

PRESENTED AT

2016 The Car Crash Seminar

July 28-29, 2016
Austin, Texas

**THE POLICE OFFICER: BEST
FRIEND OR WORST ENEMY?**

Quentin Brogdon

Author Contact Information:
Quentin Brogdon
Crain Lewis Brogdon, LLP
3400 Carlisle Street, Suite 200
Dallas, Texas 75204

qbrogdon@crainlewis.com

214-522-9404

214-598-1009 Cell

214-969-5522 Fax

**THE POLICE OFFICER: BEST
FRIEND OR WORST ENEMY?**

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
CAR WRECKS SEMINAR

July 28-29, 2016

Austin, Texas

QUENTIN BROGDON

Crain Lewis Brogdon, LLP
3400 Carlisle Street, Suite 200
Dallas, Texas 75204
214-522-9404
214-598-1009 Cell
214-969-5522 Fax

qbrogdon@crainlewis.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR OPINION TESTIMONY
- III. *DAUBERT/ROBINSON* ISSUES
 - A. Four Hurdles
 - B. The Knowledge Hurdle
 - C. The Qualifications Hurdle
 - D. The Helpfulness Hurdle
 - 1. Reliability
 - 2. Relevance
 - E. The Foundation Data Hurdle
 - F. Opinions Not Derived From a “Hard Science”
- IV. ADMISSIBILITY OF POLICE REPORTS
- V. CASES SUPPORTING ADMISSIBILITY OF POLICE OFFICERS’ OPINIONS, REPORTS, AND/OR HEARSAY WITHIN REPORTS
- VI. CASES SUPPORTING LIMITATION OR EXCLUSION OF POLICE OFFICERS’ OPINIONS, REPORTS, AND/OR HEARSAY WITHIN REPORTS
- VII. NEGLIGENCE PER SE
- VIII. CONCLUSION

THE POLICE OFFICER: BEST FRIEND OR WORST ENEMY?

Quentin Brogdon

I. INTRODUCTION

In a car wreck case, the police officer can be your best friend or your worst enemy. His testimony generally carries great weight with the jury, and his report is what is most often relied upon by plaintiffs' attorneys, risk managers, and insurance adjusters in determining whether to proceed to litigation.

Should the court scrutinize a police officer who attempts to render opinions regarding accident reconstruction issues and the cause of the wreck in the same manner that it would scrutinize any other expert under *Daubert/Robinson*? Or, is the police officer a special kind of hybrid fact and expert witness who essentially testifies regarding his factual observations at the scene of a wreck?

Can the jury hear about the citation that the police officer issued to one driver? Can the jury find a driver to be negligent per se for violating the Penal Code, the Transportation Code or another statute?

Unfortunately, the reported cases give contradictory and inconsistent answers to many of these questions. Nevertheless, a thorough understanding of the reported cases may give the trial attorney the ability to maximize the impact any helpful testimony provided by the police officer and the ability to minimize the impact of any harmful testimony provided by the officer.

II. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR OPINION TESTIMONY

The Texas Rules of Evidence contain a number of key rules concerning the scope of expert opinion testimony and the admissibility of the underlying facts and data relied upon by experts. The Federal counterparts to these Texas rules are *almost* identical, but there are differences.

Rule 701 of the Texas Rules of Evidence, "Opinion Testimony by Lay Witnesses,"

provides:

If a witness is not testifying as an expert, testimony in the form of an opinion is limited to one that is: (a) rationally based on the witness's perception; and (b) helpful to clearly understanding the witness's testimony or to determining a fact in issue.

Tex. R. Evid. 701.

Rule 702, "Testimony by Experts," provides:

A witness who is qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education may testify in the form of an opinion or otherwise if the expert's scientific, technical, or other specialized knowledge will help the trier of fact to understand the evidence or to determine a fact in issue.

Tex. R. Evid. 702.

Rule 703, "Bases of Opinion Testimony by Experts," provides:

An expert may base an opinion on facts or data in the case that the expert has been made aware of, reviewed, or personally observed. If experts in the particular field would reasonably rely on those kinds of facts or data in forming an opinion on the subject, they need not be admissible for the opinion to be admitted.

Tex. R. Evid. 703.

Rule 704, "Opinion on Ultimate Issue," provides:

An opinion is not objectionable just because it embraces an ultimate issue.

Tex. R. Evid. 704. *See also Birchfield v. Texarkana Mem'l Hosp.*, 747 S.W.2d 361, 365 (Tex. 1987).

There was a good deal on confusion and inconsistency within the reported cases on the issues of whether the jury should be allowed to hear the underlying facts or data relied upon by the expert if the facts or data would otherwise be inadmissible. Amendments to Rule 705 in 1998 attempted to resolve the confusion by the inclusion of an explicit Rule 403-type balancing test.

Rule 705, "Disclosure of Facts or Data Underlying Expert Opinion," now provides:

(a) Stating an Opinion Without Disclosing the Underlying Facts or Data. Unless the court orders otherwise, an expert may state an opinion—and give the reasons for it—without first testifying to the underlying facts or data. But the expert may be required to

Find the full text of this and thousands of other resources from leading experts in dozens of legal practice areas in the [UT Law CLE eLibrary \(utcle.org/elibrary\)](http://utcle.org/elibrary)

Title search: The Police Officer: Best Friend or Worst Enemy?

Also available as part of the eCourse

[2016 The Car Crash eConference](#)

First appeared as part of the conference materials for the
2016 The Car Crash Seminar session

"The Police Officer: Best Friend or Worst Enemy?"