

POST LICENCE DRIVER TRAINING

Information Fact Sheet

This fact sheet has been produced to provide information for those considering participating in a post-licence driver training course.

BACKGROUND

Novice drivers continue to be over-represented in crashes.

- ❑ Deaths due to road crashes are higher in the 15–24 year age group than any other age group.
- ❑ Statistics show that young drivers aged 17–20 years are 3 times more likely than drivers aged 21 plus years to be involved in a serious crash.
- ❑ Amongst young drivers, males are significantly over-represented in road crashes.

What are post-licence driver training courses?

Post-licence driver training courses (often referred to as 'advanced' or 'defensive') are sometimes seen, especially by concerned parents, as the next step for the newly licensed driver. They may feel the new driver needs additional help and often view a driving course such as this as an ideal birthday gift. Before making such a decision it is important to know the facts about such courses.

There are generally two types of courses:

- 1 'Advanced' driver training — teaches high order car control skills
- 2 'Defensive' driver training — teaches basic car control skills with an emphasis on the underlying values, attitudes and thought processes that contribute to safer driving.

Because these courses generally involve driving around a closed circuit track, they get a reputation for being fun and exciting. However, to date there is actually very little evidence that proves they help make safer drivers. (See further comments in the section 'What does research show about post-licence training?')

International and Australian research has shown that it's unlikely that attending a short course by itself will actually decrease the odds of being in a crash. One of the reasons for this is that skills — any skills — that are not used or not practised regularly are often forgotten. There is also some suggestion that advanced driver training courses can produce over-confident drivers who may take greater risks.

For experienced drivers, particularly those who drive for a living or need specific skills (such as off-road 4WD experience) these courses may be of some benefit. In these instances, it's important to look closely at what is to be achieved and understand that no driving course can substitute for an intelligent, responsible and careful approach to driving.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ADVANCED/DEFENSIVE DRIVING COURSE

If you decide further driver training may be appropriate, it's a good idea to do the following before making a booking:

Select an operator and ask permission to observe part of the course. During this time you can check for:

- Good communicators — instructors must be good drivers but also good talkers and listeners.
- Instructors who DON'T emphasise speed and performance, but rather what can go wrong in an emergency. The aim should be to show the pupils the limits of their car and themselves in a safe environment.
- Instructors who emphasise the RISKS inherent in driving and the importance of being able to identify and react appropriately to hazardous situations.
- A long history of involvement in driving courses — beware of 'fly by night' organisations.
- Whether there is an emphasis on classroom-based discussion about low risk driving behaviours and attitudes with less emphasis on behind-the-wheel car control skills. Ask the question: "How much time is spent in the classroom and how much is behind the wheel?"

Having done your research, you will be better able to choose a quality post-licence driver training operator.

NRMA has evaluated most of the post-licence courses available in Sydney and Canberra, and we will continue to update such evaluations. For friendly advice on the courses that meet our criteria, visit www.mynrma.com.au/saferdriving or call 1300 MYNRMA (1300 696 762).

NB: Even after having completed such a course, it is important to remember that simply acquiring this knowledge and skill does not automatically lead to a change in behaviour. A driver has to be motivated to adopt a less risky style of driving. A short course alone will not undo poor past driving practices which have become firmly established through practice.

WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS ABOUT POST-LICENCE TRAINING

The ongoing interest in skills-based training appears to reflect a general belief that safe driving involves vehicle control skills and conscious decision-making that can be influenced by education or training. Harrison (1999) discussed the potential value of education and training given the assumptions it makes about the development of driving skills, and concluded that the likely benefits of this approach were limited to improvements in relatively basic skills relating to vehicle control. Researchers believe that continued investment in this area is unwarranted given the consistency of evaluation results.

Skills-based driver training and education continues to be recommended as potential road safety measures by many despite consistent evidence (see Christie, 2001) that this approach does not result in road safety gains and may result in increases in crash risk for some drivers.

One of training's key issues is attitude. Even if defensive driving techniques are taught (in addition to vehicle handling skills), there is the question of the student's age, gender, cultural background and attitude, and whether this allows them to translate their learning into practice.

The following references are useful reading:

Christie, R (2001) The Effectiveness of Driver Training as a Road Safety Measure: A Review of the Literature. Report 01/03. Melbourne: RACV

Harrison, W A (1999) The Role of Experience in Learning to Drive: A Theoretical Discussion and Investigation of the Experiences of Learner Drivers Over a Two-year Period. Report 156. Clayton: Monash University Accident Research Centre.

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