the gloss off of owning one of their cars and thus reduce sales. The answer may have to wait for a high performance _____ car to come along, satisfying speed freaks and environmentalists alike.

thrills
emissions
pretty
activists
commissioner
represents
spewed
split

priorities
fear
favour
harm
hybrid
put
pride
opposes

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Speed limits proposed for German Autobahn

A proposal by the European Union's environment commissioner Stavros Dimas _____ speed limit on Germany's Autobahn has split opinion in the land _____ of Porsche, Mercedes and BMW. The idea is designed to reduce the amount of CO2 emissions by driving more slowly. Environmental activists in Germany said speeding on the Autobahn wastes energy, and that a speed limit could _____ per cent the amount of pollution _____ gas-guzzlers. They criticize speed-lovers for caring more _____ than the future of the planet. Although Germany is one of the "greenest" countries in the world, the speed limit idea is controversial and almost represents an attack on German culture. Driving at _____ has until now been pretty much a German motorist's _____.

Several suggestions have _____. A poll carried out by Germany's ZDF television showed 54 per cent of Germans _____ limit of 130kmh, while another ten per cent _____ below that level. Surprisingly, Chancellor Angela Merkel opposes a speed limit, even though climate change is one of her most _____ as president of the European Union. She also has to weigh up the harm a speed limit might do to her country's motor industry. Germany's biggest car makers pride themselves on producing powerful, safe and _____. They fear speed limits would take _____ owning one of their cars and thus reduce sales. The answer may have to wait for a high performance hybrid car _____, satisfying _____ environmentalists alike.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'speed' and 'limit'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "DRIVING SPEED" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about driving fast and saving energy.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduce• amount• guzzlers• thrills• attack• right	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• poll• favour• pressing• weigh up• gloss• alike
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DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) Are you interested in powerful cars?
- c) Do you think there should be a speed limit on Germany's Autobahns?
- d) What do you think a reasonable speed limit is?
- e) Do you think there should be a ban on gas-guzzlers?
- f) Do you think it can be someone's right to drive fast?
- g) What do you think of German cars (Porsche, Mercedes, BMW...)?
- h) Do you think it's worth changing a country's driving culture to cut fuel emissions by just three per cent?
- i) Do you think the EU proposal will be passed as law in Germany?
- j) What do you think of people who drive at breakneck speeds?



STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) What do you think of the speed limits in your country?
- c) What do you think of the drivers and roads in your country?
- d) Do you think Angela Merkel should take more of a stand in favour of speed limits?
- e) Should Angela Merkel be stripped of the presidency of the EU?
- f) German cars are fuel efficient. Does this exempt them from speed limits?
- g) Do you think car makers should be more responsible and support speed limits?
- h) What is more important to you, speed or fuel efficiency?
- i) Do you think we'll be driving water-powered cars in the future?
- j) Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a) What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b) Was there a question you didn't like?
- c) Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d) What did you like talking about?
- e) Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

ROLE PLAY:

A discussion about speed.

Team up with classmates who have the same role as you. Develop your roles and discuss ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players. Discuss your roles after the role play ends.

Role A – Speed freak

Governments allow companies to produce FAST cars. Many highways are great for driving fast. Driving fast is good for the economy. Driving slowly means more traffic jams. Guns and drugs are more dangerous than driving fast. Modern cars are safe.

- *Think of more reasons why driving fast is OK.*

Role B – Environmentalist

Global warming is destroying the Earth. It is time for speed limits to be lowered around the world. No one can drive fast and add to CO2 emissions. Engines should also be smaller. We need heavy fines for speed freaks.

- *Think of more reasons why fast cars are bad.*

Role C – Car maker

Cars are one of the most important inventions ever. Modern cars are highly fuel efficient. Ban cars that are five or more years old – that will save more CO2 than speed limits. Speed limits mean big job losses. Driving is a human passion. We cannot stop it.

- *Think of more reasons why cars are important.*

Role D – Road safety officer

You have been at the scene of hundreds of traffic accidents. You have seen the terrible results speeding has on the human body. Speed kills. Speed limits save lives. Fast drivers are irresponsible. You want all cars banned. Buses, bicycles and trains are safer.

- *Think of more reasons why cars should be banned.*

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a–d below in the article.

Speed limits proposed for German Autobahn

A (1) _____ by the European Union's environment commissioner Stavros Dimas to introduce a speed limit on Germany's Autobahn has (2) _____ opinion in the land of Porsche, Mercedes and BMW. The idea is designed to reduce the amount of CO2 (3) _____ by driving more slowly. Environmental activists in Germany said speeding on the Autobahn wastes energy, and that a speed limit could reduce by three per cent the amount of pollution spewed (4) _____ by gas-guzzlers. They criticize speed-lovers for caring more about driving thrills than the future of the planet. Although Germany is one of the "greenest" countries in the world, the speed limit idea is controversial and (5) _____ represents an attack on German culture. Driving at breakneck speeds has until now been pretty (6) _____ a German motorist's inalienable right.

Several suggestions have been (7) _____ forward. A poll carried out by Germany's ZDF television showed 54 per cent of Germans favour a speed limit of 130kmh, (8) _____ another ten per cent prefer a limit below that level. Surprisingly, Chancellor Angela Merkel opposes a speed limit, even though climate change is one of her most pressing priorities (9) _____ president of the European Union. She also has to weigh (10) _____ the harm a speed limit might do to her country's motor industry. Germany's biggest car makers pride themselves on producing powerful, safe and fuel-efficient vehicles. They fear speed limits would take the gloss off of owning one of their cars and (11) _____ reduce sales. The answer may have to wait for a high performance hybrid car to come along, satisfying speed freaks and environmentalists (12) _____.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. | (a) proposal | (b) proponent | (c) proportion | (d) proposes |
| 2. | (a) splitting | (b) split | (c) slit | (d) spilt |
| 3. | (a) emissaries | (b) emitters | (c) emigrants | (d) emissions |
| 4. | (a) down | (b) in | (c) up | (d) out |
| 5. | (a) all | (b) most | (c) almost | (d) much |
| 6. | (a) much | (b) many | (c) all | (d) thing |
| 7. | (a) look | (b) put | (c) take | (d) send |
| 8. | (a) whom | (b) which | (c) while | (d) where |
| 9. | (a) cause | (b) although | (c) because | (d) as |
| 10. | (a) on | (b) up | (c) down | (d) in |
| 11. | (a) thus | (b) this | (c) the | (d) though |
| 12. | (a) prefer | (b) similar | (c) alike | (d) likely |

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about Germany's Autobahns. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. FUTURE CAR POSTER: Make a poster about the cars of the future. Describe the safety features. How will they be better for the environment? Show your poster to your class in the next lesson. Vote on the best one(s).

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about driving fast and having speed limits. Include the pros and cons and then write your conclusion. Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Which article was best and why?

5. LETTER: Write a letter to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Ask her questions about her reasons for not wanting speed limits on German Autobahns. Tell her three reasons why speed limits are important. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. T e. T f. F g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. proposal | plan |
| b. emissions | discharges |
| c. spewed out | emitted |
| d. thrills | excitement |
| e. inalienable | absolute |
| f. put forward | propose |
| g. pressing | urgent |
| h. weigh up | consider |
| i. gloss | shine |
| j. hybrid | fusion |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. ...has split | opinion in the land of Porsche |
| b. reduce the amount of CO2 | emissions by driving more slowly |
| c. the amount of pollution spewed | out by gas-guzzlers |
| d. caring more about driving | thrills than the future of the planet |
| e. Driving at breakneck | speeds |
| f. Several suggestions | have been put forward |
| g. climate change is one of her most | pressing priorities |
| h. weigh up | the harm a speed limit might do |
| i. speed limits would take the gloss | off of owning one of their cars |
| j. satisfying speed freaks | and environmentalists alike |

GAP FILL:

Speed limits proposed for German Autobahn

A proposal by the European Union's environment **commissioner** Stavros Dimas to introduce a speed limit on Germany's Autobahn has **split** opinion in the land of Porsche, Mercedes and BMW. The idea is designed to reduce the amount of CO2 **emissions** by driving more slowly. Environmental **activists** in Germany said speeding on the Autobahn wastes energy, and that a speed limit could reduce by three per cent the amount of pollution **spewed** out by gas-guzzlers. They criticize speed-lovers for caring more about driving **thrills** than the future of the planet. Although Germany is one of the "greenest" countries in the world, the speed limit idea is controversial and almost **represents** an attack on German culture. Driving at breakneck speeds has until now been **pretty** much a German motorist's inalienable right.

Several suggestions have been **put** forward. A poll carried out by Germany's ZDF television showed 54 per cent of Germans **favour** a speed limit of 130kmh, while another ten per cent prefer a limit below that level. Surprisingly, Chancellor Angela Merkel **opposes** a speed limit, even though climate change is one of her most pressing **priorities** as president of the European Union. She also has to weigh up the **harm** a speed limit might do to her country's motor industry. Germany's biggest car makers **pride** themselves on producing powerful, safe and fuel-efficient vehicles. They **fear** speed limits would take the gloss off of owning one of their cars and thus reduce sales. The answer may have to wait for a high performance **hybrid** car to come along, satisfying speed freaks and environmentalists alike.

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a 2 - b 3 - d 4 - d 5 - c 6 - a 7 - b 8 - c 9 - d 10 - b 11 - a 12 - c