

APPENDIX 2: JUNIOR RIDERS' LICENCE

A sixteen year old motorcyclist, when accompanied by a driving instructor or other experienced rider, is entitled to ride his 250cc motorcycle at up to 100 km/h and to ride at any time, in any weather or traffic conditions on any public road except the Kwinana, Mitchell or Graham Farmer freeways.

A fifteen year old rider is not entitled to ride on the quietest public bush track, even if accompanied by an experienced rider.

This black and white system misses an opportunity to address one of the main contributing factors to the high rate of accident, injury and fatality amongst young drivers and riders.

A report commissioned by the WA Office of Road Safety¹ highlighted that the high crash risk of young drivers reflects the effects of both youth and inexperience, however inexperience is by far the main contributing factor.

Crash rates have been shown to drop dramatically with increased driving mileage, however drivers delaying the attainment of their license to older ages have been found to have a similarly increased crash risk during the first 12 months of unsupervised driving. The great majority of crashes are attributable to underdeveloped cognitive-perceptual skills and over-estimation of ability coupled with underestimation of risk. Intentional risk-taking can also play a role, although it is not considered to be a contributing factor in the majority of cases.

What this suggests is that opportunities for young people to gain experience, particularly in the areas of cognitive perceptual skills and in mechanical aspects of vehicle control could play a role in reducing the incidence of young driver crashes. Trail bike riding provides an opportunity for children as young as eight years of age to gain valuable skills and experience and to form responsible attitudes to motor vehicle use that will carry forward when they come of age to obtain their road driver's licence.

While it is not suggested that young people should be specifically encouraged to ride motorcycles, those parents who do choose to let their children ride should be given opportunities to allow their children, under parental supervision, to experience riding in company and on diverse terrain.

Some supportive highlights of the report commissioned by the Office of Road Safety include:

¹ Review of Literature regarding National and International Young Driver Training Licensing and Regulatory Systems – Monash University Accident Research Centre, report no. 239, June 2005

- Gaining many hours of varied experience is the key protective factor, with this experience better achieved during private practice than professional instruction.
- Learning to drive generally commences during adolescence: a developmental stage characterised by increasing independence from parents and an increasing need for acceptance among peers (Senserrick 2003)
- The great majority of young driver crashes are attributable to inexperience: errors in attention, visual search, speed relative to conditions, hazard recognition and emergency manoeuvres. (McKnight and McKnight 2003)
- Hazard perception is the ability to perceive and identify specific hazards in the driving environment. It is a complex task that potentially takes decades to develop to an optimal level. (Evans, 1991)
- While theoretical knowledge is relatively simple and quick to learn, competency and physical actions and attitudes involves a long term learning process. (Leutner and Bruenken 2002)
- Driver training methods that not only identify risk but also allow young drivers to actually experienced risk, associated emotions and personal shortcomings are more effective.
- To be most effective, programs should be incorporated into a graduated driver licensing system and the role of parents maximised.
- Programs that are situated within a graduated licencing system allow longevity of training was staged increments in complexity as drivers progress from safer driving conditions to greater levels of risk.
- The supervised learner period is the safest time to gain driving experience
- Lowering the minimum learner age is one way of extending the supervised learner period. In Sweden, the minimum learner age was reduced from 17.5 years to 16 years, resulting in a 15% reduction in crash risk for newly licensed drivers.
- At a conceptual level a minimum number of hours should represent a time period that will allow novices to learn basic essential skills and subsequently decreased their mental load when carrying out those skills. By decreasing mental workload drivers are increasing automatic processes, which essentially allows them to devote more of their conscious attention to hire-order skills, with less complex skills requiring less mental effort.
- Rather than apply speed restrictions for learner drivers, which can preclude learner drivers from gaining experience on country roads, a better way to minimise the concerns held towards speed for learners would be to require that driving commence on low speed roads and then progress to high-speed roads once learners acquired sufficient practice.

In a separate study on motorcycle-specific issues by Monash University's Accident Research Centre² acknowledgement was given to the fact that vehicle control skills may be a more important aspect of hazard response for motorcycle riders than for car drivers. This was supported in a Norwegian study (Tronsmoen) that stated:

It seems obvious that safe motorcycle driving demands adequate driving skills. However, a motorcyclist needs other bodily skills than a car driver since he or she is dependent on his or her balance, liveness and driving skills. The motorcyclist also needs perception of how the vehicle performs, its reaction on acceleration and deceleration, turning, weight balance, etc. The term "motorcycle manoeuvring skills" is a brief term for all of these.

The concept of a junior riders' licence creates opportunities for an extended learning period under close adult supervision. Specifically it recognises:

- the coordination and control skills that 21st-century children regularly demonstrate through their skill in computer games,
- the value that motor vehicle skills acquisition over a long period of time can deliver in terms of greater preparedness when the time comes to obtain a full road learner's permit
- the importance of gaining experience in widely varied and sometimes challenging terrain conditions
- the value of close parental supervision during the early learning process - and in particular at a time when parental influence is not diminished by adolescence.
- the value of inculcating an early appreciation of protective equipment, including gloves and boots helmets and body armour.
- The greater proximity that riding a motorcycle has to driving a motor vehicle than riding a bicycle
- that recreational trail bike riding is increasingly a family pursuit however the opportunities to engage in a suitable environment are currently severely limited.
- That responsible trail bike riding involves more than vehicle skills and includes an appreciation of protecting the environment, minimising noise, respecting the rights of other trails users and avoiding antisocial behaviour.

In practice the junior riders licence could enable children who are not yet legally able to obtain a full riders licence to ride on a subset of designated forest trails whilst on motorcycles approved for their age group and in the company of a parent or responsible adult.

² Hazard Perception and Responding by Motorcyclists – Summary of Background, Literature review and Training Methods, Report no. 234, May 2005

The following extract from the State of Colorado Off-Highway Vehicles Regulations expresses this idea:

b. Where the State, the United States, or any agency thereof, has designated any public street, road, or highway of this state open to off-highway vehicles or where local political subdivisions have authorized by ordinance or resolution the establishment of off-highway vehicle routes to permit the operation of off-highway vehicles on city streets or county roads pursuant to the authority granted in C.R.S. 33-14.5-108(1), no person under the age of ten years may operate an off-highway vehicle on such public street, road, or highway of this state or on such city street or county road. No person ten years of age or older may operate an off-highway vehicle on such public street, road, or highway of this state or on such city street or county road unless:

1. The person has in his possession a valid driver's license issued by the State of Colorado or another state; or

2. The person is accompanied by and under the immediate supervision of a person who has in his possession a valid driver's license issued by the State of Colorado or another state. The phrase "under immediate supervision" shall mean that, at a minimum, the unlicensed operator is within direct visual contact of the licensed supervisor.

Having regard to the competence of younger riders and the importance of adult (preferably parental) supervision we would modify this to enable children from 8 years of age, but insist that the supervising licence holder is either a parent or an authorised guardian with parental consent and that the supervising licence holder has held a licence for a minimum of four years.