

Why do people sign up for the IAM advanced driving test? How has it affected their driving?

What correlations can be drawn between the training given for the advanced test and the researched contributory factors leading to crashes on our roads?

Recently qualified Ipswich & Suffolk IAM member Ollie Hatcher asks members of our group for their thoughts and takes research* and survey data** collected nationally by the Institute to see how the local group might attract new members to prepare for the advanced test.

IN a national survey of 700,000 accidents that occurred between 2005-2009, "failure to look properly" (20.5% of fatal and 29.3% of serious accidents) and "failure to judge the path or speed of other road users correctly" (11.6% of fatal and 14% of serious accidents) were significant contributory factors.

Another significant group of factors were given as "careless, reckless, in a hurry" (17.2% of fatal and 16.7% of serious accidents; "loss of control" (34% of fatal and 19.7% of serious); and "travelling too fast for conditions" (15.9% of fatal accidents).

It was concluded that these could be "addressed by a more measured style of driving, taking greater account of traffic and road conditions prevailing". The survey showed that accidents affect drivers of all ages but that sometimes more could be attributed to younger drivers (under 30) and in other cases more could be attributed to older drivers (over 70). As might be expected, the conclusion was that there is a need for more post-test driver training for improving the quality and safety of drivers.

In a further analysis of the survey results, "learner/inexperience" was a contributory factor to crashes more frequently on rural roads, minor roads and 60 mph roads than elsewhere – "so the driving test does not prepare new drivers for highest risk activities".

In terms of age, the survey showed that younger and older drivers (under 30 and over 70) have "error or reaction" factors recorded in greater proportion than those in the 30-60 age bracket.

With older drivers, "failure to look properly" (see above - 20.5% of fatal and 29.3% of serious accidents) and "difficulty coping with the traffic environment" were recorded more frequently than younger drivers.

When it comes to younger drivers (under 25), "exceeding speed limit" (13.9% of fatal accidents); "travelling too fast for conditions"; and "learner/inexperience" were highlighted as the cause of crashes more frequently than in drivers over 25.

And just a few more statistics: in fatal accidents on motorways, what could the contributory factors be? The most frequently reported reasons were "alcohol; fatigue; and vehicle defects (tyres and brakes).

Men and women had similar reasons for accidents but specifically: contributory factors in accidents with men were found to be "careless, reckless driving; in a hurry, travelling too fast for conditions; and alcohol impairment" while with women, "learner/inexperienced" was given as the major factor (5.3%) of accidents.

So back to the question – why do people sign up for the IAM training and advanced test and how has it affected their driving? In particular, does it address the reported contributory factors that cause these fatal, severe and slight accidents highlighted above? What is the optimum age for this advanced training and how can we promote increased uptake?

I asked members of the Ipswich & Suffolk group what had motivated them in the first place to take the advanced test and how they had benefited from the training and also looked at the results of IAM research** (conducted three years ago by *Hopkin & Sykes* when 3,000 members were tested).

Of the reasons for signing up, 80% of members questioned by *Hopkin & Sykes* said they wished to improve their general standard of driving and 73% wanted to become a safer driver. More than half cited “the achievement/challenge of the test”; of “eradicating bad habits”; “reducing accident risk” and to “refresh their driving skills”. A third gave reasons concerned with reassurance, demonstrating high driving standards and enjoying driving more.

“I wanted to make sure my driving was as good as I thought it was but also to be put right on all the bad points” (male 60+ Ipswich +Suffolk member)

“I was driving a lot for work and had had a couple of speed convictions. I hoped it would make me a better and more responsive driver” (male 60+ I&S member)

“I read an article in the Advanced Motorist magazine by women about my age who had suddenly found themselves having to undertake the driving through illness of their husbands or because they were now widows. This really struck home and I mentioned it to my family who gave me the IAM voucher for Christmas! (female 60+ I&S member)

“I started volunteer driving and realised I had not taken any update driver training since I passed my test some 50 years ago. Obviously car technology had radically changed as had driving conditions” (male 60+ I&S member)

Respondents were asked if they thought they were already a good driver and then having been on an observed training drive, if there had been many aspects that needed improvement.

“I wasn’t looking far enough ahead. I wasn’t looking around bends and observing what was coming up” (male 60+ I&S member)

“The biggest thing was to use the mirrors more. And I used to go through the gears as I wasn’t used to block changing. I felt that my experience meant that I was a reasonable driver but I used to drive far too close to the car in front” (male 60+ I&S member)

“I regarded myself as a competent driver - doesn’t everyone? I had a tendency to cross hands on the steering wheel, didn’t use the mirrors enough and was over-signalling” (male 60+ I&S member)

“I didn’t think that I was a bad driver, more that I lacked confidence. I had never heard of block changing gears” (female 60+ I&S member)

“I needed to improve my speed awareness, forward anticipation and positioning of the car to gain maximum visibility of oncoming traffic” (male, 60+ I&S member)

When asked if they now *consciously* concentrated on areas of their driving more and keep the Advanced Driving skills in mind, respondents all agreed that they were always much more aware now.

"Yes, in terms of observation, hazard awareness and application of the systematic approach. I always try to be aware of the traffic around me and potential hazards involved, particularly when driving in London" (male 60+ I&S member).

Hopkin & Sykes found that 85% of those surveyed agreed that there had been a lasting effect from the advanced driving training in terms of 'more conscious, less automatic driving'. Many referred to being more forward-looking – physically and psychologically.

"It increased my focus – raised my vision and demonstrated quite significant defects in my 'natural' level of observation and focus" (male 40+)

"Yes – every day when I'm out in my car – it always comes to me" and "Observation and speed awareness" were frequent responses.

"Block changing and also reading the road/situation several cars ahead are the biggest skills that I use all the time" (female 60+ I&S member)

"I still have moments when I switch down. If I go into auto-pilot, then maybe check my speed, I realise I am not fully on the job" (male 50+ I&S member)

There was general consensus among participants that they had a good rapport with their Observer and that the training sessions were a thorough and enjoyable experience.

"It seemed strange at first putting yourself through unnecessary stress as no one was going to take your licence away, but after the first session I could already see the benefit. Giving a running commentary in my head works for me, something that is actually quite a difficult part of the (albeit voluntary) test" (female 60+ I&S member)

"My Observer always put me at ease. I found the driving commentary difficult and did it on my own a lot but I think it's something people should work on" (male 60+ I&S member)

"My Observer made me feel relaxed, he was non-judgemental. I think it's important to be able to persuade people to make changes but to do so with humour and have a flexible approach and be encouraging. I think the commentary is good. It shows the examiner what you can see and why you are doing what you are doing – what's inside your head" (male 50+ I&S member)

"I had a really good Observer who explained things well. For a while after the test, I kept doing the driving commentary" (male 60+ I&S member)

So what was the overall impact on people's driving as a result of undertaking the advanced driving training? According to Hopkin & Sykes research of the 3,000 IAM members nationally, more than three-quarters of drivers thought that their driving had become more 'attentive' and 90% of drivers agreed that there had been a lasting effect on 'greater awareness of other road users'. (11.6% of fatal and 14% of serious accidents were attributed to 'failure to judge the path and speed of *other road users* correctly' in the IAM 2011 survey of accidents.)

As to their 'improved general approach to speed and attitude to speed', some said that the IAM preparation meant that they now 'drive appropriately slower than they used to'; some still drive fast but 'with greater awareness'. Travelling too fast *for conditions* is another significant contributory factor to accidents (15.9% of fatal accidents) although the IAM accident report states that many issues which receive the most media

coverage are not actually among the most common contributory factors, citing 'exceeding the speed limit' (13.9% of fatal and 7.2% of serious accidents).

Within the Ipswich & Suffolk IAM group the impact of the advanced training was undoubtedly positive and long-lasting.

"I have much more confidence when driving on unfamiliar roads and on long journeys"

"My driving has improved. Better awareness and anticipation in town driving"

"I'm better driving in the countryside – looking for light reflections and looking through hedges for vehicles"

"I'm 83. Driving skills need to be kept up to date – like most skills – especially when you get to my age. How many of us know drivers who will not drive on a motorway, who stick to quiet back roads or, as they get older, only ever drive to the local shops? Maintaining the IAM standard enables a feeling of confidence"

"The training raised my level of driving and I drive my car more effectively now"

Hopkin & Sykes research found 99% of respondents saying that the advanced test had had a positive impact on their driving. "Greater sensitivity to and awareness of potential hazards and difficult driving conditions" was the most widely reported positive impact (91% of respondents).

There were a lot of opinions expressed about other people's driving. Advanced drivers reported that they now had a 'heightened awareness of other drivers'. That they were 'more conscious of how low standards of driving generally are' and that they now feel that the basic driving test is 'just the start'.

"When you learn to drive, you are really learning to pass a test, not really learning the skill of managing situations which is what the qualification covers" (female 60+ I&S member)

"The test doesn't prepare you to manage complex situations – it just teaches you the Highway Code and how to drive a vehicle. Although the test has improved a lot, it's still insufficient. People pass the test but they don't expect to have an accident – 'it won't happen to me mentality'. Companies should encourage their staff to take the Advanced Test – they have a duty of care" (female 50+ IAM member)

"There is more road congestion and people are impatient – in too much of a hurry. They feel cosseted in their cars with their airbags and cars are quieter so the sensation of speed is so much less. Their car has become like a living room with lots of distractions – mobile phones, satnav, in-car entertainment – lots of buttons – so that drivers are removed from the outside environment" (male 40+ IAM member)

"Talking on a mobile phone is not good. You are using the same part of your brain that you use for driving – so if you are talking on the phone, you are losing driving concentration – it affects your vision and speed and you are four times more likely to crash" (male 50+ IAM member)

"I think the general standard of driving has dropped. People are not so courteous. There's more aggression. It's the My Way Code instead of the Highway Code with drivers doing what suits them rather than following the rules. I'm a driving instructor and I see a lot of bad driving; there's no respect for 'L' plates"

"The number of people I see overtaking on 30 and 40mph limit roads. Drivers are becoming so impatient, driving too close to the car in front." (male 60+ I&S member)

"I notice excessive speed and people driving without consideration"

"I see younger guys out in their new sporty car wanting to prove something. Thinking that his car will fit into a small gap, that he's faster. I'd like to see a partnership agreement between the manufacturers/car dealerships whereby the youngsters are given an IAM observed drive to give them the skills to enjoy driving progressively and safely" (male 40+ IAM member)

Considering the comments from everyone questioned, one would assume that family, friends and colleagues of IAM members would be keen to sign up for advanced training.

"Their reaction generally is no desire to have their driving skills commented on. I think they fear being told that their driving is not good" (male 60+ I&S member)

"A lot of people think they are already good drivers. But they don't know what they don't know!"(male 50+ IAM member)

"I do tell my girlfriends about the course but none have taken up the challenge" (female 60+ I&S member)

Hopkin & Sykes say that members are 'proud of the IAM badge – value the IAM and are passionate about increasing the take-up of advanced driving'. They found that for the majority of people (80%), it was their own idea to take the test and had paid for it themselves. Friends and relatives had suggested it to 11% and employers had requested it for 5%. The training had been paid for by 6% of employers. Just 2% had taken the test after recommendation from their driving instructor or another professional and car manufacturers had paid for the test in only 2% of cases – part of a package of buying a new car.

Questioned on what publicity they had seen or marketing activity surrounding the Advanced Test, few could recollect anything more than show stands at a county show or similar. Is it time to put up some billboards or advertisements on the back of buses promoting the IAM and Advanced Driving? Should we be working more with driving instructors, employers and car manufacturers? One thing is for sure, we need more advanced driving training among today's road users if we are to see a marked reduction in fatal and severe accidents.

Conclusions:

1. Local IAM Members agree that the SFL training has had a positive effect on their attitude to driving.
2. Members generally enjoy their driving more as a result of their training
3. Lack of national publication was cited as a reason that there are not more people taking the SFL course.
4. One comment stuck in my mind, "after passing the driving test people don't know what they don't know!"
5. Advanced Driving has made our members safer on the roads and the training addresses the major causes of accidents.

References:

*** Evaluation of preparation for the IAM Advanced Test Driving Test** Jean Hopkin & Wendy Sykes April 2012
<http://www.iam.org.uk/images/stories/policy-research/evaluation-of-preparation-for-the-advanced-driving-test-summary-report-issue-1>

**** Licensed to skill: contributory factors in road accidents Great Britain 2005-2009** IAM 2011
<http://www.iam.org.uk/images/stories/policy-research/licensetoskill>.