

## Deciding on your approach to learning to drive

### **Introduction**

1. Driving has become almost a necessity in this modern world and yet we pay little attention to the process of learning to drive especially in respect of *who* teaches us and *how* they teach us and the *vehicles* they use to teach us.  
Whilst there are many excellent and professional driving instructors to be found, there are as many or more who are not so professional.
2. Occupants of cars are the most vulnerable to death as compared with all road users, and road users in general are much more likely to be killed in an accident than those travelling by train, boat or plane.  
In 2008
  - **50% of 2,538 deaths** on the road were of **occupants of cars**.
  - **28,567** people were **killed or seriously injured** in road accidents

To minimise the risk of you being killed in an accident it is imperative that you are trained well in all aspects of driving – to be trained just to pass the driving test is NOT enough. Training in *SAFE DRIVING* in *ALL SITUATIONS* is key.

Did you know that you can commit 15 minor mistakes within your 40 minute driving test and still pass?!

Did you know that you can pass your driving test and then be subjected to the *hazards* of town/city centre driving, inclement weather, rural driving, night driving and driving on dual carriageways and motorways *without further training*?

So how should you get yourself well trained?

### **What approach should you take?**

You need to be certain about the professionalism of the driving school and the instructor both commercially and personally. You should ensure that the programme of tuition you are following is the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) syllabus and you should follow the Pass Plus course after having passed your practical driving test.

Adopting the following guidelines will help ensure that you have an effective and enjoyable learner driver experience and have the knowledge and skills to be a safe driver.

#### **1. Set objectives - define what you want to achieve and by when you want to achieve it.**

The driving test consists of 3 mandatory components:

- Theory test (Pass Mark 43 out of 50)
- Hazard perception test (Pass Mark 44 out of 75)
- Practical driving test (Max 15 minor errors. No serious or dangerous errors.)

The **Pass Plus** is an optional course but is a real necessity if you want to be skilled in safe driving in all driving situations. It is not assessed by test but is continuously assessed by the instructor during the training programme.

Set yourself some objectives e.g.

- I want to achieve 47 or more in my theory test.
- I want to achieve 55 or more in my hazard perception test.
- I want to pass my theory test within the next 6 weeks.
- I want to pass my practical test in 4 months time.
- I want to pass my practical test with no more than 6 minor faults.
- I will take the Pass Plus course.

With a clear indication of what you want to achieve you can then plan how to get there.

## **2. Study for the Theory & Hazard Perception and Practical Driving tests concurrently followed by Pass Plus**

The theory becomes more meaningful when related to the practice, and underpinning theoretical knowledge will help enhance practical driving performance. The theory and hazard perception tests must be passed before the practical test may be booked, but with careful planning this should not present an issue.

## **3. Ensure that your chosen instructor can meet your requirements or recommend a suitable alternative.**

Having chosen defined a set of objectives you want to be sure that your instructor can assist you in achieving them or, if he/she thinks they are unrealistic and you agree, offer a suitable alternative.

Ensure that the instructor is prepared to and capable of taking you through the whole programme. Ensure you are clear how he/she will achieve it. Beware the instructor who cannot define a clear path, approach and set of resources.

## **4. Select a good driver training organisation AND instructor**

Whilst an organisation might have a strong reputation it does not mean that its instructors are fully qualified, effective or right for you. Make sure that you are thoroughly comfortable with the organisation and the instructor before parting with any money.

## **5. Ensure the instructor is fully qualified (green licence holder).**

Whilst the AA uses only fully qualified driving instructors (green licence holders), the other 'big players' BSM and RED use many ( I have heard up to 50%) part-qualified instructors (pink licence holders). So BIG is not always best. The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) governs driving standards in the UK and allows instructors who have NOT passed the instructional ability part of the instructors' 3 part test to teach for reward. *Do you want to be trained by an instructor who is still learning and using you as a guinea pig?*

## **6. Do not pay for instruction with non-qualified instructors.**

It is illegal for driving instructors to operate in the UK without having passed the requisite examinations. If the 'instructor' has not passed the tests what other short cuts might he or she take?

A google search on 'bogus driving instructors' reveals all sorts of nasties!

**7. Actively search out newly qualified instructors**

Expect that all newly qualified instructors will have raw enthusiasm and a real desire to succeed, traits which may well be missing from instructors who 'have been around a while'.

**8. Insist that you meet the instructor before taking any lessons.**

Would you normally get in a car with a strange person? Whilst driving instructors have to go through enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks (same as for school teachers), that in itself should not be enough to satisfy you that you want to get into the car with the instructor. Check the following items also:

- Professional appearance?
- Turn up on time to meet you?
- Non-smoker?
- Personable?

**9. Ensure that the instructor can show you the Code of Practice/Conduct to which he/she adheres.**

The Code of Practice/Conduct may be that generated by the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) and/or by a driving instructor professional body e.g. Driving Instructors Association (DIA), Motor Schools Association (MSA).

**10. Ensure you have seen and sat in the instruction car before committing to take lessons.**

You must like the look of the car and it must suit you, not all people's shapes/sizes suit all cars.

- Can you sit comfortably?
- Can you reach the pedals?
- Is all round observation good?
- Is the car clean and tidy?
- Is the car in good condition?
- Is it serviced and maintained regularly?
- Does the car have a valid MOT certificate, if necessary? Ask to see it.

**11. Ensure the car has dual controls.**

If it does not then it is almost certain that the insurance will be invalid.

**12. Ensure the instructor's car is fully insured for Learner Driver training.**

Ask to see the certificate.

**13. Ensure that the instructor has professional indemnity insurance.**

Ask to see the certificate – do not go with the instructor if they do not have this insurance.

**14. Can the instructor produce a set of terms and conditions?**

If not, be cautious. Ensure you thoroughly read and understand before committing.

**15. Do expect to pay £24-£28 per hour for a quality learner driving experience.**

**16. Don't expect cheap to be cheerful - there must be something inadequate in the offering!**

**17. Ensure that the instructor will provide receipts for all payments.**

**18. Ensure that the instructor maintains a record of lessons taken for your keeping and that both he and you sign after each lesson.**

This is particularly important where you have paid in advance for a set of lessons – you want to be sure you are getting every lesson you have paid for.

**19. Ensure that your instructor keeps a progress record for your keeping and that it is updated at the end of every lesson.**

It's really important to understand how you are progressing. How else would you know how competent you are in each of the assessed areas and the areas of focus.

**20. Ask how the instructor ensures you get tuition for the full time for which you have paid.**

Does he commit to arriving on time?

**21. Ensure that you are ever the only learner in the car**

You do not want to be spending for somebody else to learn, equally you do not want to be a taxi driver for the previous/next learner in your instructor's schedule.

**22. Do not expect an instant or simple answer to 'How long will it take me to pass my test?'**

The Driving Standards Agency say that a learner on average takes 46 hours of tuition with 22 hours of private practice, although the current average is said to be 35 hours of paid tuition.

Beware of any instructor who says they can teach you to drive within a specified number of lessons before they have assessed your driving ability and your capacity to learn. Even then it is very difficult to predict and there are many dependencies.

**23. Ensure the focus is on SAFE DRIVING and not just passing the tests.**

If you are taught to drive safely you will have the necessary skills to pass the practical test with few minor faults. If you are taught to pass the test you may not necessarily be a safe driver.

**24. Ensure lessons are 1.5 - 2 hours in duration**

Experience says that little can be covered in a 1 hour lesson once a recap of the previous lesson has been undertaken so progress can be slow.

**25. Take at least 2 lessons per week**

It is really important to maintain momentum when learning to drive. If possible get 2-3 hours of private practice per week alongside 3-4 hours of professional tuition.