

# Alchemy Driver Programme

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## **Biography**

Peter Sheppard is the Chief Executive of the NZ Automobile Association Driver Education Foundation and current Chairman of the NZ Road Transport and Logistics Industry Training Organisation. Shell NZ Ltd previously employed him for 15 years retiring as the Principle Road Transport Consultant. Prior to joining Shell, Peter spent 25 years as an officer in the NZ Army Corps of Transport.

Peter Sheppard has a background in Road Transport operations, crash investigation and transport safety management. He is a qualified driver trainer and has been responsible for developing and implementing a range of driver training programmes in several countries.

## **Abstract**

The Alchemy Driver Programme is a nation-wide incentive based driving programme developed by the AA Driver Education Foundation, for 15 –24 age group drivers. The programme has been specifically developed to encourage long-term safe driving behaviour through a range of interventions, which include competency based driving performance, parent/caregiver and wider community involvement and the use of incentives. The programme development was based upon considerable international comment regarding the early development needs of novice drivers, particularly areas relating to over confidence, risk reduction and attitude modification.

As drivers progress through the Graduated Drivers Licence System (GDLS) towards gaining their full licence, points are awarded for achieving specific driving competency activities. When the total points threshold is achieved, drivers are then eligible to collect a range of incentives. These include discounted motor vehicle insurance, discount on motor vehicle parts and accessories and other lifestyle incentives aimed at the 15 -24 age group.

The concept of the programme is based on the premise that most of the 400,000 15 – 24 age group drivers in NZ are in fact safe drivers and generally display a responsible driving performance. The programme specifically rewards “The Good Guys” and is not influenced by the “Law of the Few”.

In developing the programme, several areas had to be targeted, namely:

- Participants (15 –24 age group drivers)
- Training Providers (Driving instructors, secondary schools other providers)
- Incentive providers
- Programme funding sources (AADEF is a non profit organisation)
- Programme awareness (Parents/caregivers general public)
- Resource development (Information brochures, posters, information packs)
- Infrastructure development (Data base and participant progress processing ability)

On an annual basis, approximately 20,000 new drivers join the GDLS each year and the Alchemy target is to attract 1000 drivers annually. Usually, it takes between 18 months and 3 years to complete the GDLS and over that period approximately 3000 drivers would at any one time be in the programme. It is considered that this representation of drivers having a higher level of driving experience and competency may influence crash statistics.

The first participants joined the programme late August 2002 and participant numbers within the first 12 months have exceeded 1200, with an average of 50 sign ons per week. A small number have completed the programme.

## **1. ALCHEMY DRIVER PROGRAMME**

The over representation of 15-24 age group drivers in crash statistics is common throughout many developed countries, and New Zealand drivers in this age group are no exception. The underlying causes of motor vehicle crashes involving 15 – 24 age group drivers are widely known. Generally, these causes are categorised into lack of experience, inadequate driving competency, adolescence and lack of supervision/interest from parents and caregivers.

The NZ Automobile Association Driver Education Foundation (AADEF) has a mandate to promote driver education across all sectors of the NZ driving population, and obviously the 15 – 24 age group drivers became a high priority for the Foundation to target. The Foundation decided to implement an incentive based driver education programme in an attempt to support Government and other driver education initiatives aimed at reducing crash risk in this driver age group. At the same time, the initiative would create an improved platform to encourage longer-term safe driving behaviour. The Alchemy Driver Programme was developed and implementation commenced in late August 2002.

To develop such a programme, required the identification of and analysis of an abundance of international research and comment surrounding 15 –24 age group drivers. In gathering this information, it became clear that an approach from many directions was required in order to create an infrastructure and co-ordinated approach that would meet the wide range of influencing factors responsible for the underlying causes of crashes in this driver age group. It was also determined, the programme required a name different to the usual terms of “Learner Driver, Young or Novice Drivers” in an attempt to create interest and create a climate of change behaviour. Hence, “Alchemy” was used.

Research confirmed a mix of interventions was required to modify driver behaviour, and this mix had to include:

- An opportunity for drivers to gain more experience during their early stages of learning to drive
- Higher levels of driving competency (above those required for the standard driving test was required)
- More “buy in” from parents/caregivers and the driver training industry – to achieve longer periods of supervised driving performance
- A range of incentives to reward effort and continued safe driving performance (once the satisfactory standard of driving competency was achieved)

The thrust of the programme was to deliberately target those drivers (15-24 age group) that demonstrated safe driving performance rather than focus on those who choose to flaunt the driving rules, display poor driving behaviour and demonstrate irresponsible attitude towards the driving task. NZ has approximately 400,000 licensed drivers in this age group and Government statistics suggest that majority stay out of trouble and are not involved in crashes. Yet, in the main, many of these “Safe” drivers are unable to gain recognition for safe driving performance (eg. through motor vehicle insurance premium discounts) until they are at least 25.

On an annual basis, approximately 20,000 new drivers enter the GDLS and it was considered that if sufficient numbers of this group were able to gain more competence and on road experience prior to their full licence stage, these drivers would have a lower level of

crash risk, which in turn, would provide an opportunity to reduce crashes among new drivers. The Foundation planned to attract 5% (annually) of new (15-24 age group) drivers into the programme which, over the 18 month – 2 year period (of the Graduated Driver Licence System) (GDLS) would increase to approximately 12% of new drivers being in the programme, which may be sufficient to produce enough evidence to effect crash statistics.

The programme development included a literature review of international comment on young/novice drivers, discussions with driver training providers, 15-25 age group focus sessions, discussions with secondary school teachers and discussions with potential incentive providers. AADEF being a non-profit organisation, had an additional task of seeking funding for the project, which would keep costs to participants as low as reasonably practicable.

Confidence to proceed with the programme was gained through the enthusiastic response from young drivers (with the view to receive incentives), and that NZ had recently implemented a competency based driver qualifications infrastructure which provided the means to ensure drivers could gain additional experience and competency at an early stage of their driving career. These qualifications being formally recognised as part of the “Skill NZ” strategy.

AADEF being closely supported by the NZAA, provided the internal database platform to support the programme administration in terms of recording and tracking participant’s progress.

The project plan targeted four phases comprising of:

- Planning
- Resource/marketing development
- Implementation
- Evaluation

## **2. PLANNING**

The programme development was targeted at the following:

- Participants (15 –24 age group drivers)
- Training Providers (Driving instructors, secondary schools other providers and competency based training assessors)
- Incentive providers (Organisations with services/products appeal to young people)
- Funding sources (Larger organisations interested in cause-related and social marketing)
- Programme awareness (Parents/caregivers general public)
- Resource development (Marketing material, participant instructions etc)
- Infrastructure development (Project management)

Specific targets were set for all of the above and at the time of writing this paper, (prior to the completion of the first year of implementation) the following targets had been achieved:

- 1270 participants registered
- 285 Training providers registered
- A wide range of incentive providers, from discounted motor vehicle insurance to vouchers for Food, CDs and videos
- A major sponsor (Oil company) secured to support the programme and other sponsors to cover the \$30 participant sign on fee
- Database infrastructure developed and AA Centre staff trained
- An Advisory Group established to harness and monitor the ongoing operation of the programme

### **3. RESOURCE AND MARKETING DEVELOPMENT**

Because of the size of the target audience, (400,000), it was decided the marketing of the programme would initially be through TV, newspapers and advertising in appropriate magazines, road code, websites and through liaising with secondary schools and training providers. A Project Manager was employed to coordinate and manage this effort, develop information material and assist with the acquisition of incentive providers. It was estimated an annual budget of \$130,000 would be required plus the cost of TV advertising which would be funded separately. Funding was obtained to cover the salary of the Project Manager over this period (with the programme providing funding after two years) and to provide base funding for the development of information material.

### **4. IMPLEMENTATION**

Initial implementation of the programme was targeted over two years. The first year being primarily dedicated to completion of detailed planning alongside the establishment of initial resources. The second year focused on attracting the initial target of 1000 participants into the programme. The two-year period providing time to secure a range of incentive providers, establish sufficient training providers and train AA Centre staff to process participant progress on the AA database. A series of provider workshops were held to brief providers on the programme and to introduce the characteristics of an "Incentive Based" programme. The programme has no financial benefit for the Driver Education Foundation, but offers increased work for training providers assessing drivers for national qualifications.

In addition to dissemination of marketing material, DEF notified all secondary schools of the programme and advertised in the Road Code and other magazines.

The acquisition of participants has been primarily targeted through training providers, secondary schools and AA Centre staff. The latter, providing information to learner drivers as they register to become a learner driver.

### **5. LESSONS LEARNT**

The programme has been the first incentive based programme (on a national scale) for young drivers in NZ. Certain factors have influenced the development and implementation of the programme, and a number of lessons have been learnt. Response from some major insurance companies has been disappointing, despite the opportunity of the programme to lower risk in 15 – 25 age group drivers. Securing funding support has been difficult at times, which has reinforced the need for a robust funding and marketing strategy. Insufficient funds were secured for the TV advertising, so this initiative did not proceed. The timing of the programme alongside the implementation of a performance based standards into secondary schools and the workplace, created additional effort to introduce these new concepts into the community.

Commercial interests among competing incentive providers have also been another hurdle to overcome. Having said this, nearing the completion of the second year, the programme now has a wide range of incentive providers, training providers and increasing acceptance among secondary schools to become more involved in driver education.

### **6. SUMMARY**

As the programme completes it's first year of attracting participants, an ongoing operational plan is being developed to cover the remaining implementation phases and to ensure the programme continues to grow and establish itself. At this stage, it is anticipated the

programme will have sufficient participants to undertake the evaluation phase according to plan.

Being a first, the programme has had to break considerable new ground but results to date in terms of project implementation have been very encouraging and we are confident of achieving the aim of the programme, which is to reduce crashes in the 15 – 24 age group drivers.

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