

Are you really a good driver?

No one leaves home with the intention of having an accident or killing someone else. In fact, there is no such thing as a road traffic 'accident'. They are 'collisions' because there is a cause or reason for every one.

One could blame the weather, the road, other drivers or the vehicle but ultimately there is a cause – and there is a good chance that it could have been avoided if it was anticipated.

Having taken many statements from drivers in collisions, the word 'suddenly' comes to mind repeatedly. Suddenly a car came out of the junction; suddenly the car in front of me stopped; suddenly a child ran out and so on. 'Suddenly' should never happen because people should be trained to expect and be prepared for it. It can be done, try it!

Accident statistics in Cyprus are scary. Motorbike and moped riders are at high risk and we constantly hear how unsafe Cyprus roads (and drivers) are. It's easy to blame other drivers, typecast race, gender or nationality and curse their driving skills. Most of us consider ourselves to be good drivers but some think they are faultless.

Basic 'driver' training anywhere in the world is mostly geared for people to pass the dreaded driving test as quickly as possible. There is no basic training at all for any Cyprus motorcyclists, just a riding test. There is very little foundation provided to encourage a better driving or a safer system. It's the same in the UK, where approved driving instructors prepare people to pass the driving test and whose business success is dependent on clients passing the test.

With the exception of drunken drivers, it's my belief that there are very few 'bad' drivers anywhere. The vast majority are good but inadequately trained and trying to make the best of it. Cyprus does not have awful drivers; in fact, I believe drivers here are very good considering most seem to be self taught after passing a rather simple test. And before you say it....

Young people in plastic-fantastic, noisy dinky cars, aggravating the neighbours with their loud exhausts are everywhere. Innumerable groups of bikers are still disrupting quiet Sundays on Britain's country roads performing wheelies and knee down cornering. It's the same the whole world over.

So I respectfully suggest that people who are prone to complaining about Cyprus driving should step back, have a re-think and show some understanding for how driving has evolved here before they explode. Instead, let's try and do something positive. The Cyprus Department of Transport is getting to grips with changes but legislative changes to established processes takes time.

If we could train and develop road users to spot risk, avoid an accident and manage speed, wouldn't that be great? And we can, it just takes a long time. We may think that's impossible but we would be wrong. We may think it's a bit late now as people have their licences and once inside their personal chariots are free to do as they please. Again we would be wrong. There is a huge, widespread interest in driver and rider training in Cyprus.

People see a benefit to ongoing training and that realization becomes even more evident with age – no surprises there. But what can be done? It's not an easy task to change and it will take years but let's have a go anyway. The answers can be grouped into three 'E' s.

Education, Enforcement and Engineering

Education: Improve basic training for the driving test and make the test more comprehensive. When people pass their test (or even before), offer free Advanced Driver and Rider Training.

Start with schools and colleges with free or nominally priced training for young people, teach them how to manage the risk of driving and riding and how to anticipate things.

Enforcement: No one likes to be stopped by police and most of us see that as a deterrent. Yet we see lots of people driving with one hand, riders without helmets, drivers without seat belts and some with children and pets actually on their laps (even on motorbikes).

We see children without belts in back seats, traffic light jumping and illegal parking and most of us have seen ladies putting on their make-up on the way to work in the mornings, holding the steering wheel with one hand and the lipstick or mascara pen with the other. The very same happens In Los Angeles, London, Dublin, Rome and Vancouver – I know, I have been there many times. Enforcement is the only solution as education as it is, is inadequate and there is a blatant disregard for the law in some areas.

Enforcement does not have to be persecution or stealth taxing either, but there has to be a storm before the calm we are looking for. We desperately need to reduce mortality on the roads and law enforcement plays a big part in reform.

Engineering: This applies to enjoying roads that are free of potholes, bad surfaces, dropping edges, bad junctions, poor markings and poorly placed or inappropriate road signs. This is all managed by the authorities. There are positive developments with better roads and to repair all roads all at once is totally unreasonable. Cyprus roads are improving, maybe a few at a time, but they are improving.

Free Training!

There is no such thing as a perfect driver or rider. We are all human and we make mistakes. What we need to do is try and manage the risk of driving as best we can and passing the test is not enough. There is a need to teach people to drive in such a way that their subconscious is continually analyzing the situation far ahead and all around – training in sharpening anticipation skills, creating space and hazard reaction skills. Training is free and shortly we will have Cypriot tutors.

We hope to introduce BikeSafe to Cyprus as a joint Police initiative with BMW Cyprus so as to bridge the gap between road users and the Police. (Please see www.bikesafe.co.uk) Things will get better.

Contact the RoSPA Advanced Driving and Riding Group in Cyprus and together let's try and look positively at improving road safety. For free training contact myself or Steve Tucker on 97-727635.

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