

Under the Trooper's Hat

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When a motorist is stopped for speeding, the driver may ask, “Can I see the radar or LiDAR (laser) reading?” Many want to confirm their speed or better understand the reason for being stopped. While officers are not required to show the reading at the time of the stop, the officer may choose to do so as a courtesy when circumstances allow.

Police radar and LiDAR (laser) are speed detection tools used by law enforcement to enforce traffic laws. Radar (Radio Detection and Ranging) measures a vehicle's speed by bouncing radio waves off a moving target and calculating the frequency shift. It can be used from stationary or moving patrol cars. LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) uses a laser beam to pinpoint an individual vehicle's speed with high precision by measuring the time it takes for the laser to reflect off the target. Officers typically use LiDAR in stationary positions for accurate speed enforcement, especially in high-traffic areas when identifying a single speeding vehicle.

When an officer conducts a traffic stop, the primary concern is safety—for themselves, the driver, and others on the road. Every stop carries some level of risk, and officers must quickly assess the situation. If a driver requests to see the radar or LiDAR reading, the officer will consider several factors, including the safety of the stop location, the driver's demeanor, and the need to maintain efficiency in enforcing traffic laws. Stops that occur on busy highways, blind curves, or areas with limited space may not allow for safely reviewing the reading. Additionally, a driver who remains calm and cooperative is more likely to have a positive interaction, while confrontational behavior may complicate the situation.

If conditions allow, an officer may choose to share the radar or LiDAR reading as a courtesy. While not required, providing this information can sometimes help drivers feel more informed and at ease. It's also important to remember that radar and LiDAR readings are just one part of speed enforcement. Officers receive extensive training in visual speed estimation, which allows them to accurately assess a vehicle's speed before activating a speed detection device.

For drivers who wish to see the speed reading, the best approach is to remain respectful and understanding. A polite request acknowledging the officer's discretion can lead to a more positive interaction. Aggressive or argumentative behavior rarely helps the situation.

Traffic stops are not just about enforcing the law; but about keeping the roads safe for everyone. When drivers and officers approach these situations with mutual respect and understanding, the experience can be smoother, transparent and more instructive for all involved.

The mission of the North Dakota Highway Patrol is to make a difference every day by providing high-quality law enforcement services to keep North Dakota safe and secure. NDHP invites you to visit the FAQ section of the website: www.nd.gov/ndhp; like our Facebook page www.facebook.com/northdakotahighwaypatrol; or join us on Instagram, www.instagram.com/ndhighwaypatrol, to learn more about traffic safety, get tips, and read NDHP news.