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**THE TOPIC OF “AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR ON THE ROAD”
IN DRIVING SCHOOL COURSES**

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Since the appearance of cars more than a century ago, instruction has been necessary and has progressively developed towards driver training courses. It evolves constantly and has kept in close touch with new types of vehicles, technical improvements and above all the development of road traffic.

The introduction of driving licences and the driving tests that sanction them has conditioned the training of future drivers. While initially this training was limited to advice on maintenance and breakdown repairs, it was rapidly noted that mere rules of courtesy were no longer sufficient to bring order to the roads, and each country has developed a series of measures for avoiding arguments and more particularly accidents.

To begin with, it was the constructor or the salesman who provided this information, but the authorities rapidly understood that not only technical competence but also competent instruction was especially necessary. This led in the end to our driving schools, our theory and practical courses, and our professional driving instructors.

A first observation is that these courses are mandatory in the majority of countries but that there are too many exceptions, and where these exist anyone can teach future drivers anything. Germany, Portugal, Denmark and Luxembourg, to cite only these examples, make both theory and practice mandatory. Sweden, and Belgium in particular, have no mandatory provisions and as a result only about half of the candidates for driving licence pass through the hands of professional State-certified instructors.

A second comment is that the subjects taught are not the same, even where courses are mandatory. We regret that, even in the European Union, harmonization is not something for the near future, even though the European Federation of Driving Schools has given absolute priority to unification.

For more than 30 years, the Federation which I represent has been in favour of compulsory theory classes, which should go well beyond the mere explanation of the Highway Code. New topics must urgently be included: energy-saving and ecological driving, anticipatory, defensive and/or preventive driving, the dangers of alcohol, drugs and medicaments and aggressive behaviour. It is necessary to discuss this from the start of the learning process, since this is the only means by which we can achieve a change of attitude on the roads. Specific courses on road behaviour have come to the fore and are constantly being adapted.

How should the question of aggressive behaviour on the road be taught?

The first step is to propose a definition: aggressive behaviour on the road is any behaviour in traffic intended to cause verbal or physical harm to another road user, including insults, gestures, threats, or causing deliberate damage, blows or injuries ...

Instructors and candidates draw up a list of striking cases, referring to a number of situations, and try to find their causes and solutions for avoiding them. When certain cases are analysed, it may be concluded that an inadequate knowledge or a misapplication of the Highway Code is often at the origin of an aggressive reaction. The following is an example: Traffic at a junction is regulated by traffic lights. Cars have stopped at the red light. Pedestrians are crossing the street. As soon as the lights turn green, the drivers want to move off immediately but there are still pedestrians crossing; this produces an aggressive reaction on the part of the drivers who in this way fail to respect an article of the Highway Code which specifies that these pedestrians have the right to continue to cross the street; another article states that in such a situation motorists may only enter the junction if it is clear, etc.

To give another example: a speed limit of 50 km/h in a built-up area. I can cite cases in all major towns where a driver who observes the speed limit is considered by other drivers to be provoking them. As a result, they overtake him at high speed and cut in front of him, brake sharply a number of times and in some instances make a rude gesture ...

In conclusion, a specific case relating to learning to drive: the driving-school car is visible from a distance because of the sign on the roof. We have noticed that this often produces an aggressive reaction: some drivers "push" to make the learner driver go faster and create unnecessary risks for him.

In dealing with the question of aggressive behaviour, it is also recommended that a list of situations causing the most negative reactions should be provided:

- cutting in after overtaking
- driving on the hard shoulder
- failing to stop at a red light
- not keeping a safe distance
- cyclists and mopeds on the pavement
- not giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists
- obscene gestures
- overtaking on the right
- preventing someone from overtaking
- awkward parking.

In practical classes, the instructor should draw attention to the specific situations which cause forms of aggressiveness. Driving classes should therefore increasingly become classes in social behaviour; it is obvious that this type of training can only be given by professionals, who have themselves been trained for the purpose.

In conclusion, I would say that, in my opinion, a specific class is not necessary, but that good theoretical and practical training should refer constantly to issues like aggressive behaviour. I myself have been making the same comment for defensive driving classes for years: these are aspects of behaviour and attitudes which cannot be considered in isolation. Learning to drive must be viewed as a global matter, as a whole; it does not end with obtaining a driving licence, quite the contrary. Separate discussion of the question of aggressive behaviour should rather find a place in continuous training classes, a multiphase type of training, which even continues up to classes for senior citizens.

That, however, would be a topic for another seminar ...
