The first time in prison is quite terrifying

Russell Robinson

BOB Hastings says for most people, especially those without records, their first encounter with the prison system is "fairly terrifying." When the prison van takes them from court and down to the Melbourne Assessment Prison, they are brought into a room with the others. The Corrections Victoria Commission said, "Their clothes are removed and they are given prison uniforms, then searched and medically examined. It's a process that I think would be quite intimidating to anyone who has never experienced this before. It tells the inmate they are no longer out on the world of the free person."

Mr Hastings has been in law enforcement all his working life. He came to the Corrections Commissioner's role last year, after more than 40 years as a police officer, rising from guard to assistant commissioner.

One of his roles was head of traffic looking after policy and road safety, including speed cameras. He also served in the major collision unit, investigating fatal road crashes day in and day out. "You'd see both bad and horrendous things," he said. "The impact would be felt not only by those involved, but also by the investigators, the ambulance crews, the fire brigade and the emergency services officers who attended the scenes."

"People die or are badly injured in these tragedies. For the owners of the cars or something like that, you can walk away unscathed, but the others forget."

Today, Mr Hastings is responsible for the introduction of the drivers whom he once investigated and helped prosecute. "Now I'm back at the back end of the corrections system, I do have a duty of care to make sure those people who are convicted of culpable driving understand what this means," he told the Herald Sun.

"A lot of them are young men and a lot of them haven't got serious criminal convictions. So this is their first experience of what it's like in prison."

"The loss of privileges, loss of contact with family, loss of a job, loss of education..." Mr Hastings says the realism that prison isn't "soft and light" dawns on them from the first day.

"A lot of these guys aren't hardened criminals, but it doesn't take a lot to end up in jail just doing something stupid on the roads. The
The shocking truth about road trauma

For every person killed on Australian roads, another eleven lie hurt in the trauma wards of the nation’s hospitals.

Road crash fatalities are something we hear a lot about – newsreaders give us the road toll almost as often as the cricket score. Less talked about are the survivors: yet for every death on the roads another eleven people are injured badly enough to need hospital treatment. The shocking truth about road trauma is that recovery from these injuries can take years, and the pain may never go away. Trauma is the hidden tragedy of the road.

Types of injuries
There is almost no limit to the type of injury that might be inflicted in a road crash: from ruptured spleens to severed limbs, broken skulls and fractured ribs.

Often, a single individual will suffer several traumas.
One example among thousands: the Melbourne Age recently reported the injuries received by a woman involved in a collision in rural Victoria: fractured hip and femur, lacerations to her face, arms and legs, stabbing wound to the throat, broken index finger, puncture wound below her elbow, and a ‘de-gloving’ injury to her hand (in which the skin had been peeled back when it hit something hard).

Another example: a West Australian motorcyclist, the victim of a driving error by another road user, struck an electricity pole head-on; he was in a coma for two weeks and will be in a wheelchair for life, brain-damaged and paralysed below the neck.

Spinal injury is perhaps the most feared of all injuries. According to a recent report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 50 per cent of the 261 spinal-cord injuries recorded in Australia from July 1999 to June 2000 were caused by road crashes: 31 per cent of victims were occupants of motor vehicles and 19 per cent were motorcyclists, pedestrians or cyclists. Of the vehicle occupants, more than 66 per cent suffered injuries to the cervical (upper) segments of the spine, resulting in tetraplegia, the impairment or loss of movement in the arms, trunk, legs and pelvic organs.

More drivers facing criminal charges, prison

Reid Sexton  August 9, 2010

The number of drivers facing criminal charges and jail after serious car accidents is increasing rapidly after the most significant reform to road policing in the state for more than three decades.

Drivers involved in bad crashes are about seven times more likely to face criminal charges than they were three years ago, with the number set to grow as road police receive better training.

In 2007, 40 drivers faced criminal charges such as negligently causing injury and reckless conduct endangering life – with many others facing less serious traffic charges - despite about 7700 people having been seriously injured on the state’s roads that year.

So far this year, about 200 drivers have faced criminal charges, with some jailed.

The rise is the result of a training course Victoria Police introduced 18 months ago that is giving road police the ability to lay criminal charges after investigating a serious crash or incident.

Over the past 18 months, about 300 of the state’s 700 road police have completed the five-day primary collision investigation course.

Deputy Commissioner Ken Lay pointed to examples such as a young hoon who was jailed for three months for reckless conduct endangering life and on other charges after he lost control of his car and crashed into trees in Seymour.

Another example was a man with no prior record who was not drunk when he ran a red light in Parkville in December, injuring a motorcyclist. He received a five-month suspended jail term on a charge of negligently causing serious injury.