

Roadcraft revisited — still going strong after fifty-two years

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PERHAPS THE FIRST THING members will ask is to enquire whether this is any different from the 1994 Edition. The answer is that while the intentions and the structure of the book are similar to its predecessor the layout and emphases are changed in many respects to meet modern vehicle construction and driving conditions.

The text is now in two columns but the overall size is the same as is the number of pages.

The diagrams are much clearer as they have been redrawn and the opportunity has been taken to correct errors in the 1994 set of diagrams; in some cases photographs have been used. The Working Party confirmed that the basic aim of *Roadcraft* is to set out basic principles, information and advice enabling it to be used as a pre-read before police training. It is thus in fact the police drivers handbook. If this policy concerns those who are non police users, while that may be unfortunate, there is no doubt that it is

produced under the auspices of ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) for the use of the police. It therefore needs to be generalised to meet the needs of police driving schools whose instructors differ in interpretation and use in practical instruction. It is interesting to recall that in years gone by, *Roadcraft* itself was the manual of instruction.

More detailed comment

As in the previous edition each chapter ends with a review of the contents and a set of questions to check the pupil's understanding. Part of the design intention was to 'future proof' the material for the next four or five years at least.

Chapter 1 Here we meet the first major change. The discussion between 'attitudes' and 'skills' has been gathering momentum over the past ten years. *Roadcraft* now reflects this in its new first chapter called *Mental skills for better driving*. It was decided to base this on the book by Dr Gordon Sharp *Human aspects of police driving* (1997). A further

change here is that the old Chapter 11 on *Speed and Safety* has been largely incorporated as the later part of this chapter to fit with the important messages about mental skills and safe attitudes.

A further change is that the safe stopping rule is consistent throughout the book and now reads, 'Always drive so that you can stop safely in the distance you can see to be clear'.

The term 'right' (position, speed, gear) used occasionally in the old edition is replaced with 'correct' or 'appropriate' throughout.

Chapter 2 *Observation and anticipation*

This covers similar topics to those in the 1997 edition but now some are written more clearly. Hazards are defined and explained and there are details on tiredness, driving through water, bad weather and night driving.

Chapter 3 *The system of car control*

There are several references to 'information processing', defined as

'taking, using and giving information'. The book emphasises the importance of processing information rapidly and accurately. Another change is that the system no longer refers to the 'information phase' because it is not really a phase as it runs through the whole system. The system now consists of four phases but with information underpinning all four. In emphasising that one should use the system flexibly the diagram on page 52 may be useful to some people but I find it unclear and confusing. Personally, I believe that flexibility comes later when the system is clearly understood by the pupil but initially it should be learned very thoroughly. The same examples of applying the system are used as before with the addition of a 'footpath hazard'. Also the diagrams now run from the bottom to the top of the page, which make them easier to follow. The new diagrams deal with the hazards more clearly and the use of the accelerator in negotiating the hazards is stated. Thus the new diagrams are more useful in helping understanding of the system.

There is a boxed reference to brake/gear overlap where the essential points are made but there is a reference to a much fuller discussion on p 69.

Chapter 4 *Acceleration, using gears, braking and steering*

In discussing tyre grip trade off we are shown a picture of a CD, repeated on p 73, supposedly to remind us of the size of the tyre contact area on the road. It seemed rather twee to me as we know what a CD looks like, but I am assured that those for whom it is intended find it useful.

The technology and sophistication

of modern systems to help vehicles avoid skidding is changing rapidly. The reader is frequently exhorted to read the manufacturer's handbook. There is a brief section on power sources and on various transmissions.

In discussing the use of gears, a very similar diagram is given to that in 1994 showing various springs which are intended to describe the different effects of different gears. Those who find this helpful will be pleased; personally, I found it unhelpful in 1994 and still do in 2007 – my failing, I guess. Overlapping is discussed in more detail which is welcome as it is so commonly done wrongly. There is a rewritten paragraph about slowing down and stopping which is an improvement. Tapered or three pressure braking is explained, though whether the new diagrams are clearer remains to be seen. It will be evident now that the safety rule about stopping within the distance you can see to be clear no longer has the former '... on your own side of the road' attached.

Thinking and braking distances are discussed. The two second rule also has a paragraph and diagram as explanation which is helpful. There is a good discussion of ABS and cadence braking and how to use them.

Steering is discussed at length. It is pleasing to see that correct posture is emphasised. Pull-push steering is described at length and recommended as the usual method for most situations. Rotational steering is still there but described by saying that in exceptional circumstances it may be an option.

Chapter 5 *Maintaining vehicle stability*

This chapter was formerly entitled *Skidding*. It has been restructured and is

now in three sections dealing with *Causes of skidding*; *Skid control with electronics*; *Manual skid correction in older vehicles*. There is much discussion of the causes of skidding as well as an explanation of oversteer and understeer. This is followed by consideration of how the various active safety systems work and skid control in vehicles fitted with such systems. Advice to refer to the manufacturer's handbook to ensure that you know what is fitted and how it intervenes is given. There is still a substantial description about dealing with skids in vehicles without active safety features. The old advice to remove the cause is moved to this section.

Aquaplaning is discussed at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 6 *Driver's signals*

There is an interesting discussion of the use of brakelights. Here the advice is given to 'avoid dabbing the brakes; if your brakelights flash on and off repeatedly but you don't slow down, you will confuse the drivers behind you'. Readers will form their own opinions about this. There is good advice about flashing headlights. The section on 'Using the horn' has been rewritten and is much improved. Elsewhere references to using the horn have been removed or reduced because they are now out of date. There are also detailed references to the use of courtesy signals and arm signals. The examples of giving a slowing down signal when approaching crossings, and a turning right signal to confirm an indicator when turning into a right hand junction while approaching a line of stationary vehicles are mentioned.

Chapter 7 Positioning

There is much good advice here which is similar to the previous edition but more fully explained and it is supplemented by useful diagrams.

Chapter 8 Cornering

This contains much the same advice and information as previously but more attractively set out. The section on cornering forces continues to avoid the pitfalls of the 1977 edition and its predecessors.

The forces reducing tyre grip are described as steering, braking and accelerating rather than these being actions which produce the resulting forces on the car. There is further discussion of understeer and oversteer, met previously in Chapter 5. There is an interesting diagram illustrating the limit point on p 123 which is new, as well as the repetition of the previous set of drawings. The diagrams are better drawn. It is pleasing that the incorrect diagrams at the end of Chapter 8 in the previous edition have been omitted.

Chapter 9 Overtaking

The introductory paragraphs are similar to the previous version. It is pleasing to see that we have reverted to 'passing' stationary vehicles rather than overtaking them. There is more detail given and the diagrams are better drawn, being clearer and with more detailed explanation. Although the general information covers much the same grounds as previously, I feel it is easier to read and learn from.

Chapter 10 Driving on motorways and multi-lane carriageways

This chapter has been extensively

revised to take account of driving on multi-lane carriageways, emphasising their differences as well as their similarities to motorway driving. I think this is commendable because although the differences were mentioned previously the dangers of confusion were not emphasised as much, particularly in reference to slip roads and their use on the two different types of road. It is worth remembering that a motorway is a dual carriageway. But as we know, it is also more than that owing to the laws governing its construction and use.

It is good to see that the error from 1994 on the diagram on p 151 showing the lane line on the slip road now shows it ending some distance before the carriageway. Although these lines continue to the carriageway on urban motorways, they end well before it at the vast majority of motorway junctions. The motorway indicator boards on p 157 now show the correct sequence.

Some members will remember the article I put in *torque* in December 2004 about the dangers of left hand drive trucks on motorways. It is pleasing to see that this has received attention on p 155.

Bad weather conditions are discussed more fully from the point of view of high speed driving.

Appendices

Under the heading *Know your vehicle* are sections on *Roadworthiness check*, *Pre-driving check*, *Testing your brakes*.

The first two are similar to their predecessors in 1994 though the pre-driving checks section now mentions adjustment of the head restraint, a notable omission previously. A useful new section on carrying out the stationary and moving brake tests is included, the

latter being much more detailed than previously.

The European Goals for Driver Education (GDE) is included in the form of a table. This was discussed by Trevor Wedge when he addressed the Group in November 2006. The URL of the website is not included. I can supply it if anyone wants further information.

Rather oddly, there comes next a list of *Key safety points*, culled from the 1994 Chapter 11 on *Speed and safety*. Presumably it would not fit into the new Chapter 1 so has been put in the Appendices. Since it was originally written to help people drive safely at high speed, it looks lonely here between car checks and the Glossary.

The Glossary is much the same as before. The index is slightly expanded.

Overall impressions

The above comments are entirely my own, not intended to reflect the views of anyone else, including RoSPA.

I believe the book is a clear improvement on its predecessor. That is not to denigrate the 1994 edition, which was a huge change for its time. It is a consequence of the changes in driving attitudes and in vehicle technology. Hence there was the need for a more up to date edition.

It is good that this edition comes about ten years after its predecessor, a reasonable time interval, rather than the twenty years, almost, which elapsed from the 1977 edition.

I think those involved have succeeded admirably. ■