

Saturday Reply

Letters and emails

● Most people also have more than the average number of arms (Letters, 7 January). The typical number is two, but since some people have one or none, the mean is less than two. If David Willetts is included in the calculations, most people also have fewer brains than average.

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Extreme measures

Aditya Chakraborty (Brain food, G2, 4 January) is probably right that many drivers overestimate their ability, but he is wrong to claim that 95% being above average is a mathematical impossibility. To keep the numbers simple, suppose that driving ability is rated on a scale from 0 to 20, and out of every 20 drivers, 19 score 20 and 1 scores 0. The average score is then 19, and 95% of drivers do better. It's quite likely that well over 50% of drivers are of above average ability, since most drivers are moderately competent, few are really good, but a significant minority should never have been allowed on the road. That minority drags the average down, leaving everybody else above it. The 50% break-even point is the median, and this is often a better measure of typical behaviour.

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