

Novice Driver Licensing in Victoria, Australia

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Introduction

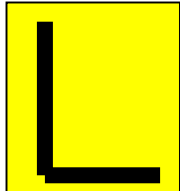

General

Australia is about the same size as the contiguous states of the United States. This area is divided into 6 states and 2 territories. Australian states are considerably more autonomous than Canadian provinces and wield more power than US States, if only because of their relatively large size and economic clout within the Australian economy. Each state is responsible for its own road law and driver licensing.

Whilst several attempts have been made over the past half-century to organise national uniform law, it is only in the last 5 years that a process aimed at providing national uniform road and licensing law has been put in place. It is anticipated that national uniform law will begin to be adopted by states and territories at around the end of 1999.

Of all the Australian states and territories, Victoria has the most demanding novice driver requirements. The Victorian requirements are laid out in Table 1.

**Table 1
Driver Licensing Structure in Victoria**

Age	Licence Type	Requirements	Requirements in Other States and Territories
16	Learner Permit 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 To be accompanied by experienced driver (full 2 Must not tow caravan or trailer 3 General Speed Limits apply 4 5 Must pass knowledge Test of Road Law 6 Zero Blood Alcohol 	<p>Common requirement</p> <p>Common requirement Some States impose lower limits</p> <p>Common Requirement</p> <p>Common Requirement</p>
18	Probationary Licence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Must display 'P' plates for 3 years 8 Must have Zero Blood alcohol for 3 years 9 Must not drive vehicle with power exceeding 125 Kilowatts / tonne or engine capacity exceeding 3.5 litres/tonne 10 Minimum 6 month disqualification and addition to probationary period equivalent to period of disqualification. 11 Passenger Restriction for 1 year after licence suspended or cancelled for specified offence 12 Must pass knowledge test of road law and road craft 13 Must Pass Hazard Perception Test 	<p>Common 1 year from 17</p> <p>Common requirement Victoria Only</p> <p>Victoria Only, though some states have greater demerit point penalties Victoria Only</p> <p>Some States Only Victoria only; NSW has commissioned pilot</p>
21	Full Licence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Automatic upgrade after 3 years on Probation 	1 Year, most states

A change towards national uniform driver licensing regulation in Australia would most likely involve Victoria in reducing its minimum solo licence age to 17 years. This would inevitably lead to an increased number of fatalities and serious injuries amongst 1st year drivers unless some intervention occurs. As, amongst novice drivers, age appears to be inversely related to casualty crash involvement, quite independently of experience. Expressed in another way, the age-experience interaction effect is not sufficient amongst the age groups

involved to compensate for the increased casualty crash involvement.

There will be a need to consider changes to the driver licensing structure so that the anticipated increase resulting from a 17 year old solo driver licensing age can be minimised. The approach adopted to achieve this will be determined by Government. Possible solutions include a night-time curfew, a passenger restriction and an automatic licence suspension if the driver incurs a small number of demerit points in any one year period. The Hazard Perception Test could reasonably be shifted from its current position as a test for new solo drivers at probationary Licence status (see Table 1). It could be used as a “hurdle” that 17 year old licence holders need to jump in order to progress to the removal of passenger and night driving restrictions.

Hazard Perception

Initial development of the Hazard Perception Test was authorised as one of a number of issues which might stem and apparent increase in road casualties amongst novice drivers in 1989.

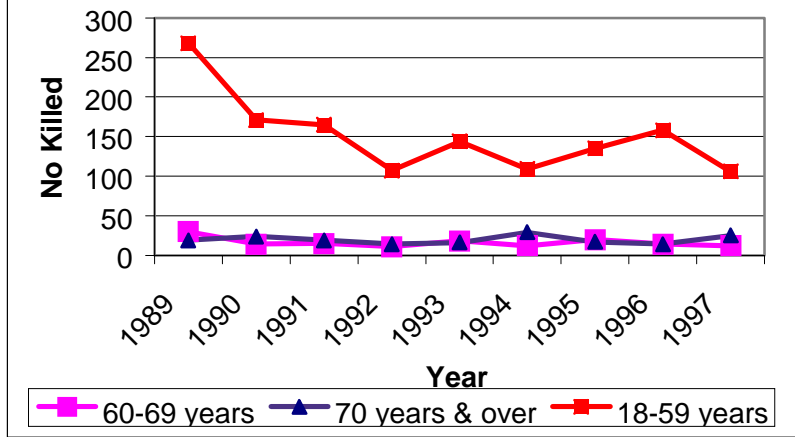
The particular approach taken in initial development work followed from a number of studies, most notably that of Wendy Macdonald for the Federal Office of Road Safety¹ which found that both on-road driving tests and tests of road law were not capable of predicting future crash involvement. She advocated work on 2nd order tests, evaluating components of the cognitive domain associated with driver behaviour.

A factor possibly mitigating against further attempts to develop on-road driving tests at that time was the vast array of sub-skills identified by McKnight et al² as being components of the broader skill of safe driving. He identified some 1500 component sub-skills of driving. It was considered that an on-road test that attempted to canvass such a broad range of sub-skills would be time-consuming to administer and very demanding on skill levels of driver licence testing officers.

A major factor to be considered in driver training generally is that short term training usually has short term effects. A 17 year old has experienced some 99, 280 waking hours in his or her life. If the 17 year old lives in a developed country, then perhaps 6, 205 hours have been spent observing the driving of others from the passenger seat. Of all his or her waking hours, perhaps 6% has been spent observing the behaviour of other drivers. The type of driving observed is completely uncontrolled as to quality. A slow learner might require 20 1-hour lessons in order to obtain the necessary car control skills to drive a car. This represents only 0.02015% of his or her waking hours. In these circumstances it is improbable that the formal driver training will have an effect that lasts beyond the first blush of solo driving.

From an overall perception, it would seem that after a minimum amount of experience, novice drivers have little problem with motor control aspects of driving but have longer term problems with driving-related aggression³, inappropriate confidence in their own ability⁴, higher risk-taking behaviour and hazard perception.⁵ It is improbable that in traditional in-car training is likely to contribute significantly to these aspects of novice driving behaviour. Certainly a stress on car-control skills in driver training may encourage a driving in a manner which approaches the mechanical limits of the vehicle, leaving less of a safety margin if an emergency occurs.

1989-1997



¹ Macdonald, W (1987), Driving Performance Measures & Licence Tests: A Literature Review, Report CR57, VicRoads, Melbourne

² McKnight, AJ & Adams, B (1970), Driver Education task Analysis Vol 1 Task Descriptions, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Washington DC

³ Lewis, C (1981), Adolescent Traffic Casualties: Causes & Interventions, Report: University of California (San Francisco)

⁴ Matthews, ML & Morgan, AR (1986), Age Differences in Male Drivers' Perceptions of Accident Risk: The Role of Perceived Driving Ability, Accident Analysis & prevention, 18:4

⁵ Bragg, BWE & Finn, P (1986), Perception of the Risk of an Accident by Young & Older Drivers, Accident Analysis and Prevention 18