

Contributed Articles

Please note that our November 2009 Journal will have a major focus on motorcycle safety. If you would like to write a 'Letter to the Editor' or submit an article, please send it as a MS Word document to journaleditor@acrs.org.au by 10th September.

Pre-Driver Education at Charlton, Victoria.

by Brian Heenan, Manager, Charlton Driver Education Centre; tel: 0418 529 718.

The Charlton Driver Education Centre, in central North West Victoria, has, for the last 20 years, focused on providing driver education to students who are about to obtain their Es.

Our experience has shown us that there are advantages in doing pre driver education.

Firstly, these new drivers are shown the basic controls of the car and how to set themselves up to correctly operate them. They are taught the correct techniques by professional instructors, so that, when they hop in the car on the open road, they have a good understanding of how the car operates and the basics of how to control the vehicle. Because they are being taught by professionals whom they are more likely to listen to, they are not going to be adopting the "bad habits" used by a lot of other drivers.

This has proven to be very beneficial as it gives those novice drivers the essential basics of how to drive correctly and safely. The feedback from the parents and police is also very positive, as it makes those first few drives far less stressful because these new drivers have the correct basic information on how to drive.

Talking to ex-students now in their early 20's, the common statement is, "Driver Ed was the best thing I did at school". Another feedback has been; "I have 3 children, two did Driver Ed. I had no trouble supervising them driving. They knew what they had to do and why; the third, all I got was, "why do I have to do that? What do you know?"

The emphasis of the course is on safety and the term "trust nobody". Check that there is no one running a stop sign; a green light means "go, if safe" – always check to make sure no one is running through a red light. (We have had feedback of this happening to past students, who have avoided the collision by checking first!)

An article in this Journal in November 2007, pages 12 & 13, stated the importance and potential for a program to educate learner drivers "before they begin solo driving. The aim of such an approach would be to "knock the top off" the spike in risk that novice drivers face when they first begin driving solo." We believe we are helping to reduce that "spike" by better equipping these students before they start driving, or at least in the very early stages of their driving.

The Centre consists of a track, 1.7 kilometres in length, 800 metres sealed bitumen and the rest gravel. It features operating traffic lights, pedestrian crossing, hill crest, a roundabout, divided roads, stop and give way signs, uncontrolled intersections, angle and parallel parking bays and facilities for U turns and 3 point turns and overtaking. Four Toyota Corollas are used for the program, two are manual sedans and two are automatics.



The normal program is for 6 students to share a car, with half in the car and the other half in the theory room, for approximately three quarters of an hour, and then groups swap over. Having 3 in a car means that the students are learning, not only when they are driving, but also by watching other students and picking up on their mistakes: "it is much easier to drive from the back seat when the pressure is not on you!"

In the theory room subjects covered include speed, alcohol / drugs, aggression, fatigue, peer group pressures, intersections and basic road rules.

Whilst in the car, students learn correct adjustment of all controls, steering techniques, correct road positioning, turns, correct roundabout usage, reversing, angle and parallel parks, U turns and 3 point turns, hill starts, gear changing, overtaking, gap judgment and the vital importance of having good observation to avoid any "potential hazards".

Because there are normally 3 or 4 vehicles on the track at any time, the students are constantly confronted with situations

requiring answers on who has to give way, and to be quickly able to make the correct decisions. The safety advantage here is, if the wrong decision is made, there is an experienced instructor in each car who can quickly intervene.

Approximately 800 students per year, from the West half of Victoria and Southern New South Wales, attend the program, usually year 10 level, as they are generally 15 or 16 years old. Programs operate normally for 2 or 3 days, but are tailored to whatever the school desires. A night drive is normally included in the program.

Students are taught the very basics of how to drive a vehicle in a safe and predictable manner. They are taught how to drive “systematically” (a set order of doing things), and how to develop “good observation” so they are then in a position to take evasive action if needed. Good observation is constantly stressed as the most important thing: observation will keep you alive.

The Charlton Driver Education Centre tries to give these 15 – 16 year olds a “solid foundation” on which to build the rest of their driving experiences,

Delivering Results through Quality Driver Training

By Russell White –Managing Director, Driversafety.com.au; Ph:0419 866 165

Overview

The aim of this document is to provide a general overview on the issue of road safety and driver education. It looks at the road toll as it stands currently and reviews some of the previous research into driver training. In addition it looks at some new areas of research and how a hierarchy for Road Safety Training can be applied to training initiatives and driver education programs.



Introduction

It is well understood that road safety is a complex issue. The impact of road trauma places huge social and economic costs to communities across the globe. The World Health Organisation states that over 1.2 million people are killed each year as a result of road crashes [1] and for every death more than 10 people on average are seriously injured. Road crash fatalities in Australia peaked in 1970 with 3798 killed [2]. Since then the road toll figures have steadily decreased due to a number of initiatives and interventions. These included improved occupant safety, vehicle design rules and enforcement.

However it appears that the national road toll rate has now largely plateaued in recent years. The annual road toll figure in Australia has remained relatively constant at round 1600 people per year. Interestingly, whilst the number of fatalities has decreased overall the number of serious injuries is increasing. This simply means that the improvement in crash survival rates does not reflect a down turn in the crash rates themselves.

Governments, police and road authorities have consistently expressed a concern that current road safety activities have also levelled out. In fact there is evidence to suggest that the road toll figures may again start to increase unless new initiatives can be put in place. The World Report suggests that road fatality rates are forecast to increase by 65% by 2020.

Key Factors for Driving Improvement in Road Safety

Thanks to an enormous amount of ongoing development from key stakeholders driving today is the safest it's ever been. Over the past few decades there has been a significant amount of improvement in road design, enforcement vehicle safety and engineering. Yet despite all these advancements it is clear that a critical piece of the puzzle is still missing because the deaths and injuries from road crashes continue.

By comparison, the only area that has not improved relates to a vehicles biological component ...The driver.

It could be argued that the driver training and licensing have largely remained unchanged whilst almost every other aspect of motoring has experienced significant levels of development and evolution. Driver licensing tends to focus on the fundamentals of vehicle control and the key elements of road law. Whilst these areas are important in early driver development there is little refinement in these base skills once the licence is issued. This can lead to drivers assuming that holding licence means that they have nothing more to learn.