

Newbury Group of Advanced Motorists

Advanced Driving Articles

1. Putting the Enjoyment Back in Driving

by David Skinner, Institute of Advanced Motorists, Newbury Group

I passed my driving test (first time!) in 1969, at the age of 25. For several years I enjoyed driving, but from about 1990 onwards that started to change. I became frustrated by the sheer volume of traffic, and began to feel that I was not as competent a driver as I should be. I owned a powerful car with an automatic gearbox but, despite many years of accident-free driving experience, I made stupid mistakes on several occasions, scared myself a few times and knew that I was developing bad driving habits.

Now, however, I enjoy driving – most of the time, anyway. My driving is smoother and more pleasurable, and I feel in total control of the car and able to cope with anything that might happen on the road.

What happened to change my attitude? Well, in 1996 I joined the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) and undertook their training course to pass the Advanced Driving Test. That made such a difference to my competence in driving, and to my enjoyment of it, that I wish I'd done it years before.

So how did it change me? I learned that the key skills of advanced driving are Concentration, Observation, Anticipation and Planning, and that the IAM Examiner is looking for a drive that is Safe, Smooth, Systematic and Progressive. It's not about being quick, although I was expected to drive up to the speed limit when traffic and road conditions allowed. Neither is it about driving aggressively or flamboyantly; it's more about making good progress, driving smoothly and unobtrusively with no violent braking or acceleration, constantly observing road conditions, being courteous to other traffic, and generally being alert and aware of what you are doing.

I found that advanced driving moves you back from the 'autopilot' stage of unconscious competence to a level of conscious competence, so that you think about driving all the time. Having learned the skills, I now use them every time I drive. I became an observer for the Newbury Group and enjoy passing the skills on to other people. In the next article I will describe in more detail the journey towards the IAM test.

If you would like more information or advice on any aspect of your driving, contact Dick Bird, Secretary, Newbury Group of Advanced Motorists, by e-mail on secretary@niam.org.uk or by telephone on 07717 366500, or visit our web site at www.niam.org.uk.