



ACCOMPANYING LEARNER DRIVERS

Here at Freeway, we believe in practice makes perfect. It is certainly true that learners who practice regularly in their own cars take fewer lessons and develop their road sense and awareness much more quickly than learners who drive in lessons only.

Any driver of a driving school car is covered by that cars insurance and therefore legally entitled to drive on the road. But learners wishing to drive outside of a driving lesson must be insured to drive the car they are in, display clear L plates, both front and back, hold a valid provisional licence and be accompanied by a full licence holder who has held their UK driving licence for at least 3 years and be over 21 years of age.

The accompanying driver is responsible for any driving offences caused by the learner whether knowingly or not, including ensuring the Learner adheres to the above.

Therefore the accompanying driver needs to be aware of the actions of others around (an additional rear view mirror will help with this) as well as that of the Learner and able to effectively communicate what the Learner should do to remain safe and legal on the road.

Having found a suitable candidate for an accompanying driver, the Learner now needs to obtain insurance for the car they wish to drive. However, most insurance companies are not very accommodating to Learner drivers being included on policies and individual policies come at an extremely high premium.

An alternative is to use monthly or weekly learner driver insurance, which provides basic cover to the named Learner driver irrespective of the car they are driving (as long as that is insured elsewhere.)

This is a relatively new concept and you may have to hunt around but one insurance company that does offer this is www.collingwoodinsurance.co.uk.

A stipulation is that the Learner is having lessons from an Approved Driving Instructor to supplement their practice and will ask for an approval code from the relevant instructor. Freeway can help with this.

Ideally, the best way of learning to drive is to begin instruction in the Instructors car and practice between lessons, what was learnt on the lesson.

Beginners' early lessons are spent in quiet roads where it is easy to avoid other traffic, and early practice should mirror this. Objectives at this stage are simply to learn the controls of the car, moving off and stopping on the left and right. Moving off from behind parked cars, on a slope and in and out of side roads. Some reversing is also useful. Speeding up (within suitable limits), slowing down and changing gears are all skills that will improve with practice and much time should be allowed for this. Learners should not venture out into traffic or start complex manoeuvres until the instructor has covered this, so tempting as it may be to drive home, this is best left to the Accompanying Driver. (Don't forget to remove the L plates.) It's worth noting here that the exercises

the Learner is practising, though seeming easy for the Accompanying Driver will be tiring for the Learner. Practice should end before the Learner gets too tired to concentrate as mistakes will then start, and confidence lost.

Once the Learner can manage the controls of the car, the instructor will then introduce the Learner to driving in traffic, starting on easily negotiated roads and junctions and gradually building up to more complex ones. Routes are preplanned to fit in with the lesson subject that needs to be taught and where possible to avoid complex junctions that the Learner is not yet ready for.

Instructors have a great deal of practice (and are tested very rigorously) in being able to talk a Learner through a complex traffic situation and of course have a fail safe option of using dual controls or taking the steering if necessary.

Accompanying Drivers don't usually have this advantage and control although they are still responsible so routes for private practice should be carefully planned and consideration also given to where it is suitable to stop and change over if the Learner is not driving from the start.

The Instructor should first cover local complex junctions that can't be avoided for practice to take place but a great benefit would be for the Accompanying Driver to sit in on the lesson to appreciate how the instructor gets the Learner to negotiate the junction. It is often very different to how the Driver may approach it himself and reasons for this can be discussed at the time with the instructor to avoid confusing the Learner.

There may well be other areas that are "different to how we were taught" that come up on the lesson and many drivers find it useful to have a drive with the instructor without the Learner to discuss these differences. One that comes up time and again is the matter of not changing down through the gears on braking, but rather to select the appropriate gear for the new speed that braking has created. Another is that 5th gear is not saved for motorways!

If insurance cannot be obtained practice can still take place effectively by Learners watching the actions and behaviours of their Drivers. However, bad habits can be learnt as easily as good ones, so Drivers of Learners should be especially mindful of their actions and avoid the bad habits that inevitably develop over time.

The most popular offence and reason for loss of new licences is speeding. Many of my learners inadvertently start to speed simply because they feel they need to keep up with traffic or will upset people behind by keeping to the limit. When questioned they admit their parents drive much faster. But they often don't consider reasons for reducing speed – narrower roads, more parked cars, schools, concealed side roads etc. Pointing out the dangers as you drive is a great education to their later driving experience.

By continuing to work together both the instructor and the Accompanying Driver are invaluable to assisting the Learner to develop and eventually pass their test, so money spent on both instructor time and insurance should be considered an investment in this education.