



What to expect on your first driving lesson

By Mike Emslie

1 INTRODUCTION.

The first driving lessons can be nerve wracking and you usually don't know what to expect. This can make you nervous but it's worth remembering that the first driving lessons usually go very well and you get excited about the thought of being on the road! I've put together a small guide to give you some idea what will happen on your first lesson and what will be expected of you, this should save you some time on the day and will explain why we do things if you are too nervous to ask, although I do encourage you to ask as many questions as possible.

When you book your driving lessons, I will arrange a pick up location with you. This is often your house, or could be a different location such as college or work. Even though I have checked your license online using the new DVLA process, can you please still bring your provisional with you so I can check before we set off. Depending on the length of the lesson and where you are collected from will determine what we actually do first time on the road and this is worth considering when you arrange the location. For example, picking you up outside the college gates in front of your friends and on a busy road may well be a bad start! So think where would suit you best before you book.

The area you will be taken to is often a quiet residential street or an industrial estate. First few times or until you are capable, I will drive to the starting location. On the way to your starting area, we will; discuss the lesson plan, describing what you will do on your first driving lesson.

This is the first step to a whole new level of freedom and will open up so many new opportunities by having a license. So remember what the goal is and approach your instruction with a positive attitude!

2 THE COCKPIT DRILL

Generally speaking, I will drive to a quiet street unless you have had lessons before. Once you are fully competent with moving off, gear changes and road positions, we will leave from your pick up point. The first driving lesson will involve the cockpit drill which will be quite lengthy for your first lesson, around 30 minutes as a one off, so you might want to consider a longer lesson so you actually get to drive the car for a decent period of time. The cockpit drill will involve an explanation of the cars controls and instruments such as the indicators, lights, windscreen wipers etc. We will also make sure you are comfortable in the seat and the seat belt is correctly worn (you would be surprised how many aren't and by experienced drivers!).

I will also explain and demonstrate car safety procedures and what the various pedals and levers do and how you should be using them. I might also ask you some simple questions but I'm not trying to catch you out! Just get an understanding of your knowledge of the car. I will then ask you to operate controls whilst the car is turned off and follow some simple instructions. And if you don't understand anything I have said, just ask me to show you again (and again if necessary) until you are clear, I really don't mind!

So on your first driving lesson, the cockpit drill will include:

- The controls and cockpit of the car
- Car mirror adjustments and how to position correctly
- Blind spot – areas that you cannot see in your mirrors
- Steering the car and the correct techniques
- How to change gears and techniques to do so
- When to use the handbrake

3 MOVING THE CAR AND STOPPING

As the cockpit drill for the first lesson takes some time, whether you drive the car or not on your first driving lesson depends on how long the lesson duration is. Ideally, your first lesson should be 2 hours to allow for driving to a quiet location, the drive back home and have time in between to learn the cockpit drill and briefly drive the car.

Before you drive the car, I will explain to you the procedure of moving the car off and stopping, how to move the car off using the various equipment in the car and also how to do it safely by use of mirrors and blind spot, followed by how to park the car up on the left alongside the pavement using the cars equipment and again, how to do so safely. After explaining this, it's then your turn and I will explain everything again but this time as you are driving the car.

During the moving off and stopping procedure, I will explain to you:

- Moving off – getting gears ready and basic control
- Clutch control – which includes how to find the clutch bite point
- When to signal when moving off and when driving
- When to change gear – At what speeds and revs a gear should be changed, although this may only be covered on a very basic level
- Stopping the car – including techniques for covering the brake and the clutch
- Kerb side parking – including reference points to aid in avoiding hitting the kerb

This is often a nervous time for learner drivers, but you will only be travelling a short distance down the road before you stop, plus it is usually in a straight line. Also, don't forget that I have dual controls so if anything goes wrong, I can take full control. You are likely to have a few goes at this before the end of the lesson. Don't worry if you stall the car, this is common, especially on the first driving lessons.

4 AT THE END OF THE LESSON

I will take you to your chosen location which doesn't have to be your pick up point. Some pupils will have a lesson as a means to commute to work or back so you are flexible on your drop off point. We will then discuss how we both think your first lesson went and what to expect on the next lesson and arrange the next lesson to suit. If you are happy we can also discuss block bookings which will give you some discounts on the lesson rate. I will also provide you with a progress report booklet to keep track of your progress on each lesson. Try and remember to take this with you to each lesson.

5 LESSON NERVES!

It is perfectly normal to have first driving lesson nerves but I am trained to deal with nervous learners and I expect it in your first lessons. Don't worry, I don't expect too much of you from your first driving lesson and will try my best to put your nerves at ease. It's not always about first driving lesson nerves however. Many learner drivers have driving lesson nerves through the majority of their driving course on each and every lesson. This is also perfectly normal too, but your nerves should subside soon after the lesson starts. If you are having issues with driving lesson nerves and believe they are impacting your progress, you will need to look at ways to reduce these nerves. I have a document with some top tips for nervous drivers, just ask me for a copy before your first lesson. I won't shout, get angry or irritated when you make mistakes. You are after all a learner and you can't upset me during a lesson! One of the most common causes of nerves is being afraid you will cause some kind of accident. I am qualified to

teach learner drivers and also have dual controls to prevent an accident happening, so this is highly unlikely. Any accidents or tyre damage is covered by my insurance too so you have nothing to be concerned about should any damage occur.

Another frequent reason for driving lesson nerves is learners expecting too much from themselves. Don't try too hard to do everything perfectly correct on your lessons. Making mistakes is what enables us to learn. Relax, chat and have a laugh with me during your lessons if you are comfortable with that, you will learn far more. If you feel I am pushing you too hard, resulting in you making too many mistakes, ask me to slow down a little and take things a little easier, I won't mind. Everyone learns at different paces and unless you tell me, I won't know what yours is! It's also better to take 2 or 3 driving lessons per week instead of 1. Taking a single lesson per week leaves too much time between lessons, leaving you anxious that you have forgotten everything.

Being slow, impeding other road users and making mistakes is a big issue with learner drivers. Stalling at junctions, traffic lights and roundabouts is a big fear. First thing to remember is that you're a learner, so don't worry about anyone else, they were a learner once too. Remember also that bringing the clutch up quickly **WON'T** make you go faster, it will make you stall. Relax and bring the clutch up just as you do on those quiet roads where you don't stall. Releasing the clutch slowly makes you move off much faster than stalling and you're not nearly as slow as you think you.

6 DRIVING LESSON TIPS

On the first driving lesson, many learner drivers have never driven a car before. You will need to operate all the controls and take effective observations all at the same time. This is obviously incredibly difficult for a novice and I do understand this, I was a learner once myself. You are likely to make plenty of mistakes and I am expecting this, especially over the first few driving lessons.

Don't rush. Take each and every movement in stages so that it's easier to understand. If you try to take everything in at once, it may become overwhelming. If you do feel overly stressed, don't be afraid to tell me and we can alter the pace of the lesson.

Before your first driving lessons, observe other people driving. Don't worry about things like mirrors checks, just look at them changing gears, when they brake, when they put the clutch down etc. It will give you a better understanding on your first lesson. Also look online for websites with tips and explanations of clutch control, moving off procedures and stopping procedures. There are plenty of learner driver tips, theory test and driving test tips that will help you along to passing the driving test.

7 THE SECOND LESSON

The second driving lesson will involve covering what you learnt in your first driving lesson, picking up where you left off from the previous lesson and progressing your driving skills and confidence. We will start to look at things like basic road junctions, I will explain the different types of junctions and how to deal with junction lines and we will likely cover driving routines such as the Mirror Signal Manoeuvre routine as an example. Other driving routines over the course of driving lessons may include:

- DSSSM – Doors Seat Steering Seat belt Mirrors
- Mirror Signal Maneuvers
- SCALP – Safe Convenient And Legal Position
- MSPSL – Mirror Signal Position Speed Look
- LADA – Look Assess Decide and Act
- POM – Prepare Observe Move

Don't forget to make sure you have the most up to date copy of the highway code and there are a number of really useful books you can download to help you. And as they saying goes, there is an app for that! Search your app store, there are a number of free apps available that will help you understand more about the driving lesson process.