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08:50 - 03 April 2007

A Member of the ultra-strict Brethren movement originally charged with speeding to church at 110mph in a blizzard escaped a lengthy driving ban after he convinced a sheriff this would cause "exceptional hardship".

Craig Michel, from Perth, was eventually banned for a month after he admitted driving carelessly at 86.95mph on the M90 Perth-Edinburgh link on March 11 last year.

The 32-year-old, who heads up a Perth manufacturing business, handed 13 letters of character reference to Sheriff Robert McCreadie.

They included one from his wife, Libby, who wrote: "As a Christian family who take up the Lord's supper every Sunday and attend our place of worship every day I would take this opportunity to ask you to consider that we are law-abiding citizens."

She feared her husband would find it difficult to get to church if he was banned from driving.

However, Sheriff McCreadie was more interested in hearing how Michel's employees would survive if he faced a lengthy period of disqualification.

Michel came to court with six penalty points already on his

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licence and would most likely have faced a six-month ban if he could not prove there were "exceptional mitigating factors".

The court was told he had been travelling to Kirkcaldy for a church meeting on the day of the offence.

Weather conditions were described as "adverse" as sleet and snow were falling and visibility was "extremely poor".

When stopped by police, Michel was found to have two young children with him.

He said his speed had crept up as he was distracted by one of the youngsters, who was feeling sick.

Michel had been charged originally with driving dangerously at 110mph, although this was reduced when it was discovered police had not checked their speed-reading equipment that day.

Yesterday, he told Perth Sheriff Court his licence was essential for his work as a partner in Paragon Profiles - a plastics manufacturing company based at the Inveralmond industrial estate.

His company employs six people and Michel warned their job security could not be ensured if he was banned from the road.

"I am the main point of contact with regard to sales throughout Scotland and the north of England and drive between 30,000 and 40,000 miles a year," Michel said.

"I start early in the morning - sometimes as early as 5am - and often work through until midnight or 1am.

"Nobody else in the company could do the work I do. If I am disqualified, turnover would go down dramatically and there could be redundancies.

"Those who work for the company are breadwinners. They have

families to support and mortgages to pay."

Michel said he also did a lot of charity work with youngsters, some of whom had learning difficulties, and added that this would also be placed at risk.

Michel said any ban from the road would cause him and his employees "exceptional hardship". The sheriff agreed to limit a ban to just one month.

"Having regard to all the circumstances, I believe a short period of disqualification is appropriate," he said.

"I consider that one month should not cause undue difficulty, although I appreciate it may cause some difficulty.

"This was stupid and thoughtless behaviour, particularly given the road conditions and the fact you had two children with you."

Michel was handed seven penalty points, leading to the ban under the totting-up process.

He was also fined £750.