



## **RAC response to the DfT consultation on allowing learner drivers to take lessons on motorways**

**This response has been written by Nicholas Lyes, RAC Public Affairs Manager, on behalf of RAC Motoring Services**

### **About the RAC**

With more than eight million members, the RAC is the oldest and one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. As such, it is committed to making driving easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for all road users.

The RAC, which employs more than 1,500 patrols, provides roadside assistance across the entire UK road network and as a result has significant insight into how the country's road networks are managed and maintained.

The RAC is separate from the RAC Foundation which is a transport policy and research organisation which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users.

The RAC website can be found at [www.rac.co.uk](http://www.rac.co.uk).

In September 2016, the RAC published its latest [Report on Motoring](#).

### **RAC Response**

#### **1 Do you think that learner drivers should be allowed to take lessons on motorways, subject to certain safeguards?**

The RAC supports proposals to allow learner drivers to take lessons on motorways under the supervision of an ADI in a dual-controlled car. According to an RAC panel survey of 2109 motorists conducted in January 2017, 79% of motorists back these measures.

Statistically, motorways are the UK's safest roads, however there are also significant risks that exist on motorways by virtue of the fact that motorists are in a high-speed environment. Such high speeds can make a driver who has recently passed their practical test feel nervous and more vulnerable the first time they venture onto these types of roads. The RAC's survey shows 58% of motorists recalled either feeling very nervous or somewhat nervous prior to joining the motorway network for the first time. As a result, new drivers may decide to delay using a motorway, possibly opting to use less safe country roads or major a-roads. In the same survey, 49% of respondents did not believe the current system adequately prepared them for motorway driving.

#### **2 Do you think that lessons on motorways should be optional for learner drivers?**

The RAC supports the option of motorway driving being made available. The biggest problem the DfT would encounter by making such a measure mandatory is that many learner drivers do not live in an area which has access to the motorway network. However, those drivers that live in regions furthest away from a motorway are less likely to drive on motorways on a regular basis.

According to a survey conducted by the RAC, 78% believe that allowing motorists to have lessons on a motorway should help improve driving standards of new drivers using the motorway network.

**3 Do you think that motorway lessons for learner drivers should only be provided by a fully qualified Approved Driving Instructor?**

Yes. Even though statistically motorways are our safest roads, we believe that given the unique sets of risks that exist on motorways, namely the presence of hard shoulders, Emergency Refuge Areas, multiple lanes and the high speed nature of motorways, it is appropriate that only ADIs are allowed to take learner drivers for lessons on these roads.

An ADI will also be best place to judge whether or not the learner driver has the required competency to drive safely on a motorway without putting themselves or other road users at serious risk.

**4 Do you agree that trainee driving instructors, (Potential Driving Instructors), should not be allowed to provide learner driver motorway lessons?**

The RAC agrees with this. We believe that only a fully qualified ADI will have the experience to assess whether a learner driver is competent to drive on a motorway. Please refer to our answer to question 3 for reasons.

**5 If you are an ADI, do you feel that the current training and testing system provides sufficient grounding for you to provide pre-test motorway lessons? If not, where should it be strengthened?**

The RAC is not in a position to answer this question as we are no longer directly engaged in delivering driver training.

**6 Are there any specific issues you think should be included in guidance to ADIs?**

The RAC is not well placed to answer this question and encourages the Government to liaise directly with ADIs or representative organisations for their views. However, we believe that guidance will be required regarding assessment of a learner to determine whether they are sufficiently competent to drive on a motorway under supervision.

**7 Do you agree that ADIs should exercise their discretion in providing a motorway lesson to a learner driver with whom they have had no previous contact?**

Ultimately, the ADI will be the most appropriate person to understand whether or not a learner driver should have lessons on a motorway. The RAC agrees that should the ADI deem the driver not to be at a suitable level of competence, then they should have a right to refuse. We believe that it would be reasonable to expect an ADI to have driven with a learner for at least one lesson on local roads to assess the learner's competence before the instructor takes the learner onto a motorway. This should form part of the guidance to ADIs referred to in Q6.

**8 Do you agree that learner driver motorway lessons must only take place in a car where the accompanying ADI has a dual control brake (and clutch in manual vehicles)?**

The RAC believes this is a sensible approach. As mentioned in the consultation, most ADIs have dual-controlled vehicles.

**9 If people learning to drive in specially adapted vehicles wish to take motorway lessons, should those vehicles be fitted with dual controls? If yes, should this be advisory or mandatory?**

The area of specially adapted vehicles requires sympathetic consideration because it is probably not reasonable to ask the owner of a specially adapted vehicle to incur the cost of conversion to dual controls in order to take a lesson on a motorway. There would seem to be two possible options. Either a learner on a specially adapted vehicle without dual controls should be prohibited from driving on a motorway before they have passed their test or ADIs should be required to apply more demanding standards when assessing whether someone in a specially adapted vehicle should be allowed to take a lesson on a motorway. The DfT may wish to consult with ADI representatives and possibly with organisations such as Motability to decide which option is most appropriate.

**10 Do you agree that motorway lessons for learner drivers who are provisional licence holders should only be permitted in motor cars?**

The RAC agrees with this.

**11 Do you agree that there is an increased risk using a top box on a motorway lesson and they should therefore be removed?**

The RAC is not in a position to comment specifically on the safety of top boxes; however if there are concerns with their safety at high speeds, then we would encourage the Government to err on the side of caution. If the Government decides to prohibit top boxes on motorways, it is vital that ADIs are made aware of this.

**12 Do you have any comments on the potential impact of the proposal to allow learner drivers to take lessons on motorways? If yes, please specify who you consider will be affected and provide examples of any costs where applicable.**



At present, there is nothing to stop newly qualified drivers from taking lessons on a motorway with an ADI once they have passed their practical test. However, relatively few choose to do so, presumably because a newly qualified driver will incur the associated cost at a time when they are likely to be financially stretched by buying, taxing and insuring their first car. It seems more likely that a motorway lesson would be seen as affordable before a learner passes their test, though we cannot support this view with evidence.

Whilst the immediate impact will be felt by learner drivers who are taking lessons on motorways, ultimately, all road users are likely to benefit from these changes. Motorways are statistically our safest roads and it is therefore it is in the interests of road safety that newly qualified drivers should have the confidence to use motorways rather than alternative routes which may involve travelling on more dangerous A-roads and rural roads.

Please address any comments or further contact to:

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