

## Driving Style

I often get calls and emails from instructors wanting to know why the driving methods recommended by the DVSA (Driving & Vehicle Standards Agency) differ from those preferred by other driving organisations. This difference in driving style leaves some instructors confused about what they should teach in order to fulfil the 'Skills for life' criteria. Another problem is that encountered by 'advanced drivers' preparing for Part-Two of the ADI qualifying examination; these drivers are often faced with a dilemma about which driving methods are 'best'.

With the questions above in mind, this article reflects some of my own thoughts and ideas about a couple of areas where the driving styles differ, namely road position and signalling. In the following text I use the term 'advanced' to help differentiate between the different styles of driving – it is not my intention suggest that 'advanced' necessarily means 'better'.

Over the years, two schools of thought have emerged with regard to what constitutes acceptable road driving. These are based upon 'Advanced' and DVSA driving principles respectively – the primary aim of both is to facilitate safe driving, however there are some differences in approach. These mainly concern road positioning, particularly through bends.

'The Official DVSA Guide to Driving, the essential skills' is very clear about the best road position when taking bends; it states that you should maintain position in the centre of your lane for left-hand bends, and that moving to the left will open the view on the approach to right-hand bends. The philosophy behind the advanced driving method for *all* bends and corners is that you should position for the best possible view and maximum vehicle stability (traffic conditions permitting). With this in mind, Roadcraft (the Police Driving Manual) suggests that drivers should position their vehicles further to the right when approaching left-hand bends; this helps to maximise forward vision and reduce the curvature of the bend. So who is right, the advanced drivers or the DVSA?

Advanced thinking also allows for the straightening of 'S' bends. This means that on roads where there is an open view and it is safe and legal to do so, drivers can cross the centre of the road, using as much of the carriageway as necessary, and then return to the left around the exit from the second bend. On the other hand, the DVSA Manual clearly illustrates a road position for 'S' bends which keeps drivers firmly in the centre of their own lane all the way through the bends. Are both methods right?

Another (generally unwritten) rule often taught in advanced driving is that when negotiating roundabouts it is useful to take the straightest clear course or adjust your course for maximum vehicle stability. This means that going ahead or turning left on a clear road will usually require the use of more than one lane, either straddling or switching lanes at the mid-point. Turning right at an empty roundabout might require use of all available road space in order to gain maximum view and stability. The DVSA are quite definite with their rules about lane discipline at roundabouts and offer the advice 'don't straddle lanes' and 'never change lanes at the last moment'. So once again I ask the question, who's right?

While road position is probably the main area of difference between the advanced and DVSA schools of thought, there are also other areas where the approach varies. One of these is signalling.

The DVSA are quite clear about the implementation of the MSM routine. Upon the approach to a hazard, you check your mirrors and then give an appropriately timed signal. This is clear and unambiguous; however, it's my understanding that there seems to be a little confusion in the DVSA camp... When explaining how to deal with obstructions on the road the DVSA states that a signal should be given 'where necessary', while their advice for dealing with junctions states that you should signal 'clearly and in good time', thus implying that a signal will always be necessary.

The advanced approach to signalling is simply that after checking your mirrors you should consider a signal (*information in – information out*). This is much the same as, although not quite as rigid as the DVSA approach, without the anomaly of a different consideration for junctions. Both right, or both wrong?

## What's the answer?

Given my earlier comment that the stated aim of both the DVSA and advanced driving organisations is to facilitate safe driving perhaps we should not be asking who is right or wrong, but rather, "Why do these differences in approach exist?"

As the official body charged with safety standards, the DVSA has a duty to all drivers and road users, ranging from absolute beginners in cars, on motorcycles and cycles, through to large goods and public service vehicle drivers. Given that the DVSA delivers its message to such a wide audience, their approach to driving must be one that will help to ensure maximum safety for everyone. Advanced driving organisations on the other hand, generally deal with experienced drivers; furthermore, their target audience is mostly comprised of those who have a keen interest in driving. It's likely that this group of motorists will have an interest in exploiting the potential speed and handling of their vehicles. While the advanced driving organisations are equally concerned with safety, their message is not generally aimed at beginners (or grannies!).

Advanced driving methods are based mainly on the police 'System of Car Control' as described in the manual 'Roadcraft'. The system was developed in an attempt to ensure that when driving in high-speed emergency situations, police drivers and those with whom they share the roads could remain safe. Here lies the root of the differences in approach between the DVSA and 'others', and why the Cardington Test and Part-Two of the ADI exam require a different driving style to other advanced tests.

A driving method that is perfectly safe and suitable for those with extensive experience and training could be inherently dangerous for novices and less experienced or untrained drivers. The tests that the DVSA have devised for driving instructors allow for this fact and hence require the safest 'all round' methods to be demonstrated; this is because these are the driving methods that are considered appropriate when instructors offer tuition to beginners.

So, which approach to driving is the safest and most appropriate on today's roads?

And given that safety is a prime consideration when driving, what are the merits and demerits of the specific aspects of driving discussed above?

**Road positioning:** in order to adopt an advanced driving method, it is essential that you are 100% certain about the position and speed of all vehicles in your immediate vicinity. Although increased sightlines and greater vehicle stability will improve safety margins, these same margins are eroded by greater speed. By following the DVSA advice about road positioning you will not be able to see as far ahead and will have to drive more slowly in order to maintain vehicle stability. The reduction in forward vision can erode safety margins by restricting the driver's forward planning; however, this deficit is offset by the lower speeds involved.

**Signalling:** If you only signal when you perceive that there is a benefit for others (advanced), there is always a chance that you will miss something or will give a late signal – of course, skilled forward planning will minimise these risks. On the other hand, if you *always* signal as a habit at junctions (DVSA) there is a danger that you could mislead others in certain situations. Perhaps a more useful approach to signalling would be as follows: If, after making all of the necessary checks and considering traffic/pedestrian movement, you think that a signal will not mislead anyone, then give it.

In conclusion, when considering DVSA versus 'Advanced' it's probably fair to say that neither is right or wrong. The driving style that *you* choose will depend upon the road conditions, the purpose of your journey and your speed.

If the whole notion of differences in driving styles drives you around the bend, you can rest assured that as long as you continue to drive without hitting anything or anybody, and you don't cause others to hit you ... At least *you* must be getting something right!

*This article by John Farlam was first published in Driving Magazine in 2002. ©2011 John Farlam All rights reserved*