

Thoughts on road safety.

With the increasing road toll, we have to look at what we're doing wrong. I believe that we need to step back, and take a whole new approach to overall road use.

Currently we have the mantra "speed kills". This is a no brainer, of course speed kills. If one runs into a solid object at 10 or 110 kilometres per hour that can kill one. It's inappropriate speed that's the problem here.

Are roads the problem, I don't believe so. I've travelled overseas, and our roads, mostly are as good, sometimes better, than in most comparable countries.

Where I believe our problem lies is mostly in driver training. It's slowly getting better, we now have the 120 hours behind the wheel rule for learners, that's a start.

But I believe we can do better. Driver training should not just be for L platers, but, for the whole of ones driving life. I have been driving for many years, and have not been required to undertake any driving refresher courses. Yet, driving conditions and rules have changed dramatically since the 1960's.

To start with, basic driver training. Yes the learner should have 120 hrs+ on the road. But also should have a number of hours in class room instruction, and dedicated practical driving training areas for enhanced vehicle handling. A learner only has to learn the road rules to get their L plates. They should have class room time, spread over at least a year to reinforce and enhance those rules.

Eg; we all know that we must stop if involved in an accident and render assistance etc. what is not told, is how the shock of being involved in said accident will affect a person. The adrenaline, fight or flight, will kick in, and unless a person can recognise and overcome this natural reaction, their first tendency is to flee the scene. This is the type of topic that needs to be covered in the classroom.

Other topics would be how drivers can be impaired, such as tiredness, alcohol, drugs, both legal and illegal, the extra space that needs to be given to trucks etc.

Also, the results of serious road trauma, both on rehabilitation, and in the case of death, affect on family and friends.

Once a learner has their P plates they should be required to complete a defensive driving course after say 6 to 8 months. Both to improve their driving, and counter any bad habits they may be drifting into. Also, until they have completed the course they can only carry one passenger, any more and they revert to L plate conditions ie; the person beside them must be a full license holder.

Once a driver has a full license, they should have to attend a day refresher course, say, once every 10 years, to check any bad habits they may drift into, and bring them up to date with any road rule changes. After the age of say, 60, include eye checks as well at license renewal. This should be increased to medical and more frequent driver checking as one gets older, (yes, I'm in that category)!

Regarding infringement penalties; for minor infringements, eg; less than 5kms over the limit, failing to give way etc, the option of attending a day road safety instruction in lieu of a fine and demerit points be given. This I believe would have a far greater effect than a straight fine would. I believe that this system is in place in the UK. The same principle could be used for low range drink driving. Say, from .05 to .06, instead of license cancellation, give the option of two weekends driver education. This would save many drivers their jobs, and improve some of their driving skills. This could also be applied to mobile phone use while driving.

Of course, there are some that will never change, the above option for drink driving/mobile phone use, should only be given once. If caught again, automatic license cancellation. And if caught driving on a cancelled license, the charge be attempted manslaughter, because they have demonstrated that they have no care for the safety of others.

For serious driving offences, such as license cancellation for 12 months or more. The license be cancelled totally, and the offender be required to go through the learner process again.

The above are my thoughts for your consideration. I might add that they are derived from years of driving, having taught my children to drive, and seen my parents and in laws driving skills deteriorate as they aged.

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