



ROAD SECURITY EDUCATIVE CONTINUUM

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# Road user training in France

## Driver training in France

The evolution of driver training in France is the fruit of measures which have been taken for thirty years.

Whereas obtaining the driving licence used to constitute the sole determining step in a citizen's life which nothing would disturb, apart from a cancellation, the current trend aims at highlighting the privilege aspect of this authorization and leads to set up a series of measures calling for knowledge, behaviour patterns as well as driving abilities, so that one can keep one's privilege statute as a vehicle user.

One must bear in mind that these training actions are based on a postulate. Indeed, for several decades, various countries have introduced different training programmes to counter the dramatic problem of accidents. However, no serious study has significantly validated any. A training programme cannot be only validated according to the sole accident criterion. That is why any training action and particularly **progressive access to motorization** must be approved unanimously although they are neither demonstrated nor obvious.

The innovative spirit of these current measures is to underline the progressive aspect of this access throughout several compulsory steps. Indeed, young people must be taught how to behave as pedestrians, motorcyclists and car drivers, that is to say how to behave at a different age and according to different moving modes.

Today foreshadows what will become reality as early as 2004 and the following years. The whole plan of action emphasizes a continuum which starts in the first school years and which is materialized in teenage years up to senior citizens.

### **Today: Several complementary steps**

Driving a motorized vehicle comes under road education the goal of which is to offer a set of means allowing progressive adaptation to road traffic. Indeed, the young driver must become aware that her/his behaviour determines others', which necessarily takes some time.

Each teenager presents a variable maturation depending on the education and the values he/she was given, depending on enhanced or rejected parental models etc. These elements influence and condition the relation of the teenager to his/her vehicle beyond the apprenticeship : symbolic, imaginary or realistic relation. What does driving represent to the driver ? Entering the adult world, contributing to the self image constitution, facing the other in the traffic or using a simple moving tool ? It is difficult to standardize behaviour since substrata are various and complex reflecting the teenager image. Training can solve part of the problem but cannot be considered as a universal remedy !

## Prior to the driving licence

### From childhood onwards: driving premisses

Road education at school has led to a **Road Primary Education Certificate** in October 2002 (RPEC). It consists in a knowledge and behaviour assessment of the pupils as pedestrians, passengers and bike riders.

**The Road Security School Certificate, level 1** (RSSC 1), implemented in 1993, is made of a theoretical training under the form of a multiple choice question paper which is prepared and validated in secondary schools for second year (5<sup>ème</sup>) pupils usually aged 12. Teachers are in charge of the training (usually history and geography teachers who deal with civics).

**The Road Security Brevet** (RSB), implemented in 1996, is a practical training given by driving schools which is sometimes subsidized by the territorial communities, which otherwise must be paid by families. The young teenager is initiated to two-wheeled vehicle (security organ etc.) as well as to driving for three hours. At 16 years of age, no document is required to drive a motorized bike.

**The Road Security School Certificate, level 2** (RSSC 2), implemented in 1993, is also a theoretical training which is suggested in secondary schools for 4<sup>th</sup> year (3<sup>ème</sup>) pupils usually aged 14. Focussed on the variety of the public highway users and on vehicle driving, it is run and validated by teachers.

## Access to the driving licence:

### Initial training

Quite old numerous studies showed that the accident number, compared to the offence number without accident, keeps falling once one has hold the car driving licence for 8 years. If some of American states granted the driving authorization from 16 years on, this is on one side because the experience proved that this teenage period is particularly favourable to car driving training and on the other side because a progressiveness staggered over a period of time is decisive to the acquisition of positive attitudes towards road risk.

**Anticipated Driver Training** would partly meet the issue of the driving access age and the experience factor.

**Anticipated Driver Training** is the first administrative measure defining an age to get prepared for driving. Thus, from 16 years old onwards (no age limit), a teenager can be admitted in a driving school and start training for the driving licence examination. Then he/she will be accompanied by a co-driver co-driver for two years before taking the driving examination for which the age of 18 is required. Generalized in 1989, **Anticipated Driver Training (ADT)** applies to car or motorized bike driving.

This measure stresses the benefit drawn by young trainees through an experience which makes their insertion among experienced drivers easier and which besides reduces the level of risk they take once they have their driving licence.

Thinking it over, one comes up with the idea of a probationary authorization, that is to say no longer a specific training aimed at passing the examination but the introduction of a progressive training.

The generalization of **Anticipated Driver Training** is linked to a teaching programme providing the trainee with a strict follow-up.

This measure aims at resolving the too high risk taking among young drivers which has been known for several years and which is tackled in numerous studies.

Two stages follow each other within the framework of **Anticipated Driver Training**:

**Stage 1:**

From 16 years of age on, the teenager can register for the ADT in a driving school. A contract is signed between the driving school (the training centre), and the teenager parents. The signature of the contract is subordinated to a previous agreement with the insurance company which extends the guarantee to accompanying driving.

Subjected to the preparation of the general theoretical examination, like the older ones, the teenager will have to pass the test. Meanwhile he/she attends a practical training in a car with a driving instructor : at least 20 hours are required to take the driving licence examination.

**Stage 2:**

The young driver is allowed to drive for two years under the co-driver's responsibility who is at least 28 years old and who has hold the driving licence for more than three years. The co-driver can be one of the legal representatives (parent) or another person. He/she must not have been subjected to serious penal prosecutions. A distinctive sign (sticker or magnet) can be seen at the back of the car driven by a young driver within the context of ADT.

During this stage: two pedagogic sessions are organized in the training centre: one after a 1,000 to 1,500 kilometre driving experience, the second at the end of this stage before taking the driving licence examination. Several teenagers as well as their co-drivers are invited to mention the difficulties they were faced with and to discuss various issues such as alcohol and driving etc.

This measure aims at responding to the too high risks young driver take which have been known for several years and which are corroborated by their implication in road accidents. 24% drivers come within the ADT at the driving licence examination.

**“Traditional” training:**

Given by driving schools, the training is split into two stages. Like for the ADT, a first theoretical stage must be acquired to take the final driving examination.

A minimum of 20 hours of practical driving is legally provided.

A national training programme (NTP) tends to standardize the goals and the training content. The trainee is given a training leaflet thanks to which, in partnership with the driving instructor, he can play a role in his training. Progressive training is organized in four steps and aims at defining the knowledge, the know-how, and how to behave. Its asset is that one can assess one's own progress. These suggestions were presented in Jean Verré's round table report in 1997.

## **Driving licence maintenance**

The obtained driving licence is provided with a 12 point reserve.

In France, the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1989 law, July 1992 decree, provides the driving licence with a twelve point reserve. Each driver offence is then punished with point withdrawal. The targets are to have a driver follow-up and to give him the means to regulate his/her own driving.

The penalty point system offers each driver self-control and evolution means over his/her own behaviour. Before losing all "his/her" points, the driver can attend a programme to gain partly back his/her point reserve so as to acquire a road security culture.

### Step 1:

Two years long, the young driving licence holder affixes a distinctive sign on the back of the vehicle: **the A letter** ("Apprenti" = *Leamer*). Furthermore, **the maximum allowed speed limits are lower** than those allowed to other drivers (they are equivalent to those concerning driving on wet road).

**An Assessment session (AS)**, called post-driving licence appointment has been enforced since 1999. one year after obtaining the licence, a one day training in driving schools, on a free basis, enables one to appraise this first year of driving. The content is currently not subjected to a follow-up. Possibly chargeable to insurance companies, the post-licence day is not much spread yet.

Since 2000, **if an offence has been committed** (4th class fine or offence), the driver must attend a rehabilitation programme making him/her aware of the road accident causes and consequences. This constraint will be renewed as often as an offence will be committed. The driver will gain back some of his/her lost points, only once, up to 4 points maximum.

### Step 2:

As an experienced driver, the driver should be subjected to a **pedagogic session (PS)** on a free basis every ten years. Currently, whereas the law has provided it since 1999, this programme is little followed by users.

**If an offence is committed**, the driver whom point reserve is cut back must choose between two options (apart from legal proceedings):

- Wait for three year without committing any other offence so as to gain back his/her initial point reserve.
- Attend a rehabilitation programme making him/her aware of the road accident causes and consequences which will enable him/her to gain partly back his/her point reserve up to four points.

Should several offences come under a lump sum, the driver will gain back the lost points ten years after the first committed offence.

This concerns all offences against the highway code (driving while being drunk, breaking speed limits, hit-and-run, injuries or not having a seat belt or a helmet on etc.)

### **Automatic point loss in the event of offence:**

In the case of subsequent offences, the system leads to the invalidity of the driving licence. The point loss depends on a legal decision although it comes under administrative authority.

In the case of offences handled with a lump sum, the actual fact of which is not denied by its author, its payment leads to immediate point loss. This is automatic.

In 2002, 80.50% offenders were men (19.50 women). Women seem less involved in committing offences than men. Speed limit breaking represents 47.09% (no seat belt or no helmet:: 25.58%) of all scale registered offences (about 8% concern drunk driving).

**In case of total loss of points:** 6 month driving licence invalidation. The candidate must then have a medical and psychotechnical examination, he/she will have to take the general theoretical examination again (GTE:

highway code) and if need be (if the holder has hold the driving licence for less than three years), the driving examination.

This process does apply to legal proceedings concerning subsequent or serious offences.

### **The rehabilitation programme raises awareness of road accidents causes and consequences :**

The content of the programme aimed at serial offenders or not and focuses on making the driver aware of his/her role in the occurrence of road risk and on taking the collective dimension better into account.

The sessions last sixteen hours for two consecutive days.

A psychologist and a driving instructor run the programme.

The law provides that a first interview can be conducted by the psychologist. Currently, this occurs seldom.

Each programme welcomes between 10 and 20 participants.

The participation in this programme is on a free basis and each person can choose the centre he/she wants to register for. Each centre is validated by the local prefecture. The programme cost, chargeable to the driver, amounts to roughly between 200 and 250 euros.

## **Shortly:**

### **A continuing education logic**

#### **From childhood onwards**

At primary school, the **Road Primary Education Certificate** (RPEC) consists in assessing pupils' knowledge and behaviours as pedestrians, passengers and bike riders.

At secondary school, road security training is enhanced and become the first stage to the access of vehicle driving. Thus,

- **The Road Security School Certificate, level 1** (RSSC 1)
- **The Road Security School Certificate, level 2** (RSSC 2)

One of the two is required to take the driving licence in a driving school (the training centre).

- Outside the secondary school, a **Road Security Brevet** (RSB) is suggested. Its content is similar to the Road Security School Certificate, level 2 but the preparation can take place in any training centre. Only GRETA centres (continuing adult training centres) can validate the acquired knowledge.

#### **To vehicle driving...**

Initial training of traditional type or accompanied driving remain identical.

An ability check-up should be requested in the coming years to register at the driving licence examination.

The regular driving licence is submitted to a probationary period.

#### **Step 1 : probationary licence**

The success in the driving licence examination will be subjected to a **probationary period** as early as March 2004.

It applies **three years long** to all candidates coming from initial training achieved only in driving schools. The drivers must respect lower speed limits than other drivers and affix the A letter ("Apprenti" = Learner) during all this period.

It applies **two years long** to the candidates who undertook anticipated driver training. This aims at acknowledging the experience gained by the driver during accompanied driving. The drivers must respect lower speed limits than other drivers and affix the A letter ("Apprenti" = Learner) during all this period.

Moreover, the driving licence is subjected to a **6 point reserve**, that is to say half of the reserve granted to an experienced driver.

Committing an offence (4<sup>th</sup> class breach or offence) leads to attending a **rehabilitation programme** which raises awareness of road accidents causes and consequences.

Once there is no point left, the driver must undertake the complete training right from the start again.

The probationary period entailed in the driving licence constitutes a turning point in the road education field in France. It "aims" at weakening the driving licence and thus at limiting excessive behaviours spotted in road accidents caused by young drivers.

## **Step 2: regular licence**

The regular driving licence will now not be available before

- 20 years of age, for drivers who had anticipated driver training (ADT)
- 21 years of age, for drivers who had traditional training in driving schools

The penalty point driving system combines three orientations: repressive, dissuasive and pedagogic/educational. It works towards the individual awareness of conforming to the collective law. The late measures harden a scale, the offence list of which is extended. The will of the authorities to severely sanction offenders, taken over by the media turns the public opinion towards rule respect.

Sanctioning offences as early as possible, reducing subsequent offences which are considered more and more seriously in a legal (extended deadline of legal re-offending for 5<sup>th</sup> class fines, subsequent offences are considered even more strictly) and administrative standpoint (extended list of the offences registered in the scale, more points are withdrawn in the event of certain offences...)

## **Up to senior citizens**

Drivers older than 75 years of age, would have to submit to a medical check-up every two years from 2004 onwards although this could be brought forward or postponed.

The usual doctor would deliver a **certificate stating the absence of obvious driving contra-indications** which must be renewed every two years.

Otherwise, the doctor will suggest the patient to do a check-up in a validated medical centre.

A psychological examination would be of great interest to assess the driving ability efficiency of the user.

## Conclusion and future prospects

Two major measures have recently been adopted and will be enforced as early as the beginning of 2004. They confirm the scheme orientation of progressive training: **the probationary licence and stronger repression.**

**The access to the driving licence,** progressively likened to a driving authorization, highlights the progressive training to which young drivers are submitted.

Several years are required to obtain the driving licence: From childhood up to the age of 20/21, including the probationary aspect.

- Stronger control pointing out any behaviour breaking the rules

This aims at making the driver feel responsible. Therefore, a compromise is partly reached: the learning ability, the development of adaptation abilities, both match the young adult features and his/her coming maturity. 20/21 old people are supposed to be usually aware of risk taking.

Otherwise, special undertaking could take place. Any behaviour identified as symptomatic opens the way to psychological undertaking of the patient.

**The driver follow-up** favours a repressive and dissuasive orientation thanks to the point reserve granted to each licence. The legal system becomes harder as more and more offences are registered and linked to an even higher loss of points.

Lately, behaviours tend to mostly change and fit with the legal norm. Meanwhile, rule breaching repeated behaviours are making themselves conspicuous and are becoming even more excessive and deviant. Marginal, they nevertheless require something else than a sanction, such as a psychological follow-up. Studies are being currently carried out so that to offer specific help handling problems such as: driving while being drunk, important and repeated speed excess, driving without holding a licence etc.

Victims associations, today the state highest authorities and the media are hammering out the public opinion about the necessity to change behaviour while driving. Repression and educative undertaking would have to be combined so as to protect the user in his/her every day moves. Besides, a study led by the Road Security and Research National Institute (INSERR) is under process and aims at defining the undertaking operation modes of road users all their lives long. This collective expertise (nine countries are involved: Germany, Austria, Spain, Finland, The Netherlands, Quebec, the United

Kingdom, Sweden) will give its conclusions and suggest research directions in 2004 after a Parisian seminar.