

What Did I Do, Officer?

By **Barnet Fagel**

In the minds of most people Corvette drivers always speed or want to. Although this is not true, it is a perception we live with, and at one time or another most of us have been pulled over by a police officer. In most cases the driver answers a few questions and then the officer issues a citation.

One of the most common reasons for a traffic stop is speeding. If you are pulled over, it is vital to listen carefully to what the officer asks and think about what you say. Your responses are important. Even though you may be nervous, this is not the time to react emotionally or to worry that your insurance premium may go up.

The one question every officer asks is, “Do you know how fast you were going?” If those aren’t his exact words, you may hear a variant, “Do you know the speed limit here?” The officer will record your answer as evidence because a part of his questioning is geared to make drivers admit to speeding by stating a specific number. The law says you cannot be forced to incriminate yourself. Further, the officer is not forcing you to say a thing, he is just asking you a question.

How would you answer the officer? “75.” “85.” “95.” “About your I.Q.” “Who knows? The sign blurred out



Barnet Fagel, right, meets with George Sianis, president of Chicagoland North Corvette Club.

when I passed 100.” These are all wrong answers. Here are some other wrong answers: “No. I was keeping up with traffic.” “I was just passing another car.” “I sneezed.” “My accelerator stuck for a second.”

Here’s the classic response: “I thought I was going [fill in your own speed here] miles an hour.” These answers may give an officer enough information to cite you for speeding, and in truth most people respond with them. I’ve played a game with my friends by asking the officer’s question, “Do you know how fast you were going?” Only a few gave the correct answer.

When an officer asks the speed of your Corvette, your answer should be a very confident, “Yes.” If he asks you a question, the answer to which would imply guilt, such as, “Do you know why I stopped you?” your response should be noncommittal and brief — a simple “No.” Try to suppress the impulse to reply,

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“Gee, no, officer; I thought you would know why you stopped me.” Every question an officer asks has a purpose; he is collecting evidence, and the information you give may make the difference between receiving a citation, a warning, or possibly getting a pass.

I suggest you avoid an argument if an officer relates the speed he thought you were going or what he thought you did. A noncommittal one-word answer, such as “I see” or no answer at all, is best — no more, no less. Silence is not an admission of guilt and cannot be used against you in court.

If you want an officer to think you are a lawyer, you could tell him, “Yes. I was going a safe and reasonable speed for conditions in accordance with the basic speed law.” If an officer asks

if you know why he stopped you, your perception and the officer’s may be entirely different.

The question, “Do you know how fast you are going?” is not the same as, “How fast were you going?” The basic difference is simple, but important. The officer did not ask your speed; he asked if you knew your speed.

Under state law, each driver is responsible for the safe operation of his motor vehicle, and this includes knowing the speed at which he operates the vehicle. By answering anything else but “yes” to the question, “Do you know how fast you were going?” you concede that you were speeding. Most drivers in this situation are ordered to take driving school and be done with it. Those who can’t attend driving school face the option of points against their driving record

and bigger insurance premiums.

If the officer states you broke a law but does not immediately start to write a ticket, ask for a warning. Officers seldom ask if you want one (this is your job), but a safe and courteous traffic stop on your part will vastly improve your odds of receiving only a warning. Here is an example: “Well Officer, I understand you think I was going a bit over the posted limit, but I haven’t had a ticket in years and always drive safely. I believe my speed was safe and reasonable for conditions. Would you please give me a warning as a reminder?”

For other types of violations you may say, “I’m always a safe driver officer, and now that I understand this law, I’ll certainly never violate it again. Would you please give me a warning as a reminder?” ●

Traffic Stop Routines

1. Pull over in a way that will calm down an angry or annoyed traffic officer.
2. Slow down quickly and always use your turn signal to indicate a lane change but not so quickly that the officer will have to brake to avoid hitting you.
3. Drive to the shoulder of the highway as far as possible from traffic so the officer doesn’t have to worry about being clipped by other vehicles. (Pulling over right away is not an admission of guilt. It just means you are alert to everything that happens around you.)
4. Turn on your hazard flashers. (By stopping as soon as you can, you can more quickly figure out exactly where the officer saw you commit the violation. You may want to return to the area later to understand his perception of your speed, the way he saw you turn, or witness any other violation.)
5. If it is night, turn on your interior lights so the officer easily sees you. (This shows respect for the officer and helps both of you to relax.)
6. Turn off the engine and put the keys on the dashboard.
7. STAY IN YOUR VEHICLE.
8. Roll both front windows all the way down before the officer gets out of his car. (This may avoid a ticket for a having tinted windows.)
9. Put your hands at the 10:00 and 2:00 position on the steering wheel and don’t move them. Even though an officer carries a gun, he doesn’t know whether you have one.
10. Pull out your identification only if and when the officer requests to see it.
11. Ask the officer if you may open your glove box or other areas

of the car where you keep registration and insurance papers.

12. Always be pleasant, respectful, and polite to the officer.

Look the officer in the eyes when answering questions.

14. Never ask, "What's the trouble?" This sounds hostile, and you are going to find out soon enough anyway. 15. State officers can be referred to as "trooper," and members of the sheriff department are "deputies." All other police

should be referred to as "officer," unless you recognize a rank nametag or insignia, such as sergeant, etc., in which case you may address the officer by his rank.

16. Provide only the information you are asked for (don't volunteer information), until you are reassured you are not getting a ticket. If you are issued a ticket, thank the officer because this incident may have saved your life.

17. If the officer asks, "Do you still live at this address?" as he reads the address on your license, the best answers are either, "Yes officer, that is my current address" or "No officer, I moved two days ago to the following address..." If you do not live at the address printed on your driver's license, you give an officer an excuse to start writing a ticket.

18. If the officer asks, "Do you know how fast you were going?" the best answer always is, "Yes."