

Guide to general driving information and minibus driving technique.

General driving information

For a significant number of drivers, once the basic driving test has been passed, little thought is given to further development of driving skills. People who drive a minibus, with or without passengers aboard need to be sure that their driving skills are well up to the standard of the D.S.A. (Basic "L") test.

Braking:

Many drivers don't appreciate the importance of proper use of brakes and the effect they have not only on the speed of the vehicle but on its stability and balance.

- Brake firmly only when travelling in a straight line
- Brake in plenty of time
- Vary brake pressure according to the surface you are travelling on
- When descending steep winding hills brake firmly on straight and ease off on the bends
- Both hands should be holding the steering wheel

Steering:

- Hands should be placed at ten to two position
- Don't let the wheel spin back - feed it through the hands
- Gear changes should be made whilst travelling straight
- On slippery surface - delicate and gentle movements

Following distances:

- Reasonable distance from vehicle in front - 2 second rule
- Reaction time has to be added to all braking distances
- In towns under 30mph it is possible to leave 1 second
- When stationary leave 6 feet between you and vehicle in front

Observation and Anticipation:

- Observation, together with concentration are the two skills that raise a driver above the normal.
- We have already looked at how far it takes a vehicle to stop even on a dry road.
- With observation you can anticipate the actions of other road users and become much earlier with your braking. You may find that in a lot of instances you will only need to decelerate and not brake at all.
- One way you can improve your observation and concentration is to talk to yourself about the road situation ahead.

Minibus driving technique

Instruction Manual

Sit down with the manual and familiarise yourself with the checks that need to be made: e.g. Engine oil, coolant, windscreen washer bottle, tyre pressures (including spare).

Layout of vehicle

Get to know the layout of the vehicle:

- Pre-driving checks
- Make sure doors open and close securely
- Is there a first aid kit and fire extinguisher?
- Visual check for external damage

Seat and visibility

The driving seat is higher than you may be used to and the vehicle generally bigger.

- Adjust the seat for comfort and access to controls
- Interior mirror may be of little use when driving (full of heads or windows steamed up)
- Door/wing mirrors assume greater importance
- Don't rely on mirrors to reverse in a confined space or where visibility is restricted - get assistance from someone who knows what they are doing (not a child). If on your own get out and walk around vehicle first.

- Check for obstructions on the ground (and at roof level), for pedestrians and children playing.

Height

Know the height of your vehicle (including roof rack) - this helps when confronted with car park height bars.

Familiarise yourself

For anyone who has not driven anything larger than a private car it is essential to drive with an experienced driver until you feel confident.

Width of vehicle

- A minibus is wider than a car and you may find yourself touching the kerb sooner than expected.
- Foliage, traffic signs and shop awnings can present a hazard.
- Get used to using your mirror on the near side to judge the distance from obstruction on the near side. Always check it before moving off.

Length of vehicle

- Because the minibus is longer it is necessary to be more careful with positioning.
- On left hand turns keep to the crown of the road checking your near side mirror, as you turn, for cyclists, etc., moving up the inside of you.

Minibus brakes

- Minibus brakes are designed to cope with a full load. This makes them a little too powerful for the situation when the vehicle is empty, especially in damp or slippery conditions.
- You should do a static brake test before moving off and then test them again just after you have moved off (especially after a vehicle has been standing for a while).

Driving with a full load

Driving with a full load of passengers for the first time can be a real experience:

- The vehicle is much heavier - 17 people of average weight weigh over a ton.
- The vehicle is slower to respond to acceleration (greater care must be taken when overtaking).
- You need to change gear more frequently to obtain maximum response from the engine.

- Hill starts require more care and lower gear is needed on them.
- On motorways and dual carriageways do not get caught in the offside lane on a rising gradient as the minibus will lose momentum quickly.
- Cornering presents its own problems, the centre of gravity on the average minibus is quite high and a full load does not help the situation - be prepared for instability on corners.
- Excessive zeal on corner will, at best, upset the passengers, at worst lead to loss of control in wet or icy conditions.

Braking technique

Braking in a vehicle at or near its maximum weight always requires more care, therefore:

- Avoid harsh or sudden breaking as it only upsets the passengers.
- Read traffic situations carefully - ease off prior to the possible need to brake e.g. approaching green traffic lights.
- Do not get too close to the vehicle in front.
- Keep your speed in check with your brakes, but be prepared to engage a lower gear before descending a long steep hill. (Avoid riding the brakes as this can cause "glazing", causing sudden loss of braking efficiency. Cadence braking may be a good idea.)

Luggage

If you are taking luggage either on top or in a trailer careful planning is required, please ensure:

- Luggage is always securely stowed whether inside and/or outside the vehicle.
- Exits are not blocked with luggage.
- If the vehicle has a luggage rack you monitor the stability of the vehicle. As we said the centre of gravity is high on these vehicles and luggage on the roof can substantially affect the handling and stability of the minibus.
- Heavy luggage should be put inside the vehicle whenever possible.

It all adds to more weight and acceleration will be even more sluggish.

Fitness of the driver

The vehicle may be fit to drive but, equally important, so must the driver.

- He/She should not be tired or rushed.
- Allow plenty of time for the journey - better to arrive earlier than expected after a leisurely drive.
- If your health is suffering for any reason don't allow the pressures of completing the journey to compromise safety in any way.
- Work out a route before you start and take map books with you.

Distractions from passengers

- If children are being carried it is necessary to take along another adult to amuse and control them.
- Noisy children are the worst distraction for a driver.
- All passengers must be belted in for the whole of the journey. If they are allowed to move around the stability of the minibus is badly affected. In the case of sudden braking the movement of bodies inside the vehicle can have fatal consequences.
- Passengers like to talk to the driver but lengthy conversations should be discouraged.
- Noisy hand held radios won't aid the driver's concentration either.

Planning your journey

- Plan your journey to include stops. You should always consider the passengers and time should be allowed for meal breaks and toilet stops.
- When you stop passengers will emerge from the side and rear doors - don't park too near other vehicles and obstructions. (You won't be too popular if passengers have to disembark into a large puddle either.)
- Breaks enable you time to take stock of the situation.
- If undertaking a long journey consider whether you require a co-driver.
- As a maximum do not attempt to drive for more than 5.5 (five and a half) hours without a complete break from the vehicle.
- More than 10 hours driving a day is pushing the endurance of the most competent driver.
- The minibus will have a higher fuel consumption than the average car - so keep your eye on the gauge and plan pit stops.

Motorway Driving

- Motorway driving requires a high level of concentration - things happen very quickly on them.
- Be careful with overtakes as even a slight gradient can leave you stranded in lane 3.
- Speed itself may not be a killer but sudden deceleration can injure passengers who are not seated or are not strapped in.
- Always expect the unexpected.
- If you have to stop on the hard shoulder in an emergency remember that your responsibility does not end with bringing the vehicle to a halt.

Evacuation of the vehicle

Hurried or otherwise, it must be controlled and passengers supervised until they are clear of any moving traffic - or potential moving traffic. Clearly this is important when dealing with children or disabled people.

- Passengers who have been evacuated from the vehicle must be moved away from it and well onto the grass verge.
- The hard shoulder of the motorway is one of the most dangerous environments one can find.

Disabled passengers

Driving Disabled passengers require special treatment, not only when embarking and disembarking but also during the journey.

- The vehicle is much heavier - 17 people of average weight weigh over a ton.
- The vehicle is slower to respond to acceleration (greater care must be taken when overtaking).

Journeys end

At the end of any journey check the vehicle and note any defects- any damage caused such as hitting the kerb should be reported.

If you have any queries please contact the Insurance Office who will be happy to assist you.

Summary of contact names

Insurance Office

0118 378 8309

insurance@reading.ac.uk