

DUI checkpoint keeps drivers on a straight path

By Kathryn Reed

Balancing on one foot with the other off the ground, but parallel to it, the South Lake Tahoe man counted to 30. He walked a straight line while counting. He did everything the officer asked him to do.

Even though the pupils of his eyes bounced around enough for him to be pulled out of the line of cars during the St. Patrick's night DUI checkpoint, this local was let go. He and his female passenger, who was wearing a festive green and white hat, were allowed to drive home. At least that's where they said they were headed after being at McP's.



SLT police
Officer Berry
Rider at
Wednesday's
DUI
checkpoint.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

People under the influence usually cannot track well with their eyes. The same goes for someone with a head injury.

Wednesday night was the second of five DUI checkpoints the

South Lake Tahoe Police Department will conduct in a year's time, with funding through a grant.

Another grant that multiple agencies in El Dorado County were just awarded means another three to four more checkpoints will be added to the calendar. The AVOID grant is from the California Office of Traffic Safety.

"The overall goal of the awareness campaign is to let drivers know about the countywide increased enforcement periods and warn drivers that the only way to AVOID the county's law enforcement officers is to drive sober," the state website says.

Netting drunken drivers isn't the main goal of checkpoints " it's awareness.

"It's more of a deterrence," said South Lake Tahoe police Sgt. Shannon Laney as he stood on the edge of Highway 50 near Heidi's restaurant.

A steady stream of cars passed through the checkpoint near Fairway Avenue between 9pm and 1am. The backup determined whether it was every third or fifth car that was stopped. Driver's licenses were checked. Citations were issued for those without one.

One young woman said she had a permit from Arizona but couldn't produce it.

With it being such a small town, officers recognized a parolee in one passenger seat.

Cabbies seemed to be doing well on this night known for massive beer drinking. All of their vehicles were full. Even though they were the designated driver, so to speak, it didn't mean they automatically got to pass through the checkpoint without being questioned.

Caltrans workers, semis, beat-up Tahoe vehicles, BMWs " no

one was immune from being stopped. One officer asked for to see the driver's license. The cop on the passenger side shined a flashlight to see what might be inside " open container, weapons, drugs, children not in a car seat.

During the December checkpoint three male juveniles from out town, and all wearing red, were drunk. They also had a Samurai sword in the trunk. They were detained.

Everyone the cops spoke with was handed a little information flyer about what to do if they suspect a person is drunk behind the wheel. Call 911.

Plenty of warning goes into the checkpoints. Besides having the information broadcast by the media, a sign before the stop alerts drivers about the checkpoint. Legally, officers must allow drivers an opportunity to drive around the checkpoint.

Even with the warning, people still make it to the front of the line.

Laney said it's often people who are too drunk to know any better or someone who had a couple drinks and has no idea they are past the 0.08 limit for blood alcohol.