

CONTINUOUS DRIVER DEVELOPMENT

Foreword

The Driving Instructors' Scottish Council has represented professional driving instructors working in Scotland for more than thirty years. It has co-operative links with similar bodies in the rest of the United Kingdom and other road safety related bodies including the Driving Standards Agency (DSA). The Council is consulted by Ministers on matters relating to driver training and testing.

The Council aims to promote road safety at every level of its activities not only by ensuring that it's members are kept up to date through a system of continuous professional development but also through its contact with other bodies and authorities with an interest in road safety.

The Council is a voluntary body. It has no paid officials and no executive committee. It is fully democratic with all policies being formed at full Council meetings and all its funds are raised through member contributions.

It is not the Council's intention to present a detailed proposal at this stage. This will require discussion with agencies whose expertise we do not have. We intend only to present a case in principle which we hope will be pursued by our partners in the Driving Standards Agency and government ministers.

We would be pleased to receive your comments on these broad principles. Replies should be sent to:

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Introduction

The Council is concerned by the number of casualties arising from road traffic incidents. These figures are unacceptable. Government is already taking steps to reduce casualty figures but the Council feels that radical steps need to be taken if any real impact is to be made.

Past measures have resulted in the reduction of casualties through improved vehicle safety and improved road engineering. While the Council acknowledges the improvements brought about through engineering and enforcement capabilities, it contends that education has a much greater part to play and the proposals contained in this document aim to reduce not only the number of casualties but also the number of crashes. We suggest that this can be achieved by making not only vehicles and roads safer but also by encouraging drivers to be safer.

The Problem with New Drivers?

The driving test was introduced in 1935 to tackle the growing problem of road crashes and although its seventieth birthday was extensively celebrated in the year 2005 an analysis of its success cannot be similarly celebrated.

The reason for this might lie in the fact that the testing system presumed then, as it does today, that people once tested will not only maintain the standard of driving which they demonstrated on their test but will go on to develop and improve their driving by keeping it up to date. Sadly the evidence is that the authorities presumed too much.

The evidence is that too many drivers allow their skills to deteriorate after passing the driving test. Without the prospect of further supervision or monitoring, drivers are free to deviate from what they learned and adopt their own driving principles, sometimes without even realising that they are doing so. Comments such as, “Nobody drives like that after they pass their test” or “You only learn to drive after you pass the test” are very common and are an indication of a popular concept that the driving test bears no relevance to the ‘real’ business of driving.

Too Much Too Soon

It is accepted that new drivers are a particularly vulnerable group of motorists and are involved in a disproportionate number of road crashes. It has also been established that those who find the driving test easiest to pass are the ones who are most likely to be involved in a road crash.

It is a fact that when a seventeen year old passes a forty-minute driving test which is conducted in a familiar, local area, he or she is set free to drive in most places in the world and to do so for the next fifty-three years without any additional monitoring, guidance or checks unless they specifically seek it out or are involved in a reportable incident.

From the moment of passing the driving test, which is described by the Driving Standards Agency as being ‘basic’, a new driver presumes that he or she has had enough experience to be able to face the world. They are given the freedom of the road without restriction.

The new driver is entitled to drive the most powerful vehicles subject, not to performance criteria but to weight and passenger number restrictions. Even a modest, modern family car is capable of considerable performance, probably much more than the one they learned in.

*Too much freedom
Too much responsibility
too little experience*

New drivers are allowed to drive on roads which demand a great deal of experience although they have had little or no experience on those roads.

This is too much freedom to allow and too much responsibility too expect from a driver with too little experience.

Because candidates are given an unrestricted right and freedom to drive when they pass the test, they are required to demonstrate all the skills that the exploitation of that freedom will demand. Candidates are therefore required to demonstrate that they can drive at high speeds on the test and consequently they have to be instructed in how to make the car go very fast. This is a dangerous approach to take with novice drivers who should rather be encouraged to keep speeds down to speeds commensurate with the level of their experience or driving maturity.

It takes very little skill to make a car go at 70 mph on a motorway. It takes a lot of experience to drive at that speed safely.

Research has shown that inexperience is a major factor in new driver crashes. A TRL Report, “The development of hazard perception testing” by G B Grayson and B F Sexton concludes that:

“It is inexperience that is the main contributor to the higher accident rates”.

The report goes on to say that:

“At a practical level, maturity cannot be accelerated, while the lessons of experience can be taught”.

These findings seem to suggest that regardless of the training a new driver is given, experience – the main safety factor – will come only in time. The lessons of experience can certainly be taught but it takes time for those lessons to be learned and gaining the experience takes time. During this time, the new driver is extremely vulnerable.

This problem was recognised by the DSA, in its manual ‘Driving’ which said,

“A good driver has many things in his make-up. Some of these such as experience and skill will come only in time”.

Similarly the Highway Code advises:

234: When you can see well ahead and the road conditions are good, you should drive at a steady cruising speed which you and your vehicle can handle safely and is within the speed limit.

The amount of driving and the quality of the driving affect the value of experience

Even when considering and allowing for experience or inexperience we can still get it wrong. A driver's 'experience' is often measured in 'years since passing the driving test'. This is a very poor and unreliable indicator since many people hold a licence for several years without ever driving while others can gain a great deal of experience in a very short time. The amount of driving and the quality of the driving affect the value of experience.

The argument that, since the learner is allowed to drive at maximum speed when he or she passes the test therefore the ability to drive at maximum speed must be tested and therefore it must be taught, proffers the corollary that if the new driver was not allowed to drive at the maximum speed limit when he or she passed the test then it would not need to be tested and if it did not need to be tested it would not need to be taught at a such an early stage.

Phased Licensing

It is to the credit of the driving instruction industry that they are able to prepare candidates to the levels demanded by the test in the time that they are allowed to do it. It would be a better and a safer option to have less to teach and more time to devote to it thereby making a more thorough job of basic training and laying sound foundations for further development at an appropriate stage.

Consideration needs to be given to the possibility of a 'pass with restrictions' or a grading system for the 'L' test. A grading system would be valuable to insurers in assessing premiums and an indication of the amount of 'freedom' the new driver is allowed.

Newly qualified drivers may be restricted to:

- △ driving vehicles below specified power levels – as opposed to engine size*
- △ driving on specified classes of roads*
- △ below specified speeds.*

Restrictions placed on the new driver during those first years of vulnerability would help to protect him and her from the pitfalls arising during the period of in-experience and immaturity.

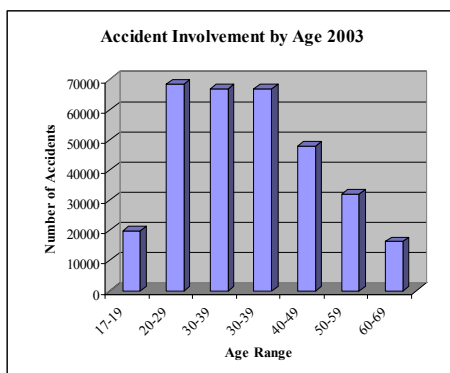
Drivers would be able to improve their grade with the consequent lessening of restrictions and potential saving in insurance premiums by attending developmental sessions. These developmental training sessions would be more effective because they would build on experience already gained.

The idea of continuous development would therefore be introduced to the new driver from the outset of his or her driving career and this concept could then be continued throughout that career with a requirement that a driver must attend some developmental sessions before the periodic renewal of a driver's licence.

Failure to produce evidence that some developmental training had been undertaken during the period of validity of a licence would result in a compulsory re-assessment before a licence would be renewed. This would allow a continued monitoring of the new driver's development during the most vulnerable and formative years and would encourage the new driver to maintain the highest driving standards throughout his or her driving life.

Not Limited by Age

It is important to engender a desire for driver development in all drivers not just those at the extremes of the age ranges. We recommend that to do this the motivation or perhaps the requirement needs to be in place from the start of a person's driving career. It is necessary to replace thinking behind the comment, "You only learn to drive after you pass the test" to a realisation that, "You started to learn before you passed the driving test - you must continue to learn to drive after you pass the test".



Road Casualties Great Britain: 2003
Department for Transport

The problems associated with new drivers are well documented but it has to be remembered that while a disproportionate percentage of new drivers are involved in road crashes and elderly drivers experience a slowing down of reaction and a diminishing of their skills, the vast majority of road crashes involve experienced drivers between the extremes of the age range.

Many 'experienced' drivers will comment, "I would probably fail a driving test if I sat one now. I have too many bad habits". This is indicative of either an attitude which disassociates the requirements of the driving test from 'real' driving or a culture of 'it's alright to have bad habits' as long as nobody is watching. It demonstrates

a pressing need for action to be taken to change motorists' attitudes to driving, whatever their level of experience. The need for driver development extends beyond the seventeen to nineteen year olds through all age and experience levels to seventy year olds and beyond.

Further training and assessment for new drivers are already advocated by the Driving Standards Agency and supported by some insurers in the form of 'Pass Plus'. This is, however, a voluntary system and it is taken up by only a low percentage of new drivers. While open to all drivers it is rarely taken up by anyone other than those who have recently passed their driving test.

A few experienced drivers do take the opportunity to refresh their skills through training with an approved instructor or some of the motoring organisations. Most of these have recognised real benefits in taking this developmental training but most by virtue of their recognising the value of further training are likely to be the type of driver who least needs it.

Many fleet operators have also discovered considerable benefits from developmental courses for their drivers. These courses have resulted in a drop in the number of crashes recorded and in a consequent reduction in insurance claims and premiums.

The present system encourages a 'flippant' approach to driving by awarding a once and for all freedom which is questioned only when there is a crash. The system itself abandons responsibility after awarding a pass in the driving test and thereby encourages an, 'it does not matter what I do anymore because nobody cares' attitude.

Road safety is about saving lives, not obtaining retribution for lives already lost. Road safety is about preventing crashes not about prosecuting offenders after they crash or adapting roads to suit drivers who refuse to adapt their driving to suit the road.

It is important to replace the perception of a 'right to drive' with one which perceives driving to be a privilege which has to be earned not just at the beginning of a driving career but continuously throughout it.

Renewal of Photo-card Driving Licences

The periodic requirement to replace a photo-card licence provides a timely opportunity to require a re-assessment of the driver or evidence that a course in driver development has been satisfactorily undertaken since the last application for the continuation of a driving licence.

An awareness of this requirement will stimulate drivers to preserve their driving skills because it will preserve their entitlement to drive.

WHO WILL PROVIDE DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES?

Presuming that drivers have to pay for their own courses which must be accreditable then the courses need to involve Driving Standards Agency Approved Driving Instructors because the law prohibits others from giving paid tuition.

The instructor industry and the Driving Standards Agency are working to ensure the highest standards of instruction are available but we recommend that there should be a specific qualification for instructors who undertake developmental courses or assessments.

FEES

The cost of development courses should be reviewed and set by an independent body. The potential savings in health care and enforcement costs could be used to subsidise the cost of developmental sessions or courses.

Conclusions

The Council submits that:

- △ Too much reliance is placed on the ability of the test to discriminate between the potentially safe and the potentially dangerous driver in a once off test.
- △ The driving test exacerbates the problem for new drivers by demanding skills that are not commensurate with the experience of the new driver.
- △ It is naive to expect drivers once given the freedom of the roads to diligently continue to develop their driving skills in line with recommended driving practices when there is no incentive to do so.
- △ It is illogical to expect drivers to develop their driving when many are unaware of developments in driving -- The Highway Code, road engineering, vehicle engineering or driving techniques.
- △ There is a need to provide drivers with the motivation to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.
- △ There is a need to provide drivers with a continuing opportunity and incentive to develop their skills and knowledge.

WE PROPOSE THAT

- △ That new drivers should be subject to a continuing period of supervision and restriction after passing the driving test.
- △ The periodic renewal of a driving licence should be conditional upon the applicant's having undertaken some driver development activity during a specified period within the validity of the expiring licence. Eligible developmental activities may have to be prescribed in regulations.