

SMILE, YOU'RE ON CAMERA

There are four basic types of speed detection equipment, but they all serve the same purpose: to separate you from your license and your hard-earned cash. Here's the Fast Bikes idiot's guide to roadside speeding kit.

Radar Detection

Radar is an acronym for 'radio detection and ranging'. The cameras ping out high frequency radio waves that bounce back from a target. The difference in wavelengths shows vehicle speed.

The GATSO is the most common speed detection device on Britain's roads today: its name has become a synonym for revenue generation. It was named after the inventor, the 1953 Monte Carlo Rally winner, Maurice Gatsonides.

Nearly three quarters of all points dished out in the UK today are from GATSOs. The almost-made-to-blend-into-the-background grey boxes on poles now carry high visibility panels in most areas.

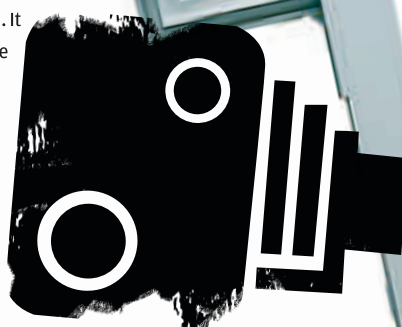
There are two apertures at the front; one for the camera and one for the flash. Most sites are inactive due to the cost of the equipment: each GATSO costs £33,000. Even if you do see the dreaded double-flash, there's every chance no film is loaded. They work on K band radar that is detectable by devices that are still legal in the UK.

Other radar devices to look out for include the Double Sided GATSO, which

uses a single unit with apertures facing in both directions of traffic and of course, the dummy GATSO that is never intended to be operational, but has the effect of slowing motorists when they spot it lurking at the roadside.

The Red Light GATSO is fixed at traffic lights and is triggered by a vehicle passing a red light signal. The most recent versions also operate as standard speeding GATSOs when the lights are green or amber.

There's also the handheld Muniquip and the Multanova that is most commonly used as mobile traps on motorway bridges.



Laser Detection

Look out: these blighters can catch you out almost a kilometre away. First introduced by Galactic Traffic Officer Han Solo in 1977, lasers work along the same lines as radar traps, except they use infrared light instead of audio.

Marom is an automated traffic monitoring system that measures vehicle speed. It fires two infrared beams across a lane of traffic, aimed at reflectors on the roadside. The interruption to these beams gives the speed of any vehicle passing between them both.

Marom grabs a digital image of every vehicle that passes through these beams and it can cope with

Digital Camera

New-fangled cameras that don't need expensive film to run mean they cost less to operate more. They're also impossible to detect, since they don't pump out radio or laser. Sneaky bastards.

VASCAR stands for Visual Average Speed Computer and Recorder. It operates from a police vehicle - marked or otherwise - relating vehicle speed to markers at the side of the road. VASCAR is impossible to detect as the system doesn't emit radio or light, but it can only operate in daylight conditions or under full lighting, as it relies on good visibility.

SPECS is an increasingly

common average speed checking system that combines digital video with number plate recognition.

It works by checking the time a vehicle takes to pass between two points and working out the average speed overall. Offender's registration details are sent instantly to DVLA and of course, you can combine offences from a single trip to lose your license.

SVDD may sound like something you'd pick up on a stag night in Blackpool, but it actually stands for Speed Violation Detection Deterrent. One camera at either end of a stretch of road up to 500 metres can monitor traffic speeds 24 hours a day.

SVDD SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING YOU'D PICK UP ON A STAG NIGHT IN BLACKPOOL, BUT IT'S SPEED VIOLATION DETECTION DETERRENT

an unlimited amount of traffic in all weather and lighting conditions. So don't think there's safety in numbers if you're taking part in the May Day run to Hastings.

Once an offender has been noted, a NIP can either be in the post within a matter of hours, or a friendly police officer parked down the road can put down his cup of tea and take care of the paperwork at the roadside.

Auto Vision is a portable video-based system that's linked to a laser and parked by the roadside in a van that faces oncoming traffic. Not one for us to worry about then, even if the fact that it costs a third of a GATSO means we'll be seeing more of them.

