

Podcast 18 - A Licence to Drive - Learning to Drive in Australia

by Rob McCormack - Friday, July 05, 2013

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Podcast Number 18 – A Licence to Drive – Learning to Drive in Australia

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Hi,

Australians love their cars. We have a large country, long distances and very long roads. That means that almost everyone has a driver's license. In fact, it's rare to find someone who doesn't have one. I got mine when I was 17 years old, way back in 1969. Back then, it was much easier to get a driver's licence. Nowadays, it's much harder and that's a good thing. There are many more cars on the road now and all our drivers need to be highly skilled. In fact, the number of people killed in road accidents (called the road toll) has dropped steadily in Victoria since 1970, when it was at its peak of 1061. In 2012, Victoria's road toll had dropped to 282. That's the lowest since we started recording these numbers. Improving our driver training has played an important role in that reduction. In this podcast, I will give you a summary of how you get a driver's licence in my state of Victoria. For more detailed information, you should visit www.vicroads.vic.gov.au or www.keys2drive.com.au.

In Victoria we have a graduated licensing system. This means there are 4 types of licences and new drivers move from one type to the next as they develop more driving skills. For young drivers under 21 years of age, there is an extra step, as these drivers have the most risk of crashing when they first start driving. The graduated licensing system is helping to reduce this.

The first licence is a Learners' Permit. The second is called a Probationary 1 Licence. This licence is only for new drivers under 21 years of age. The third is called a Probationary 2 Licence. The final licence is called a Full Licence.

You can get a Learner's Permit from the age of 16 years. To do that, you must read, study and understand a book called 'The Road to Solo Driving'. This book has all the information and rules that a driver needs to know in order to get a Learner's Permit. First, you must complete a computer test at an office of VicRoads.



VicRoads is the government department which administers drivers' licences in Victoria. You must first book an appointment at VicRoads and then you must take a computer based test. In the test (which is available in 20 languages), you must answer 32 questions about the road rules and about road safety. In order to pass the test, you must get at least 25 questions correct. That's 78% correct. If you pass, just pay the Learner's Permit fee and, congratulations, now you are a learner driver! The Learner's Permit lasts for up to 10 years. But I don't think there are many people that would take that long. I hope not anyway.

The Learners' Permit allows you to drive a car only under the supervision of another qualified driver. They are called the Supervisory Driver. They must have a Full Licence. The job of the Supervisory Driver is to teach you how to drive safely and how to drive according to the road rules. When our two sons were learning to drive, my wife and I were the Supervisory Drivers, although our sons both had around 5 driving lessons with a professional driving instructor. I think that's a good idea, especially before they take their Probationary Licence driving test.

There are some restrictions for drivers with Learners Permits.

1. Obviously, they must always drive with a qualified Supervisory Driver in the car.
2. They must show yellow L Plates on the front and back of the car.
3. They must have NO alcohol in their blood. That means no drinking alcoholic drinks before you go driving.
4. They must not use a mobile phone, not even if it is a hands-free phone.
5. They must not tow a caravan or a trailer, and

6. They must always carry their Learner's Permit licence card with them.



But that's not all. If they are under 21 years of age, they are also required to practise their driving for at least 120 hours before they can take the Probationary Licence driving test. Included in the 120 hours there must also be 10 hours of night driving. They must also prove they have done the 120 hours driving by completing an official Learner Log Book. Each time they drive, they must write down in the log book when they drove, for how long, for how far, in what conditions and who was the Supervisory Driver. For example, they must show that they have driven in light traffic, in heavy traffic, in the dry, in the wet, on Freeways, on country roads, on gravel roads, during the day, at night and at dusk. Wow, that is a lot of driving. But it helps make sure that each new driver receives a lot more driver training than when I was a young man. And that means fewer accidents and fewer road deaths and injuries. A Learner Log Book is not required if you are over 21 when you learn to drive.

New drivers under 21 years of age must practice with their Learners Permit for at least 12 months. Those who are 21 to 25 years of age must practice for at least 6 months, and those over 25 years of age must practice for at least 3 months. Note however that you can only take the Probationary Licence test once you turn 18 years of age. So some 16 year old learner drivers will get 2 years of practice with a driving supervisor. I think that's a good thing. Practice makes perfect.

When they are finally ready to take their Probationary Licence test, there are two tests to take.



The first is a Hazard Perception Test. This is a video test and shows how safely you respond to traffic situations. If you pass that test, then you take the Probationary Licence Drive Test. This is the big one. This is a practical test taken with an examiner in the car. You drive for 30 minutes in many traffic conditions, both quiet and busy. You must show that you can control the car, can obey all the road rules, can cooperate with the other drivers on the road and show that you can drive safely. If you pass that test, then well done, you are now a Probationary Driver. Time to celebrate. If you are under 21 years of age, then your licence is called a Probationary 1 Licence. This lasts for 1 year. During this time, you must wear red P plates on the front and back of your car.



This lets other drivers know that you are a young, new driver. These drivers have the highest rate of accidents and so there are special conditions which apply, including:

1. You must not use a mobile phone, not even if it is a hands-free
2. You must not have any alcohol in your blood. Like the Learners Permit, no drinking.
3. You can carry only one other person who is aged between 16 and 22 years of age in the car. This rule applies because, in the past, we have had crashes where many young people under 22 years of age have all died in one car. That's a terrible thing that this law will help prevent.

Once they have successfully driven for 1 year, then the new driver automatically receives his Probationary 2 Licence, which lasts for 3 years. Now they can change their red P plates for green P plates.



They can now use hands-free mobile phones, but they must still not have any alcohol in their blood. Note that new drivers who are over 21 years of age go straight to the Probationary 2 Licence once they pass their drive test.

After 3 years of successful and safe driving with a Probationary 2 Licence, the new driver will automatically receive their full drivers licence. Now they should be an experienced and safe driver. I hope our road toll continues to drop. In my opinion, our graduated licensing system is a great system.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it by clicking the comments link at the top of this story. You can leave your comment in English or in any language and I will translate it. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my slowenglish podcast. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Vocabulary

accidents = something that is not planned, usually something bad

according = when you follow something

administers = to control

alcohol = in beer and wine, it affects your brain. It can make you drunk

applies = when you must follow what you are told

appointment = when you make a time to see someone

automatically = when something happens by itself. You don't need to ask, it just happens.

blood = the liquid in our bodies. It is red

caravan = a place where you can sleep that is pulled behind a car

computer based test = a test done on a computer

conditions = the things which can change

congratulations = when you tell someone they have done something very good

cooperate = when you help someone else or work together with them

correct = when something is right

country = the areas away from the city

crashing = when two cars hit one another

died = when someone is no longer living

distance = how far from one place to another place

dusk = just before the sun goes down

experienced = when someone has done something for a long time.

extra = when there is one more

graduated = when something increases in steps

gravel = made from loose rock.

hands-free phone = a mobile phone which you can use without your hands

hazard = something which might be dangerous

highly skilled = when someone is very good at doing something

improving = when something is getting better

injuries = when people get hurt, usually in an accident

killed = when someone has their life taken

nowadays = in our time, now

peak = when something is at its highest

perception = when you see or hear something

perfect = when something has no errors or mistakes

practise = when you do something many times in order to get better

professional driving instructor = someone who is paid to teach learner drivers

qualified = when someone has been trained and knows what to do

rare = when something is hardly ever seen

recording = to write something down

reduction = when something goes down or gets smaller

respond = when something makes you do something else

restrictions = things which you are not allowed to do

risk = when something may happen, but it is not known if it will happen

rules = these tell you what you can and what you can't do

steadily = when something is changing over a long time

successful = when someone has done something correctly.

supervision = when someone watches you to make sure you do it correctly

terrible = when something is very, very bad

trailer = is pulled behind a car and used to carry things

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