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Why young drivers must wise up to the law

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Kent's young drivers are dangerously ill-informed when it comes to how the law affects them.

It seems that every other week there are sad new statistics about the number of young drivers who have car accidents – and suffer life-changing consequences or worse still, lose their lives – just months after passing their driving tests.

Inexperienced new drivers are more likely to have an accident in the first two years after ditching their L-plates than at any other time. Between 2006 and 2008 alone, over 500 young people died or were seriously injured on Kent roads.

As a motoring lawyer with 30 years experience of representing Kent motorists, I have first-hand knowledge of the risks of driving dangerously. Time and again, I've met people who have made bad choices behind the wheel – ranging from a simple speeding ticket to being involved in a serious accident involving other drivers.

It saddens me that some of those have been brand-new drivers with only a few months driving experience and no real knowledge about how the law affects them once they pass their test.

I am also a parent of three young drivers and know how worrying it is when a new driver tears up the L-plates and drives solo for the first time.

So when the Association for British Insurers (ABI) called for an overhaul in how young people learn to drive recently, I took notice. It's an issue I feel passionately about.

The ABI recommended that learners spend a minimum of one year with L-plates before they can take a test. And that when they do, there should be restrictions on night time driving and how many young passengers they can carry and a reduced drink driving limit.

Spending longer learning to drive would give young people more time to realise the responsibilities they have when they get in a car - and increase their awareness of the countless hazards that have to be negotiated on our roads.

Through my work as a lawyer, I know that many young people are out there on the roads with little knowledge about the law, or believing incorrect information passed on from their friends. There are some alarming myths that need to be busted.

Few young drivers realise that you can lose your licence on just six points in the first two years after passing your test (compared to 12 points for everyone else.)

Some think that you can drink two pints of lager and still legally drive. And that if you eat a big meal it'll actually lower your alcohol levels if you have a breath test. Then there's drug-driving and using a mobile phone behind the wheel, both trends growing at an alarming rate. Many young drivers don't realise that the onus is on them to understand the law – ignorance is no excuse.

That's why I'm touring Kent schools to talk to sixth formers who are learning to drive. It's part of a campaign called 'Lose your L-plates, not your licence'. I'm hoping it'll encourage them to drive more responsibly when they're given the freedom of being a qualified driver.

I've planned talks in schools all over Kent to get my message across. I'm asking teachers or schools who'd like me to give a talk to their students to get in touch via my website <http://www.motorists-lawyer-kent.co.uk>.

Learning to drive is such an exciting time for young people, but it comes with responsibility. It's down to those of us with years of experience to pass that knowledge on.