CRAIG J. OROSZ • The Lima News

Officer Brian Taylor of the Celina Police Department displays a laser gun with a reading of 56 mph in a 35 mph zone on Fairground Road inside the city limits. Taylor estimated by sight the speeds of 15 vehicles in a demonstration and was off by an average 2.73 mph.

Proof as insurance

Cops use gadgets despite being allowed to eyeball

Estimating your speed
Patrolman Brian Taylor is put to the test

Speed limit: 35

Actual	Estimated	Variance
56	55	-1
54	52	-2
48	50	+2
43	44	+1
42	40	-2
42	40	-2
40	43	+3
40	35	-5
39	34	-5
38	35	-3
36	35	-1
32	32	0
31	27	-4
30	27	-3
27	34	+7

By J.D. BRUEWER
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A recent Ohio Supreme Court ruling that a police officer's visual estimate of speed is admissible evidence in court doesn't mean police are going to pitch their radar guns.

Police officials around the region say officers are trained to estimate speed within five miles per hour, but only as a starting point.

"What we're trained to do is we make a visual estimation of your speed and we use the radar to confirm our suspicion," Celina Police Chief Dave Slusser said. "When we turn that radar on it should match what we estimated."

Administrators with the Ohio State Patrol and most local sheriff's offices as well as village and city departments agreed that the ruling doesn't apply to many situations because officers generally backup their estimate with radar or laser.

LimaOhio.com
See video online at www.limaohio.com/video

Slusser said the ruling will not affect his office. Celina Patrolman Brian Taylor, who gave a demonstration of his estimating ability, agreed.

"I like to have a good case when I go to court," he said.

Slusser said if an officer had evidence to support that vehicle was traveling well over the speed limit but the radar or laser gun didn't work, there are options. The officer could write a ticket for exceeding posted or safe speed, without listing an exact speed.

Taylor demonstrated his speed-estimating ability on a stretch of road with a 35 mile-per-hour limit. Out of 15 vehicles, he was off by an average of 2.73 mph. He nailed it on one vehicle and was off by 7 mph at his worst.

In his defense, Taylor said he doesn't usually estimate the speed of vehicles moving under the speed limit. In general his accuracy

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dropped with the speed of the vehicles. His worst estimate was 34 mph for a car traveling 27 mph, the slowest of all vehicles clocked.

If you exclude vehicles that were not speeding, Taylor averaged miss drops from 2.73 to 2.45 mph. If you exclude vehicles within five miles of the limit, the average drops to 1.66.

He said it can also be a bit tricky estimating the speed of odd-sized vehicles. One of the two speeds he missed by 5 mph was for a box truck.

So, if an officer can be that accurate with traffic, can he do the same with other things like trains, fastballs and birds?

No.

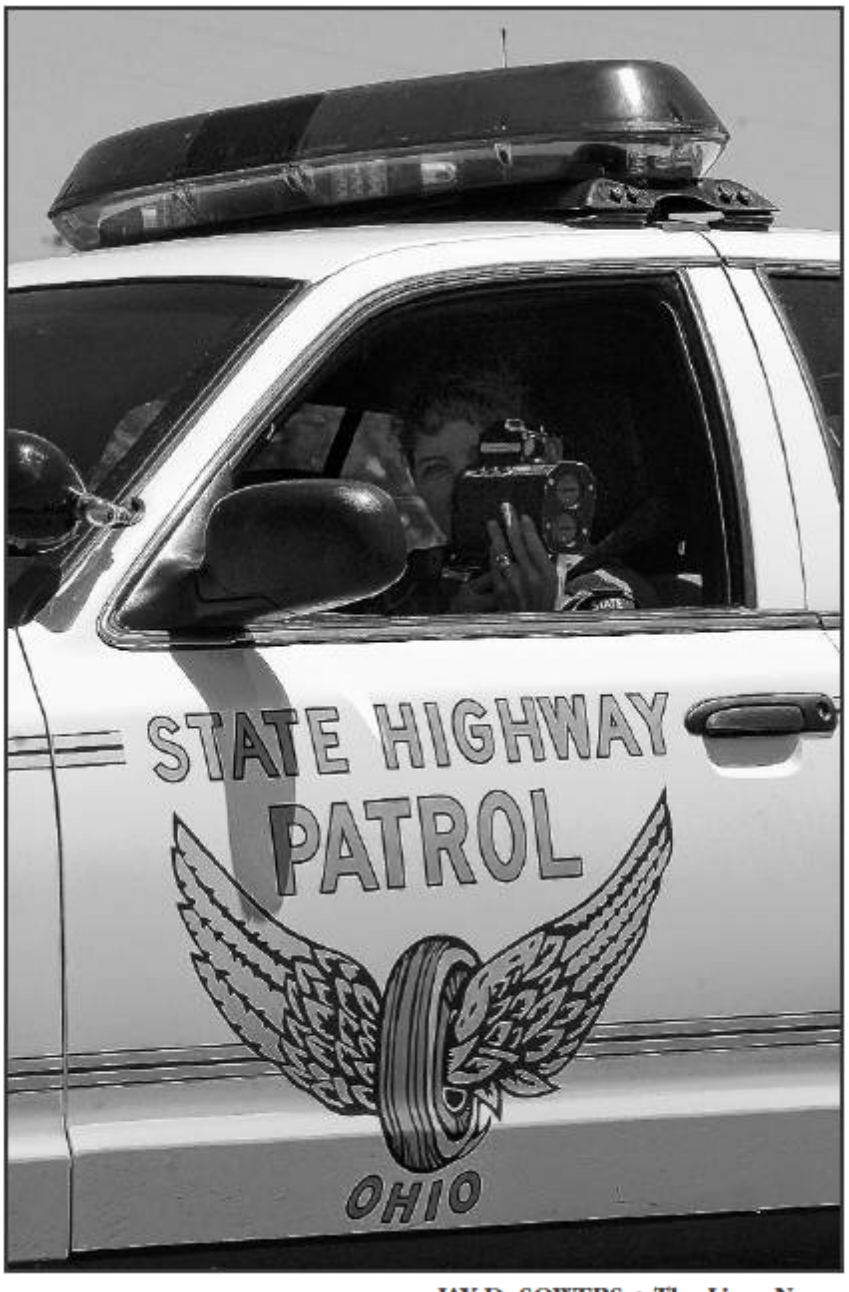
When officers with more than 15 departments were offered the chance to test their skills at estimating the speed of other things, they all declined. The skills don't translate, they said.

Slusser said officers, often at a subconscious level, take contextual clues into account.

"There are standards," he said. "Telephone poles are about the same distance apart. Sidewalks are about the same width. White lines are spaced about the same."

Years of repeated observation makes speed easier to figure.

"Your mind learns that relativity factor," Slusser said. "It's kind of specific."



JAY D. SOWERS • The Lima News

State Trooper Kellie Jackson uses a laser gun Thursday afternoon to check the speed of northbound traffic on Interstate 75 at the Fourth Street exit.

It's almost second nature. Years removed from traffic duty, Slusser said he still finds himself estimating the speed of vehicles, even when he's off duty.

In fact, as Taylor was driving to the demonstration, he looked at a truck coming the other way. "Here's one right here," he said. After estimating the truck's speed at 40 in a 25 mph zone, he flipped on the radar, which read 38.

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