

NSW High Performance Vehicle Scheme for Provisional Drivers

David Black, Dan Leavy

Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW

Abstract

In the interests of road safety, NSW provisional drivers are prohibited from driving high performance vehicles (HPVs). This restriction has applied since July 2005. In 2014, the definition of a HPV was amended to mean a vehicle greater than a specified power-to-mass ratio (PMR). Although this was intended to apply nationally, NSW added an additional criterion to include vehicles with a lesser PMR but which pose a high risk to novice drivers for other reasons. A new website was developed, which now allows the public to check the status of over 90,000 vehicles available in NSW.

Background

In NSW, provisional licence holders are not permitted to drive HPVs. This restriction was introduced in July 2005, in response to concerns that novice drivers were allowed to drive dangerous vehicles. At the time, a HPV was defined as a vehicle that had eight cylinders or more or was turbo/supercharged, and the road authority published a list of prohibited vehicles. A similar policy was applied in Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

Recently, turbo/supercharging began being used to create more fuel-efficient, rather than high-powered, engines. To respond to these changes, the relevant Australian jurisdictions changed the definition of a HPV to mean a vehicle with a power-to-mass ratio (PMR) greater than 130 kW/t, and removed reference to specific engine features.

Changes to definition and administration in NSW

From August 2014, NSW applied the new definition to all vehicles irrespective of manufacture date; NSW also qualified the definition to allow it to ban vehicles that otherwise posed a high risk to novice drivers, such as vehicles with a high acceleration rate or a history of frequent crashes by provisional drivers. Other jurisdictions continue to apply the original definition to vehicles manufactured before 2010, and the new definition to later models; they do not apply the NSW policy to ban other types of high-risk vehicles.

Using a vehicle's PMR means that its power and tare mass must be known. Transport for NSW (TfNSW) engages a supplier to provide the necessary data for the vehicles. Data for older or personally imported vehicles are often not readily available, which can pose problems in determining the PMR of older or exotic vehicles.

Additional data is necessary for TfNSW to determine other high-risk vehicles. This data has proven relatively easy to source for modern vehicles, and the NSW definition is seen to provide a safety benefit with the addition of little administrative burden.

Details of the HPV status of over 90,000 vehicles is on the TfNSW website. This allows members of the public and the NSW Police Force to access the status of individual models by a user-friendly interface (Figure 1).

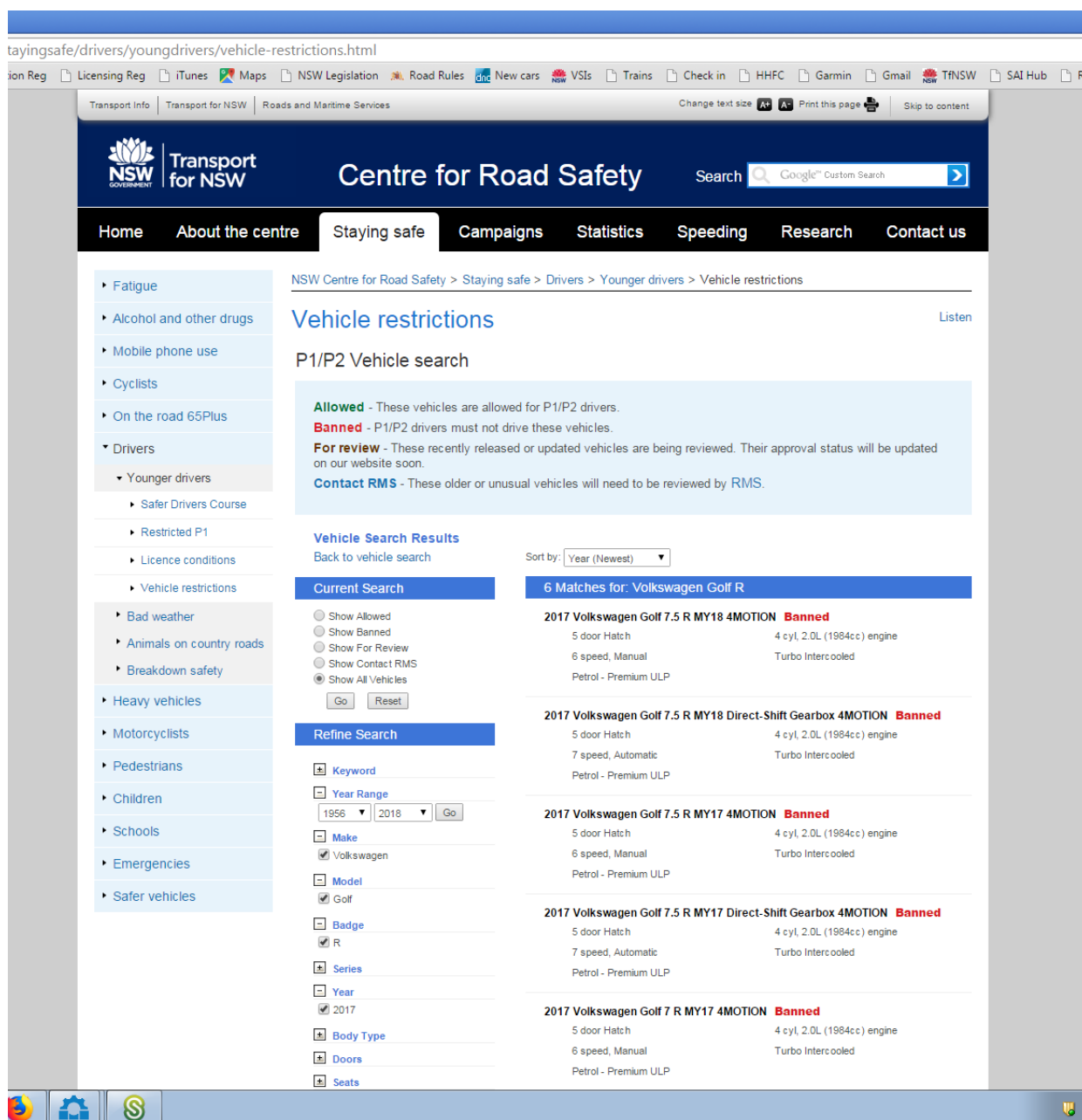


Figure 1. Screenshot showing a HPV search

Conclusions

Applying a consistent PMR-based definition of HPV to all vehicles, irrespective of build date, is a fair approach from a policy perspective. Although the difficulty in sourcing data for older vehicles creates an administrative burden, it is considered worthwhile as it produces a more equitable outcome than the previous policy, which relied on certain characteristics which do not necessarily equate to a high-risk vehicle – for example, the increasing use of turbocharging to improve fuel efficiency rather than increasing engine performance.

Specifically banning other high-risk vehicles has been relatively simple administratively and has led to some vehicles, whose performance characteristics clearly pose a high risk to novice drivers, being banned despite having PMRs less than 130 kW/t. For example, the 2007 Subaru WRX is included as a HPV despite it having a PMR of 123 kW/tonne as it can accelerate from 0 to 100 km/h in 5.9 seconds.