

OUR EXPERIENCES

B + E Driving Trailer Training & Test

My son and his partner are joining us on our caravan holiday to the south west coast of France this summer. He was hoping to help me with the towing of my twin axle Coachman caravan, but following the 'Ask You Club' article in the Club Magazine's May 2007 issue, we set about searching the web to find information relating to the driving licence, test and training.

A driver training centre in Bristol were very helpful and agreed a towing assessment to determine my son's ability. This resulted in a two day training session with an instructor plus a test booked with the Driving Standards Agency at their Bristol Test Centre. They would use my Coachman caravan and Land Rover Discovery.



Instructor and pupil prepare to set off

All was set for the two day training with our trainer, who had been a driving instructor for some 30 years and regularly taught drivers to obtain their HGV licence on articulated lorries. Interestingly, this trailer test is based on the same principles as the HGV test.

My son had a full 'B' licence, but having achieved his driving test pass in 1998, this excluded him from the 'E' aspect which would enable him to tow my combination of car and caravan.

I had to accompany my son in the Discovery with the caravan to the Training Centre in Bristol, some 25 miles from our home, displaying 'L' plates to comply with the law. I was also able to sit in the rear seat of the car during his tuition and see all aspects of his training, and it was a bit of an eye opener even for me as a 25-year experienced caravanner who thought he knew all there was to know about towing a caravan, but soon realised I had many bad habits!

Training Day One

This was initially all about procedures: Checking the trailer, ensuring wheels and tyres are OK, checking the windows and exterior lockers are closed, then moving to hitching up correctly and ensuring the breakaway cable is in good order. Also checking the 12N electric plug & socket is in good order, then by getting somebody to check the rear of the caravan, ensuring the rear lights, stop lights, indicators etc were working correctly, as was the audible indicator inside the car.

We moved off after all the checks had been carried out onto the streets of Bristol towing with an overall length of 14.2meters and gross weight in excess of 4500 kg. My son had towed previously in France before we were aware of these regulations, and thus was very confident.

Later that day we spent a good deal of time off road in a training area dealing with reversing and controlled stopping. Several other learners dealing with articulated lorries were also there and it became very evident that the same procedures for reversing and stopping were undertaken as with the lorries, the only difference was a caravan with wheels in the middle of the body would go out of line much quicker than that of the lorry with the wheels at the rear of the trailer. The controlled stopping was from

20mph to a stop over a measured distance. (Good job all was secured in the caravan.)



Reversing into a coned area to arrive at a rear yellow line in a straight position

That afternoon we continued this 6 hour training session embarking again onto the streets around Bristol, ensuring the correct position is undertaken at every roundabout and dual carriageway plus maintaining the speed limits. One key aspect was checking mirrors continuously, in particular the left hand side.

We had also visited the DSA test centre in Bristol where the instructor checked with the examiners that it was OK to use the car & caravan for the test the next day.

Before we left for home our instructor checked all our documentation to ensure adequate identification was to hand. We also completed the DSA test application form and read the 'Important Notes'. This gave us information regarding the requirements with respect to the vehicle, caravan and driver's licence etc. We thought we had covered all their requirements. However, my son had a paper version of his driving licence and not a photo card one, and thus as the notes say, we would require 'suitable photographic identification'. He had his licence, four forms of ID with his photograph on them (one used in conjunction with his work) and his passport, which although it had expired in February, still had a good photo of him, so all seemed to be in order.



Reversing into a coned area is much the same as the articulated lorry drivers have to do

Training Day Two & The Test (Attempt 1)

We set off again from home and on arrival at the Training Centre in Bristol, our instructor viewed all uncoupling and coupling procedures that would be undertaken during the test. This seemed to go well and we set off for a hour or so instruction before heading for the DSA Bristol Test Centre.

The training centre had booked the Test and paid the £89 test fee as part of our package. On arrival at the Test Centre, the instructor took all the ID detail into the Examiner's office in preparation for my son's test. He returned a little later saying the test had been cancelled due to insufficient ID since the passport was a little out of date. The sheet headed 'Important Notes' that we had down loaded from the internet on May 1st 2007 had only required 'suitable photographic ID', but had not said that a valid in-date passport was required. We thought his ten year old passport should had been adequate as photographic ID along with his normal driving licence that was well in date.

I was somewhat annoyed that not only having taken the time and trouble to deal with this new legislation and training that is still not fully understood by all, plus loosing the £89 test fee for what I consider a unnecessary bureaucracy or is this 'ID' gone mad and remained frustrated by the whole affair. I have subsequently written to the DSA regarding the inaccuracy on their Web site. So be aware that a valid in date passport is needed.

We subsequently renewed his passport and re-booked a further test for 18th May 2007.

The Test (Attempt 2)

May 18th 7:00am we arrived at the Training Centre for further training prior to arriving at the DSA Test Centre for 8:30am –The test this time was completed after a good hour tow around Bristol. My son had passed his B+E to add to his driving licence.

Steve B Club Member

Club Comment

Reports from the DSA suggest that identity fraud for those seeking their first ('B') licence is remarkably commonplace, and this is no doubt why such a stringent view is taken on the proof of identity even for a test such as this. The following advice is taken from the DSA website:

Reporting for your practical test

You must bring the following items with you. If you do not, the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) may refuse to carry out the test and you may lose your fee.

- an appropriately insured and licensed vehicle, displaying L- Plates (except for taxi and Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) part 2 tests), that is suitable for the purpose of the test
- the appropriate theory test pass certificate (or confirmation) if you are not exempt
- your appointment letter
- both parts of your photo card licence. If you do not take both parts of your licence your test will not take place and you will lose your fee

- if you have an old-style paper licence, you must take your signed driver licence and a valid passport - from 1 November 2005 no other form of photographic identification will be accepted

It's worth noting that at the time of writing (August 2007) the cost of exchanging a paper driving licence for a photo card one is £10, while the cost of applying for or renewing a passport is £66. If you need photo ID just for the purposes of a B+E driving test, therefore, it makes sense to get a photo card driving licence first, even if this will subsequently have to be upgraded to reflect the additional towing qualification once you've passed your B+E test (which is a free upgrade).