

INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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21 November 2007

Mr Geoff Corrigan MP
Chairman
Parliament of New South Wales
Staysafe Committee
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Mr Corrigan

YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION INQUIRY

I refer to the Staysafe Committee's inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs.

Greater Hume Shire Council, Lockhart Shire Council and Urana Shire Council's Road Safety Officer Miss Heidi Clark convened a very successful program for Learner drivers and their parents or supervising drivers in late 2005. The program was so well received that it is considered that the Staysafe Committee should consider developing the program further.

The program was called the Young Driver Development Program and was held over the weekend of 29/30 October 2005. It was delivered by Murcotts Driving Excellence School of Melbourne and conducted at the Henty Machinery Field Days Site. The site is located in Greater Hume Shire and incorporates unused sealed roads and an area which can be used as a classroom.

The Young Driver Development Program was designed by Murcotts Driving Excellence in response to parents' concerns that young pre-licence driver's ability to read traffic situations and remain safe on the roads was limited. The program involved both theory and practical exercises.

Learner drivers and their parents/supervisor drivers residing in 3 Shires were invited to participate.

Due to the interest in the program, the group was split with each group receiving a full day of training. The prime objectives were hazard perception, speed versus distance, vehicle awareness and practical advice to parents and supervisors on how to provide effective driving practice. The program was pro-active and involved theory and practical driving sessions

The fee for Murcotts to conduct the training was \$220 per (parent and driver) and the Councils were fortunate enough to obtain sponsorship from NRMA Motoring and Services which covered participants' attendance fees and advertising of the program.

Manager of NRMA's Safer Driving Programs, Alan Finlay, attended the program on both days to evaluate it and see the training first-hand. His report on the program is attached.

The difference in this program was the involvement of both the learner driver and the parent or supervisor in the same program. Currently the parent or supervisor is required to ensure the learner driver completes a prerequisite amount of driving. However parents and supervisors do not normally receive any formal assistance or training to help the learner driver. This program allowed the parent or supervisor to both improve their own skill and to recognise the issues and difficulties facing learner drivers. In particular it allowed the parent or supervisor to develop skills to assist the learner driver.

It appears that the learner drivers appreciated the commitment of their parents and supervisors in developing skills to assist the learner driver. The participants who attended said it was a worthwhile experience and were very appreciative to be able to attend training of its high calibre in a rural area.

The program from the Councils' point of view was very successful and it received a lot of positive feedback from participants. This was expressed in evaluation forms and also in thank you letters to the three Councils from the participants.

Council considers that this was very successful program and that it is recommended for further development as a way of improving the combined skills of learner drivers and their parents and supervisors. Overall road safety among learner drivers should be improved as a result of this program.

I hope this submission is helpful for your inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs. For any further enquiries please contact me at the Urana Shire Council office.

Yours faithfully,



Leigh Ashford
Group Manager-Engineering Services
On Behalf Of The General Manager.

Murcotts Young Driver Development Program

Henty, NSW, 29 and 30 October 2005

Purpose

The purpose of this note is to report on the effectiveness of a Young Driver Development Program (YDDP) conducted by Murcotts Driving Excellence (Murcotts) at the Henty Field Days showground on the weekend of 29 and 30 October 2005, and sponsored by NRMA Motoring and Services (NRMA).

Background

Murcotts offer the YDDP to Learner drivers and their supervising driver (typically a parent) as a one-day course that combines classroom discussion and simple, practical driving exercises. On this occasion, Murcotts were engaged to deliver the program at Henty by Ms Heidi Clarke, Road Safety Officer (RSO) for the three shire councils of Greater Hume, Lockhart and Urana. Heidi approached NRMA for sponsorship of the program, and this was agreed. I agreed to attend for the two days as an observer and evaluator, using some questions that Anne had prepared.

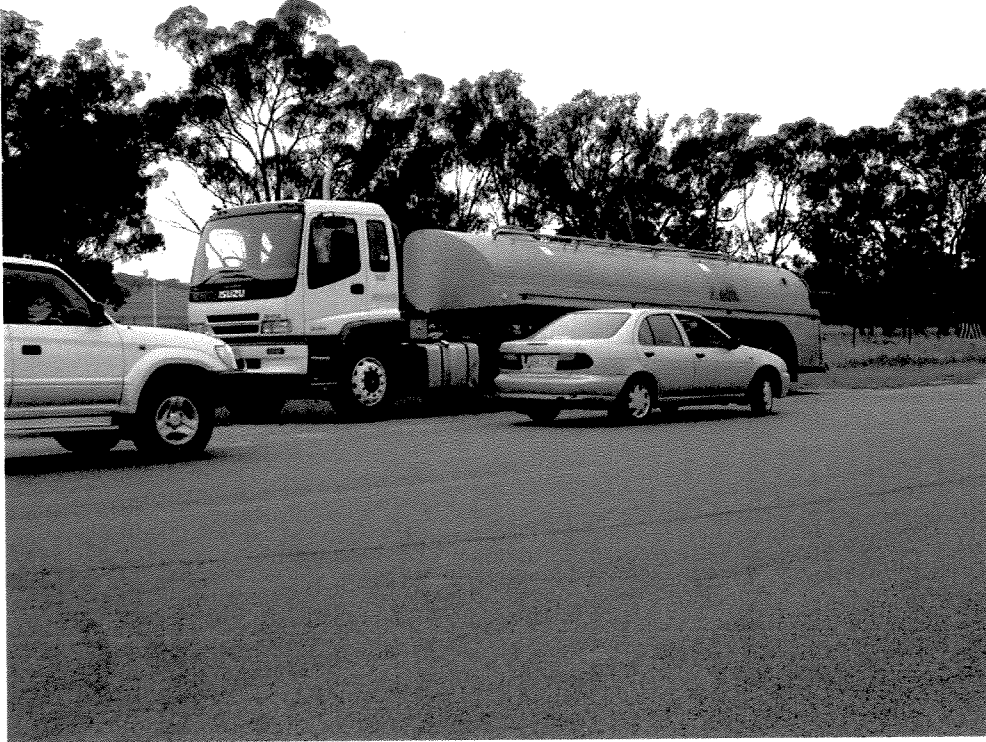
The venue was the showground used for the Henty Field Days – a very large annual regional exhibition of agricultural equipment. The YDDP was able to use one of the sheds as a classroom, and one of the site's internal, sealed access roads as the driving 'track'. These facilities, along with power, water and toilets are all that are required by Murcotts, who brought all of their training resources (laptop, data projector, workbooks, traffic cones, etc). Heidi arranged seating, screen, tea, coffee, etc. Participants were asked to bring their own picnic lunch. To minimise tyre wear and enable exercises to be completed at low speeds, a council water truck was arranged by Heidi to wet down the braking exercise area.



Cream shed at left of photo was the classroom



Interior of classroom



Council water truck at edge of 'track'

On Saturday 29 October there was a total of 26 participants, while on Sunday 30th there were 37 participants. Murcotts provided three experienced trainers – two from Victoria and one from NSW.

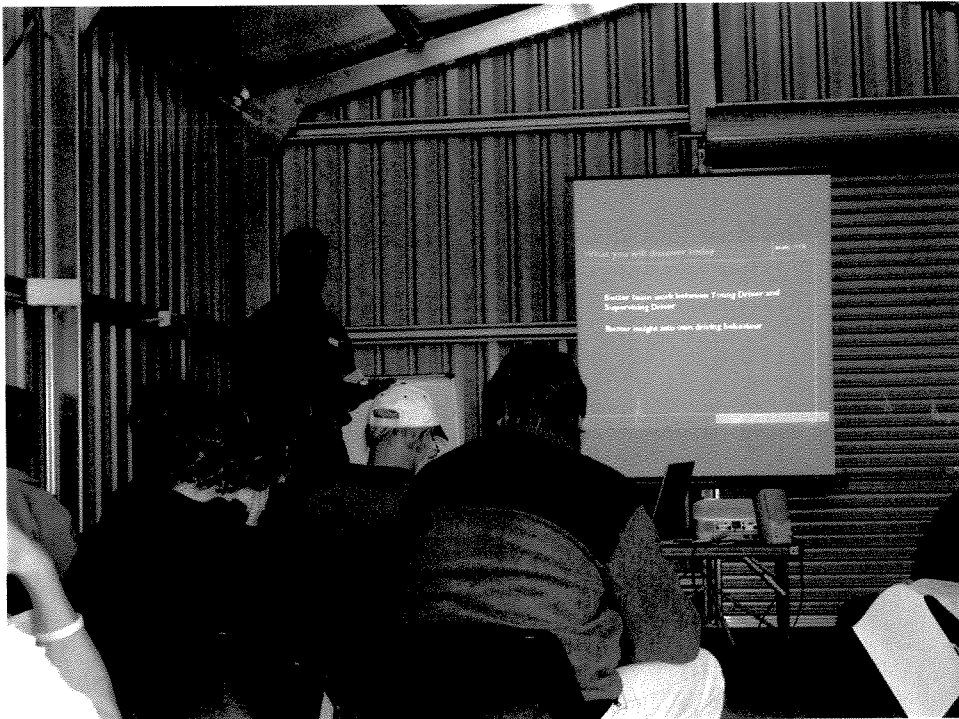
YDDP Format

On a typical Murcotts YDDP, the classroom discussion and practical sessions are alternated, so there is a balance between time spent indoors and time spent driving or observing. All learners must have at least 20 hours log book experience so that they can demonstrate basic car controls skills (starting, accelerating, braking, and steering). For the Henty programs, Heidi had asked that less experienced learners also be able to participate, but these were limited to the classroom sessions (no driving). Accordingly, all of the 'theory' sessions were delivered in the morning, and all of the practical sessions were delivered in the afternoon. The less experienced learners (or yet to be learners) were permitted to observe the afternoon activities if they wished.

In summary, the format for each day was:

Classroom AM

- Introductions by RSO
- Short address by local Police Highway Patrol officer (Saturday only)
- Powerpoint presentation and discussion by Murcotts senior trainer, punctuated by two short breaks. Using workbooks, this session covered risks, hazard identification, young driver characteristics, transition from Ls to Ps.



Morning classroom session with Murcotts senior trainer, John Ristell

Track PM

- Emergency braking from 60 km/h, then 50 km/h (supervising drivers first, then learner drivers)
- Discussion about the importance of perception and reaction times/distances
- Discussion about ABS vs non-ABS braking performance and techniques
- Seating position and steering techniques
- Slow speed (30 km/h) slalom to demonstrate steering and vision techniques



Emergency braking exercise – note distances on traffic cones



Discussion about stopping and braking distances



Demonstration of correct seating position and steering technique



Steering and vision exercise using slalom

Classroom PM

- Split into two groups – Learners in one; supervising drivers in the other
- Working groups to discuss why young drivers take risks and what are the strategies to minimise these
- Report back from each group and discussion
- Presentation of handbook and certificate of course completion to each participant



Learner drivers discussion group

Materials handed out by Murcotts

- Workbook for participants to make notes and record follow up actions
- Handbook with safer driving tips and hints

Feedback from participants

Using the prompting questions prepared by Anne Morphett, I used the breaks between sessions and the observation times during the practical exercises to seek informal feedback from both learners and their supervising drivers. In no particular order, the following points were made:

Learners

- Looks to school for road safety material, or occasionally via Google
- Expected lots about road rules – pleasantly surprised about new information (for example the importance of wearing seat belts correctly)
- New things learnt: looking ahead in the traffic stream; staying back from the vehicle in front
- Sources of information: parents; RTA Road User Handbook; RTA web site (most appeared to use this extensively and they particularly liked the ability to sample the tests); L driving instructor in Wagga Wagga
- Not hard to achieve log book hours in a rural environment – for many, the return trip to town would exceed 1 hour
- Would like more of the Murcotts sort of information in the Road User Handbook or on the RTA web site or in other printed materials
- Despite many being internet savvy, there was also a strong preference for printed materials that they could read over and over, and make notes thereon
- Aware of young driver risks and the factors behind risk taking behaviours
- Also aware of limited rural transport options – prepared to plan ahead (eg take swag to party)

Supervising drivers

- Pleased with emphasis on correct following distance and on pro-active driving skills ('look up and stay back')
- Good that 3rd person (rather than family) is giving the message (several remarked on this)
- Lost of push back on increasing the cost of getting a red P licence (eg through mandatory professional instruction), but little resistance to extra log book hours – seen as easy to achieve
- Very supportive of extra training, as opposed to longer test
- One parent said he had not learnt anything new because he was a driving instructor in the Army
- RTA web site is great source of information
- Loves this course – great information provided in a user friendly manner
- New things learnt: stopping distances; commentary drive technique; ABS and other modern safety features
- Driving for others (setting a good example) very important
- Liked the idea of shared learning between L driver and supervising driver
- Liked the explanations behind the theory components of the program, ie why it is important to do things this way

NRMA exposure and recognition

- I took with me one of our NRMA Safer Driving roll up banners and made sure this was prominently displayed
- Anne Morphett had arranged for Fact Sheets, *SHIFT* CD ROM and *Getting There* booklets to be available, for participants to take a copy
- Both Heidi Clarke and Murcotts chief trainer emphasised NRMA sponsorship of the program
- There were spontaneous applause and votes of thanks for NRMA at the end of both days

Potential improvements

Don't include learners with less than 20 hours, or else demand that they spend the whole day at the program, thus enabling Murcotts usual format to be used (mixing up classroom and practical). Having the classroom components all in one long session is too much – young people (and some old!) became fidgety and participation rate tended to decrease.

Murcotts professionalism is beyond reproach. There was no evidence of gender or cultural issues in the way the Murcotts trainers communicated or interacted with the learner drivers or parents.

Alan Finlay

Manager, Safer Driving Programs

10 November 2005