LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Residual Effects of Alcohol on Skilled Performance

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(Received 21 March 2008; accepted 21 April 2008; advance access publication 29 May 2008)

On reading the paper by Stephens et al., 2008, I note some minor inaccuracies concerning a study on which I collaborated (Lemon et al., 1993). The study was criticized for not verifying zero BAL at testing, while in fact BAL was tested to ensure lack of intoxication in the post-intoxication phase (see Lemon et al., 1993; Table 1) although as noted in Table 1 in Stephens et al., 2008, the values were not reported. The lack of detectable BAL was not surprising given the interval of twelve and one-quarter hours (Stephens et al., 2008; Table 1 suggests that this was 11 h) between the end of drinking and the commencement of post-intoxication testing. This interval would ensure virtually complete clearance of the highest dose of alcohol administered, even in subjects with unusually slow absorption rates (Norberg et al., 2003). The divided attention task used to assess skilled performance showed a strong dose-dependent deterioration in performance during intoxication, but there was no indication of such a deterioration during post-intoxication testing. This outcome, although unexpected, emphasized the difference between hangover and post-intoxication performance (Lemon, 1993) and alerted us to the fact that there is more to the association of drinking with poor performance on the following day than just alcohol. As Verster (2008) points out in the accompanying comment, fatigue often follows lengthy drinking sessions and our subjects were in general well rested.

REFERENCES