

INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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NOVICE DRIVER TRAINING



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Submission to:

The NSW Parliamentary

Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe)

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Physics in Motion™ Science Program (12,000+ participants since 2003)

Home of the SAFE DRIVE TEST DRIVE™ Young Driver Safety Program (27,500+ safer drivers since 1996)

Motorsport: Driver Coaching, Track Time, Drift School, Car Club Events, Driving Events, Observed Licence Tests

Driver Training: High School, Defensive, Company Fleet, Advanced, Skid Pan, Corporate Days, Tyre/Vehicle Launches

Exclusive Australian and New Zealand distributor for Fatal Vision Alcohol and Drug Impairment Goggles and Training Materials

The Safe Driving Pledge

(Developed for novice drivers by Joel Neilsen)

I respect your right to drive on the road.

I do not own the road.

I will be patient and not harass you.

I will be tolerant and not intimidate you.

I will not speed to kill you.

I accept that sometimes you will make mistakes, so will I.

If I want to drive fast I will find a safe venue to do so.

By driving fast I am no better driver,
I am just breaking the law by more.

If I take risks I will be responsible for my actions,
including all the legal consequences.

As a driver I hold the lives of my passengers in my hands.

My licence is a privilege and not a right.

Without a licence I may not be able to get a job.

My actions can affect my success,
lifestyle and well being for the future.

My parent's greatest fear is that I will die in a car crash.

I will do everything in my power to not become a crash statistic.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

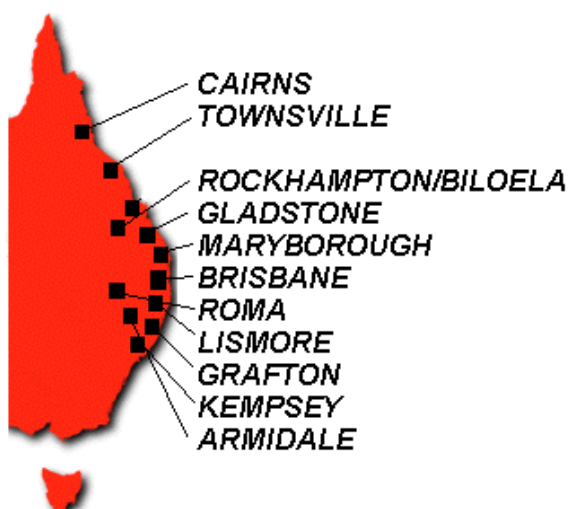
As the Managing Director of Safe Drive Training (Aust) Pty Ltd, the largest private supplier of novice driver education in Australia and the largest supplier of novice driver training in Queensland, I have a keen interest in any inquiry relating to novice driver education and the reduction of the road toll for Young Australians.

My company has been at the forefront of moves to provide better driver education to young novice drivers. The achievements of Safe Drive Training in relation to novice driver education include:



1. The development and implementation of a special Young Driver Safety Program as offered to High Schools throughout South-east Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Since 1996, 27,500 Year 12 students have enrolled into this course. A record 3,615 young novice drivers participated in the 2007 SAFE DRIVE TEST DRIVE: Young Driver Safety Program. The following 144 school enrolled:

A.B. Paterson College, Alexandra Hills SHS, All Hallows School, All Saints Anglican School, All Souls St. Gabriels, Alstonville High, Anglican Church Grammar School, Aquinas College, Beerwah SHS, Blackheath & Thornburgh College, Boonah SHS, Bracken Ridge SHS, Brisbane Adventist College, Brisbane Boys College, Brisbane Grammar School, Browns Plains SHS, Burdekin Catholic College, Burnett State College, Caboolture SHS, Calvary Christian College, Cannon Hill Anglican College, Canterbury College, Capalaba State College, Chinchilla SHS, Christian Outreach College, Clairvaux MacKillop College, Clarence Valley Anglican School, Concordia College, Corpus Christi College, Dakabin SHS, Dalby Christian School, Downlands College, Everton Park SHS, Faith Lutheran College, Forest Lake College, Forest Lake SHS, Genesis Christian College, Gilroy Santa Maria College, Goondiwindi SHS, Grace Lutheran College, Hillbrook Anglican School, Holland Park SHS, Hughenden State School, Ignatius Park College, Indooroopilly SHS, Ingham SHS, Innisfail SHS, Inverell High School, Iona College, Kadina High School, Kenmore SHS, Kilcoy SHS, Laidley SHS, Lakeside Christian High School, Lindisfarne Anglican Grammar School, Lismore High School, Lockyer District SHS, Loganlea SHS, Lourdes Hill College, Lowood SHS, Macksville High School, Mansfield SHS, Marist College Rosalie, Marist College Ashgrove, Marsden SHS, Miles SHS, Mitchelton SHS, Morayfield SHS, Moreton Bay College, Mossman SHS, Mount Alvernia College, Mt. Gravatt SHS, Mt. Maria College Petrie, Mt. St. Patrick College (Murwillumbah), Mueller College, Mullumbimby SHS, Nambucca Heads SHS, Narangba Valley SHS, Nerang SHS, Northern Beaches SHS, Northpine Christian College, Nudgee College, Our Lady's College, Pacific Lutheran College, Padua College, Palm Beach Currumbin SHS, Park Ridge SHS, Peace Lutheran College, Redcliffe SHS, Redlands College, Rivermount College, Roma State College, Rosewood SHS, Shailer Park SHS, Sheldon College, Smithfield SHS, Somerset College, Southern Cross Catholic College, Springwood SHS, St Brendans College, St. Aidans College, St. Columbans College, St. Edmunds College, St. George SHS, St. Johns College (Roma), St. John's College (Woodlawn), St. Joseph's College (Gregory Tce), St. Josephs College (Toowoomba), St. Laurences College, St. Marys College (Ipswich), St. Mary's College (Toowoomba), St. Michaels College, St. Patrick's College, St. Paul's School, St. Paul's School (Kempsey), St. Peter Claver College, St. Peters Lutheran College, St. Stephen's College, St. Thomas More College, St. Ursula's College (Yeppoon), Stanthorpe SHS, Stuartholme School, Tamborine Mountain College, Tamborine Mountain SHS, Tara Shire State College, Tenterfield High School, The Gap SHS, The Glennie School, The School of Total Education, The Southport School, Thuringowa SHS, Toogoolawah SHS, Trinity College, Trinity Lutheran College, Tullawong SHS, Tully SHS, Urangan SHS, Victoria Point SHS, Villanova College, Warwick SHS, West Moreton Anglican College, Westside Christian College, Windaroo Valley SHS, Woodcrest College, Wynnum SHS, Yeppoon SHS



We deliver this programs in the following locations:

CAIRNS (QLD): Cairns Showgrounds

TOWNSVILLE (QLD): Dairy Farmers (Cowboys) Stadium

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GLADSTONE (QLD): Benaraby Raceway

MARYBOROUGH (QLD): Maryborough Showgrounds

ROMA (QLD): Ironbark Raceway

SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND (QLD)- 3 venues

- **Qld Advanced Driver Education Centre, Willowbank**
- **Mt. Cotton Training Centre, Cornubia (near Loganholme)**
- **Carrara Stadium Carpark (Gold Coast)**

LISMORE (NSW): Evans Head Memorial Airport

GRAFTON (NSW): Grafton Hillclimb Track

ARMIDALE (NSW): Traffic Education Centre

KEMPSEY (NSW): Kempsey Airport & Terminal Building

2. The delivery of Free Safe Driving Lectures in South-east Queensland High Schools to an estimated 145,000 senior students since 1996.

3. Our Safe Driving Video (and DVD) is used by 1250 High Schools throughout Australia and New Zealand. Many companies use this video to build-on the training provided. A modified version of our video is also used by the NRMA as part of their Safe Driving Programs.

4. In 1999, Safe Drive Training sent a free copy of our Safe Driving educational Handbook to every High School and Driving School in Australia and New Zealand.

2.0 THE TRAINING NEEDS OF NOVICE DRIVERS

Considerable evidence exists to condemn young novice drivers from being exposed to skills-based advanced driver training courses that attempt to enhance the manipulative skills of those undertaking the training. For example “if they (young novice drivers) are taught how to control skids and lateral sliding, then many of them will practise such tasks for the adrenalin rush or to gain social approval from their peers” RACQ (1995)

It should be remembered that this however is often what the young novice driver expects (as too the parents) from the post-licence driver training course they enrol in.

However to assume that young novice drivers if not exposed to post-licence driver training will not experiment, deliberately produce skids and slides and drive aggressively is also delusional and fails to appreciate the exploratory behaviour of human beings.

2.1 LEARNING TO CRAWL BEFORE YOU WALK

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After an infant develops the ability to crawl, the next goal becomes the task of walking. Children develop the skill of upright mobility through (as Gregerson 1995, calls it) “skill-failure experiences”. Attempts at standing upright are followed by gravity propelled falls (what goes up must come down). The time periods of prolonged standing become larger and eventual a fall forward is considered the first small step. The child learns slowly the parameters of what causes them to lose balance and fall. Practice and time leads to developments of muscle mass, dexterity and strength. The natural learning process is a slow one, of trial and error and development and failure.

Introduce to this analogy the concept of skill-based driver training, a parent could (if desired) begin coaching, provoking and training this child into running, jumping, hopping and skipping as soon as they learn to walk. No doubt after some time, the small child would be able to run and jump at an abnormally early age. It is doubtful these extra skills would make the child safer though, as the child will be now experimenting and learning new parameters at higher speed before their body has developed to cope with more severe falls, grazes, cuts and bruises.

This is the argument regarding, equipping novice drivers with advanced car control skills. There is little doubt a novice driver can be taught the higher order car control skills of a motor racing driver. These skills though can exacerbate the crash risk because the skills are obtained before the driver has had the experiences of learning how other road users behave, how traffic functions, the various road and weather conditions they can encounter and the maturity to drive in a prudent and controlled manner.

In their book “Accident Research Methods and Approaches”, Haddon, Suchman and Klein state that “children tend to explore the environment and to investigate the possibility of objects. During such exploration they learn about places, they learn about objects and they learn about events. Some places, some objects and some events in the environment are dangerous. Hence children necessarily and unavoidably come close to certain kinds of danger. Locomotion, manipulation, play, investigation, trial-and-error, insight, and problem-solving involve the skirting of danger.”

These behaviours of learning the parameters of ones environment are repeated when a young novice driver obtains their driver licence.

Through the Q-Safe Driver Licencing System (currently operating in Queensland) the only opportunity for driving experience is with a supervising driver (be it a parent, relation or driving instructor). The older, more experienced (and often more mature) supervisor allows the novice to gain practice in the basic manipulative skills of steering, braking and gear changing.

This training environment is often **over-controlled** by the supervisor preventing any but the most insignificant of exploratory-learning. The supervisor for example might permit the novice to “kangaroo-hop” when learning the use of clutch and gear changes. But (often through fear of damage to the vehicle being driving) any excessive “kangaroo-hops” are quickly curtailed.

Anecdotal evidence highlights the amount of stress that develops between parents (as supervising drivers) and young novice drivers during this learning period.

It is only after the provisional licence is obtained that the young novice driver is free to drive unaccompanied or with passengers (that do not act in a supervisory role), thus allowing relatively uncontrolled exploratory learning to happen. This is shown by the study on the effects of passengers on driving style, which showed young drivers tended to deteriorate in the presence of passengers of similar age (Ingham 1991 in RACQ 1995).

Driver training staff working for Safe Drive Training, have noted in their experience a degree better driving skills and safer attitudes (less interest in risk taking and youthful exploits like burnouts) amongst novice drivers attending training courses from country areas. This may be due to the greater opportunities young drivers growing up in these areas have for unlicensed driving on farms and exploratory learning (such as “bush-bashing”) from an early age.

Haddon, Suchman and Klein go on to examine the notion of “margins of safety which exists between a person and the edge of danger. It should be noted that the margin-of-safety concept involves either or both of two kinds of gaps – closeness of danger in space and the imminence of danger in time. In either case, however, the perceiving of the “safety reserve” in various situations is something all children want and need to do. And the appropriate adjustment of behaviour to such margins is a skill worth practicing.” **This is where skills-based driver training courses that focus of advanced car control techniques run the risk of altering the perception of the “safety reserve” thus making the driver more accident prone.**

However a complete failure to educate a young novice driver on the limitations and parameters of driving, a failure to allow exploratory learning can also skew the perception of the safety-reserve. It is proposed the great benefit of post-licence driver training conducted at off-road driving centres is that it provides the means (venue and space) for exploratory learning. A young novice driver can experience critical components in the margin-of-safety concept such as (but not limited to):

- Braking distance and a function of travel speed
- The limits of tyre adhesion
- The point where “grip turns to slip” under various conditions
- The inherent dynamics of a vehicle

Haddon, Suchman and Klein, also points out that “Parents are commonly so reluctant to have their children “exposed” to dangers or, as we say, to “risk accidents,” that they often discourage the very exploratory actions which would lead the child to form habits of prudence and to avoid unsafe practices.”

“Such an over-protected child does not grow into an adult who is safe from the dangers of the environment; on the contrary, he is at their mercy. I suspect that “accident prone” individuals are of this sort.”

Young drivers should be provided every opportunity to study the permanent, fixed and predictably dangers that surround them. “The remedy for ineffective reaction to dangers, then, is to train the

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skills of the child, or allow him to learn. He must coordinate his behaviour to the margins of safety.”(Haddon, Suchman and Klein)

It is the position of my company that we are failing the youth of Australia to expect them to walk before they learn how to crawl. It is the firm belief of the author, that young novice driver should be given a safe venue to learn these invaluable exploratory lessons, but not be taught or convinced that these parameters can be controlled by their skill.

2.2 HOW YOUNG DRIVERS ASSESS DRIVING ABILITY – SELECTING SUITABLE ROLE MODELS

Driving is a unique human endeavour in that there exists no readily available measuring tools to prove driving prowess compared to another individual. For the general public there is no simple, readily available test or comparison to prove driving competence.

The fact young drivers mistake high speeds and recklessness as a measure of driving ability, is in my belief the most critical factor to consider in novice driver education and training.

In sport there exists scoring systems, rankings and handicaps to define someone’s abilities compared to another. A reserve grade footballer, must know they do not yet possess the talents of the elite players in their sport.

A golf player (hacker) with a 27 handicap realises via the scoring system of golf they are not yet Tiger Woods. Even in academic pursuits, a high-school graduate must know they have not yet obtained the knowledge of a university graduate.

This pecking order, scoring and ranking system which is prevalent in so many facets of life, is non-existent in the activity of driving a motor vehicle. Higgins (1995) states that “the ability to physically manipulate a vehicle has traditionally been associated with good driving”.

For a mature age driver, when asked about their driving ability, commonly their crash history, years without crashing, kilometres travelled or personal feelings (based on perceived skill levels or direct comparisons with other drivers) are the evidence available to confirm their belief in their own ability.

For a novice driver, their personal views on their own driving ability are often measured by who is asking the question.

If a mature aged driver (particularly a relative like a parent or uncle/aunt) enquires about a novice driver’s ability, the proof tendered will often relate to obedience of road rules, ability to following speed limits, how successfully they passed the driving test or (if of a value to be proud of) the number of driving lessons undertaken.

If someone from their immediate peer group asks a novice driver about their ability the evidence given will tend to relate to the highest speed they have obtained or the speed they regularly travel

at, the type of car they drive (or the modifications performed), the reckless driving stunts they undertake or the shortest amount of time they have needed to drive between two locations.

It is well known that novice driver's perceptions about their driving skills do not match the reality. This is commonly cited in anecdotal evidence by training providers as one of the key advantages of post-licence training (conducted at a off-road training centre) as the driver gets to experience how their true levels of driving skills are not as high as the perceived skill level.

Safe Drive Training's office staff receive phone calls everyday from parents investigating what training courses exist for their teenage son or daughter. It is no embellishment that most phone conversations begin with the parent stating categorically that "my son/daughter is a very good driver, but we would like them to undertake one of your courses". The parent's are under the apprehension that the basic skills of changing gears and steering a car equate to driving competence.

The skills and techniques that make a truly safe and aware driver are mostly those hidden from view. The cognitive processes, the visual scanning techniques, the low risk driving procedures, the mindset, the experience level, the understanding of road law, the appreciation of vehicle dynamic and so forth are not easily visible to a novice driver.

Every novice driver attending a Safe Drive Training course is asked by questionnaire as to "Who (if anyone) is your role model for driving". From the collation of results from 9,000 questionnaires, the novice driver's role models are:

37% of participants report their FATHER as being their role model for driving
17% of participants report that a RACING DRIVER is their role model for driving
11% of participants report their MOTHER as being their role model for driving

It is the experience of Safe Drive Training that novice drivers mistake their ability to achieve the same competence in the basic control skills of driving as their role model, with the ability to drive safely. Their perceptions of driving skills are reinforced when they drive faster than, outwit or out-manoeuvre and overtake, older more experienced drivers.

Safe Drive Training has also found this staunch belief in driving ability being proportional to driving skill; as most prevalent in young novice drivers (male or female) that cite a racing driver as their role model. In the young drivers simplified notion of motor sport, those with the most skill and the ability to drive faster are seen as champions. Rarely is the reality true.

Champion motor racing drivers, whilst possessing high level driving skills also have hidden talents that are critical to their success. These talents include the same cognitive skills of a good driver and abilities to judge risk versus reward, drive to the limit of (but not exceed) the grip of the tyres and the longevity of components. Champion racing driver's attitude and demeanour often attract the sponsors so necessary for success.

Many post-licence training providers would have anecdotal experience of training a novice driver, that is enrolled in the training course by a well meaning, caring parent but simply doesn't want to be their.

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It is both concerning and frightening to deliver a driver training program to a novice driver that already believes they are highly skilled, know all there is to know about driving and cannot be taught anything new as they are “gods gift to driving”. When in reality they have had several months of driving experience and a few driving lessons.

It is proposed that young novice drivers possess a warped sense of awareness regarding, what defines a safe driver.

It is critical to the development of safer novice drivers that driver training and education programs;

- Reinforce that driving ability is more than car control techniques
- Educate novice drivers that the hidden factors are of more importance than the visible
- Select appropriate role models for novice drivers

2.3 THE FATAL FOUR FACTORS IN YOUNG DRIVER CRASHES

For some time road safety campaigns in Queensland (particularly during school holiday and long-weekend blitzes) have focused on the FATAL FOUR, the common factors in motor vehicle crashes.

Whilst crash data supports the notion that Speeding, Non-Restraint Usage, Drink Driving and Driving Tired are overwhelmingly the most significant contributors to road trauma, they are also the visible results (symptoms) of an underlying attitude or driver behaviour.

The extensive marketing of the FATAL FOUR campaign may serve to simplify the notion of driving dangers to only be considered as these 4 factors. In other words, the mass media campaign may (in some drivers) create a notion that by obeying the speeding limit, wearing a seatbelt, getting plenty of rest and not consuming alcohol (or other drugs) before driving will somehow guarantee safety.

In the report Stop Look and Listen – Future Directions of Road Safety for Young People (Fresta et al, 1995), the findings of school based questionnaires into road safety highlight that “Peer pressure appeared to be the most significant motivator for young people to engage in dangerous road user behaviours, followed by intentional risk taking for the purpose of thrill seeking and relieving boredom. Individual personality traits such as a rebellious nature, laziness, stupidity and a conviction of invincibility were also seen by many as reasons why teenagers get into dangerous situations on the roads. Some participants suggested that some teenagers are unaware of the dangers involved in some situations due to their lack of experience or maturity.”

Anecdotal evidence gained by training some 27,500-novice drivers reinforces these findings.

During the delivery of modules of our Young Driver Safety Program, peer influence is regularly witnessed by training staff. Course participants often encourage schoolmates to do burnouts, break the rules set-down and drive in a manner they would not usually.

It should be noted that this is tolerated to a point (so long as safety parameters are not jeopardised), so that trainers can make reference to these influencing factors. Course participants are also often overheard recounting their driving exploits and boasting of the dangerous driving they have done.

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All course participants self-reported perception of driving skill is sought prior to and immediately following this driver training course.

- 23% of course participants rank themselves above-average (8 or more out of 10) as a driver prior to the course
- 83% of course participants rank themselves as at least average (5 or more out of 10) as a driver prior to the course

It is suggested that a new Fatal Four be adopted to target young novice drivers. The Fatal Four being:

The Real Fatal 4

OVERCONFIDENCE
RISK-TAKING
INEXPERIENCE
PEER INFLUENCE

It is proposed that detailed investigations of crashes involving young novice drivers, would find that one (or more) of these factors as being the primary causes of the crash.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS INTO DRIVER TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR NOVICE DRIVERS

I wish to acknowledge that some research has found “little empirical support for the effectiveness of “traditional” forms of driver training, such as behind the wheel instruction, classroom education and skid training” (Deery et al, 1998)”.

Though all proponents of driver training can wield a compelling argument as to the flaws, biases and limitations of this research. For a comprehensive review of the major arguments as to why the research into driver training is believed to be flawed, refer to the “Driver Education Discussion Paper” prepared for the Australian College of Road Safety by John Fraser (July, 1996).

I acknowledge that in the past **typical** post-licence driver training programs “have not focused on the skills and behaviours that are important in crash causation” (Deery et al, 1998)”.

I acknowledge the argument that **typical** training programs “focus primarily on knowledge and vehicle handling skills and do not effectively address the range of perceptual, cognitive, motivational and attitudinal factors which influence driver judgement and decision making (Lynam and Twisk, 1995; Job 1995; Christie, 1995 in Williams and Dray, 2000)

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I acknowledge that claims have been made and “French research has indicated that drivers trained in emergency vehicle control procedures (eg. braking and/or swerving) quickly regress to pre-trained behaviours in emergency situations (Malaterre, 1989; Christie, 1995 in Williams and Dray, 2000)

I acknowledge that commentators suggest the fundamental flaw in **typical** driver training programs is “that there is no correlation between driving skill and driving behaviour” and that driver training programs presuppose “drivers will take their newly learned skills and apply them in a manner that will minimise risk to themselves and others (Higgins, 1995).

In his article in Roadwise (1995), Dr. R. F. Soames Job reminds us that “claims that driver training will not work are not justified by previous failures; many possibilities remain to be explored and there is at least suggestive evidence that driver training can produce safety benefits”.

The author suggests that to inform a devout non-believer in post-licence driver training (ie. researcher), that (hypothetically) a driver leaving a recent post-licence driver training course had a serious car crash on their way home, would serve to reinforce this researchers beliefs that such course should be banned. But to tell the same researcher that (hypothetically) a driver leaving a recent rock concert had a serious car crash on their way home, would not result in calls to ban rock concerts, but instead an effort to understand the causes and possible countermeasures to prevent future crashes. Such is the apathy held by some, towards the industry of post-licence driver training.

For driver training to evolve to meet the expectations of the non-believers is not an overnight process; as unlike the detractors, driver training providers operate in a commercial environment where a wide range of factors limit the ability to change and at all times it must be remembered that our clientele (the road user) is even less knowledgable on the correct structure and methodology the driver training services should adopt.

The proposition that typical post-licence driver training has to date not proven effectual is accepted by this author, but definition needs to be made of “**what is a typical post-licence driver training program**”.



3.1 *WHAT IS TYPICAL POST-LICENCE DRIVER TRAINING?*

Higgins (1995) states that “as a road trauma countermeasure, traditional skills-based driver training presupposes that motorists are motivated to drive safely.” However statements like this presuppose that all driver training is skills-based.

Higgins (1995) also reminds us that “early driver training program that were developed in Hendon, England, concentrated on the physical skills component of manipulating the vehicle. Bearing in mind the novelty of the motorcar, this was an appropriate approach to the problem faced at the time.

Through a series of systematic procedures, London Police were taught the fine art of push pull steering, accelerating, turning, changing gear and other such skills. Modern post licence defensive driving and advanced driving courses have evolved from these historical roots.”

It is conceded in the authors experience that many of the post-licence driver training programs on offer 10 years ago (when most evaluations of post-licence driver training were undertaken – as discussed later in this paper) were orientated to the improvement of driving skills first and foremost. This was accomplished by either purely theoretical presentations (like the American National Safety Council course as evaluated by Lund and Williams, 1985) or through practical skills-based training delivered at off-road training centres.

Driving behaviours (especially risk taking) and the targeting of driver’s attitudes were seldom discussed in great depth during these courses. It also must be said that (10 years ago) the majority of practitioners offering these skills-based post-licence driver training courses came from a background of motorsport or the police service. Whilst this is not a criticism of the driver trainers of the time, their knowledge and personal experience did help to shape the type of training courses they offered.

It has been suggested by commentators like Christie (1995) that these training providers exhibited a “Don Quixote-like confidence in their product, ignorance of the evaluation literature and/or, in the worst of all cases, to turn a blind eye to what the published scientific literature has to say in pursuit of profit.”

It should be noted that whilst there may have existed practitioners of post-licence training that were exploiting the market place and profiteering from the public faith in driver training, there also existed people passionate about contributing to the reduction in road trauma through improved driver education and training.

Higgins (1995) explains that “The belief that skills-based driver training is an effective road trauma countermeasure has proven resilient, even in the face of research findings to the contrary”.

These skills-based driver training courses, that focus on teaching a technique (such as emergency braking, cornering, brake and evade or skid control) and allowing course participants the opportunity to repeatedly practice these techniques at varying speeds (in some cases in varying cars) still exist and in many cases remain well frequented by the driving public.

It should be stressed that this is not the only type of driver training course on offer, both in Australia and internationally.

The skill-based training courses are often marketed as Advanced Driver Training, Advanced Car Control or Performance Driving Courses and often conducted at motorsport venues, by current or former motorsport competitors. In recent years, driver training programs such as these have been introduced (as a marketing and customer relations exercise) by vehicle manufacturers such as Audi, BMW, Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, HSV and Honda (to name a few).



As Higgins (1995) explains “proponents of traditional skills-based approaches to driver training generally cite anecdotal evidence to support their position. Those who have been through an advanced driver training course often believe that they have benefited from the experience.”

The fact that such courses are delivered in light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary is due to the fact that a market (cottage industry) exists for such training programs. Car enthusiasts, owners of performance vehicles, car club members and novice racing drivers are the typical clientele seeking this form of training. Gift vouchers presented as birthday and Christmas presents are another source of course participants.

It would be puerile to suggest that all driver training courses in Australia are skills-based. In the authors experience many leading post-licence driver training providers have been undergoing a paradigm shift in training methodology over many years.

It is recommended that the post-licence driver training industry voluntary agree that until evidence is tendered to the contrary, that skills-based driver training course not be marketed using terminology such as a Crash Reduction Program, Defensive Driving, Driver Awareness, Driver Safety Programs or under the category of Road Safety Training, because this misrepresentation of the training course is detrimental to the efforts of separating out the skills-based training from other types of driver training course.

3.2 ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF DRIVER TRAINING

By definition post-licence driver training, is the delivery of training services to drivers that already have obtained a class car driver’s licence. In recent years these training services have changed markedly in both content and delivery formats from the typical skills-based courses of a decade ago.

Post-licence driver training can now include:

- classroom theory based presentations (lectures, power-point presentations, videos, computer software, questionnaires, handbooks)
- on-road driver training
- on-road driver assessments
- driving simulators

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- off-road driver training

A post-licence driver training course may involve only one of these segments or be a mixture of any two or more components. The exact mixture of components is often controlled by factors such as the client's requirements, budget, crash history, location or time available for training or by the driver training providers beliefs, experience, staffing, equipment and access to resources.

3.3 DRIVER TRAINING: THE PUBLIC VIEWPOINT

Dr. Ron Christie (1995) highlights that “training and education are often viewed as panaceas for problems in the community, in the workplace and on the roads. It is not surprising therefore that parents, policy makers, training providers and the average member of the public often see training programs/courses for drivers as the remedy of first resort whenever the road toll appears to rise.”

In market research conducted by Safe Drive Training, there is overwhelming community support for driver training initiatives. Anecdotal evidence suggest many parents groups, youth groups, community organisations (eg. Rotary, Lions, Apex) are keen to support driver education and training programs. Queensland Transport found that 80% of teachers and 68% of administrators agreed or strongly agreed that road safety education should be taught in secondary schools (Fresta et al, 1995)

The NRMA Road Safety Department confirm that there exists “high community interest in driver education generally with almost 90 percent of the community ranking it as an important issue” (Higgins, 1995)

In a survey of more than 1500 motorists just completed (2007) by ANOP Research Services on behalf of the AAA and Australia's state autoclubs (NRMA, RACQ, RACV etc), 86% of people said we should have more driver education and training.

The significant public support for improved driver education must surely be a factor behind the ever increasing moves by government, government departments, car insurance providers, car manufacturers and motoring organisations to deliver driver training or driver education programs.

4.0 PAINTED AND TAINTED WITH THE SAME BRUSH

A literature review of the research conducted regarding the effectiveness of driver training programs highlights that the majority of studies originate in the USA or Europe, and in all bar a few cases the studies often cited were for training programs delivered before 1990.

In his 1995 paper, “Driver Training – What have we learned”, Dr. Ron Christie historically summarises the current state-of-play with respect to research into driver training initiatives. Whilst not criticising the author, the research available at the time of writing and used as references for this paper spans from 1975 to 1995.

It is doubtful whether any provider of post-licence driver training in Australia is still doing things the same as they did 12 months ago, let alone in 1995.

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By nature the provision of training services is a fluid medium where new ideas and concepts are continually being trialed and where appropriate incorporated in the training program.

The point being made is that the leading providers of post-licence driver training move with the times and to suggest the training course they offer is ineffectual because an overseas (or even interstate) study (like the De Kalb County study) conducted decades earlier, didn't work, is the equivalent to suggesting the cars of the 1950's are of the same standard as current models.

As noted by Henderson (1991) "none of the driver training schemes in New South Wales – or indeed Australia – has been subjected to evaluation even approaching the rigour of the DeKalb County study in the United States.

Townsend (1990) in her review for the RACV of Defensive Driver Training in Victoria went on to point out that "the findings of course evaluations like the Lund and Williams (1985) study focused specifically on the National Safety Council Defensive Driving Course and its derivatives....as such it is not appropriate to generalise the results obtained to include the different instructional designs, durations and curriculum content currently available in defensive driver training in Victoria. This has often been overlooked in subsequent critical comment on defensive driver training."

Therefore during the last decade when research data was being published on optimism bias, risk homeostasis theory, driver attitudes, driver attribution, motivational factors, causation of crashes, the inability of novice drivers to predict hazards and switch attention; the die had already been well and truly cast on post-licence driver training's effectiveness.

4.1 THE FAILURE TO RECOGNISE UP TO THE MINUTE CHANGES IN POST-LICENCE DRIVER TRAINING COURSES

A quick survey of the major driver training providers in Queensland has found that 75% have **never** had a representative of Queensland Transport, the RACQ, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau or any university based researcher ever attend one of their driver training programs. The other 25% suggest that the last time such a person visited their courses was at least 5 years ago.

It is asked then how key road safety stakeholders can be so dismissive of post-licence driver training when they would not know what such courses cover.

Safe Drive Training was awarded a High Commended for the Quest Safe Drive 2000 Program (Young Driver Safety Program) in the Industry Category of the Queensland Road Safety Awards. At no time during the nomination and evaluation process did any person involved with the awards actually attend a training program to review the course structure and methodology.

The question is then asked of researchers, how they know what today's driver training courses are like and what the providers of this training plan to cover in the future, if the only evidence to go by is from a time when the majority of driver training was skills-based.

4.2 LACK OF SUPPORT DICTATES THE TRAINING DELIVERED

The reluctance of government agencies to embrace the public's belief in improving driver education and training has in its self created a viscous circle effect. As there exists a lack of evidence supporting driver education and training programs, there remains a lack of incentives for the general public to invest in these courses. Incentives (for course participants) like improved insurance premiums, free vehicle registration, rebates, subsidies, extra demerit points are figments of the imagination of many post-licence driver training schools.

It could be argued that if the public already believe in driver training, what stops them undertaking it. But the human traits of optimism bias (It won't happen to me) and the tendency to attribute fault to other drivers, conspires to ensure driver training "should be compulsory for everyone else".

It is widely recognised that the majority of single individuals that pay to attend a driver training course are already biased from the general public by a regard for their own personal safety. In other words those that most need to improve their safety are least likely to undertake any remedial actions. The same can be said about those motorists who choose to fit high performance tyres to their car or tick the ABS and/or airbag option boxes when they purchase a new car.

Therefore as post-licence driver training has not proven its effectiveness and there is no carrot to attract those that would otherwise not consider enrolling into a driver training course, the course itself must attract the clientele. The marketing concept of "give them what they want and they will pay to come" is often applied. It would be also true that some post-licence driver training providers are very successful in "selling the sizzle with the steak" by ensuring the program incorporates advanced car control and skid pan elements to excite and entertain more than train and educate.

In correspondence received by Safe Drive Training from Mr. Tony Kursius (Executive Director: Land Transport and Safety, Queensland Transport) a "best-practice" driver training model is cited that comprises:

- 32 hours of classroom instruction
- 16 hours of instruction on driving simulators
- 16 hours of off road (driving range) instruction
- 8 hours of on-road instruction

For a commercial driver training provider to adopt this model (without government endorsement or support) would be commercial suicide as there would be few participants keen to pay for this level of training, when a simpler system exists.

4.3 MEASURING TOOLS FOR EVALUATING POST-LICENCE DRIVER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many proponents of post-licence driver training can provide common counter claims as to the flaws and biases found in many negative evaluations of driver training programs.

These counter claims often centre around the flaws in research methodology, failure to differentiate between “at fault” crashes and crash involvement in long-term studies, the small sample size and the way samples and control groups were selected. The author acknowledges that despite the flaws, there is little evidence to prove long-term crash involvement will reduce from a typical (skills-based) advanced driver training program.

However there exists (when evaluating driver training as a road safety countermeasure) a stringent focus on success only being attributed to crash rate reductions. This stringent focus is not replicated in other fields of road safety. For example studies conducted on road safety advertising on radio, television or print media use a different measure for success.

Graphic road safety television commercials are assessed by phone surveys on recall rate. Therefore a successful road safety commercial is achieved when a significant enough percentage of television viewers remember seeing the commercial in question. The road safety commercial is not assessed on the grounds of behaviour change or long-term crash reduction by the viewer.

Countermeasures are not being compared as “apples with apples”, if a road safety commercial is found to be more effective than a driver training program, when the measure of effectiveness differs greatly in each case.

Since “training” is defined in the Macquarie Dictionary as “the development in oneself or another of certain skills, habits and attitudes and “education” is defined as “the act or process of educating, the imparting or acquisition of knowledge, skill, etc via systematic instruction or training”, driver training and driver education program should be evaluated on their ability to meet these definitions.

Research and evaluations should focus on measuring the gain in knowledge and skills from driver training and the retention of this knowledge and skill over time.

The fact that studies have shown advanced driving skills such as emergency braking and skid control deteriorate over time without practice and are not always applied correctly in real emergency driving situations should not be confused with the fact that the person gained and retained knowledge of these driving techniques as a result of the training. The training was successful in imparting knowledge.

Similar studies conducted on tennis coaching, would show the ability to serve, volley and hit topspin lobs would also deteriorate over time without practice, but that is not to say the person didn’t gain and retain the knowledge of these tennis skills as a result of the training.

Similarly there are many stories of motor racing drivers that left the sport, retired or suffered serious injuries only to return to competitive driving after an extended period. There is no questioning after an initial period of practice there learned skills returned.

There seems to be this argument (under the current criteria applied to driver training) that there is no sense teaching driving skills to a person if they won’t apply them or will not have any opportunity to practice them. What is not addressed is whether they will remember the techniques following training. One thing is for certain if they have never been trained, there is no chance of them knowing or reacting in the correct manner.

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There is little doubt you can train someone to be a racing driver. Therefore advanced skills-based driver training does exactly what it claims to do, advance the driving skills of those undertaking the training. The fact that research suggests skills-based advanced driver training courses do not reduce crash involvement is only an issue if the proponent of the skills-based training claims the course does reduce crash involvement.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The term post-licence driver training has traditionally become associated with a driver training course teaching advanced driving skills through repetitive practice.

Whilst there exists a market for this type of advanced skills-based training (and considerable public support) research findings have failed to show a resulting reduction in crash involvement. Driver training providers offering this type of training are possibly guilty of falsely advertising the safety benefit of this training and creating confusion with other more sound driver training approaches.

Research conducted into the effectiveness of post-licence driver training courses also has failed to differentiate between skills-based advanced driver training (classroom and practical) and other forms of driver training methodology (especially those that can appear to be skills-based but in fact adopt different training methods).

Often those people critical of post-licence driver training are using out-of-date research, based on a different type of training program, to be critical of possibly well-developed training courses.

During the last decade research data has highlighted the cognitive aspect that driver training should target such as optimism bias, risk homeostasis theory, driver attitudes, driver attribution, motivational factors, causation of crashes, the inability of novice drivers to predict hazards and switch attention. By nature the provision of training services is a fluid medium where new ideas and concepts are continually being trialed and where appropriate incorporated in the training program but commercial post-licence driver training providers cannot alter the content and delivery of training courses overnight and must always consider the market expectations of the paying customer.

Young drivers pose unique problems for the delivery of suitable post-licence driver training programs. The young driver's perceptions and desires from post-licence driver training often are vastly different to the best-practice methods. Young drivers tend to possess an inflated sense of their own driving ability due to a lack of understand of the real components of driving prowess. Young drivers (and human beings in general) develop an understanding about safety margins and risk by exploratory learning. This exploratory learning often happens in an uncontrolled environment (on public roads) when facilities exist to allow young novice drivers the opportunity to experience the parameters and limitations of the driving task in relative safety. The key focus of young novice driver training in this environment must be not to enhance car control techniques or build a perception of a greater safety margin though increased driving skill.

Whilst we may have learnt what doesn't work through past failures, post-licence driver training providers may already be making a difference to tomorrows road users, today.

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