

LEARNERS DRIVERS NEED A TOUGHER TEST

Adult life has few torments to compare with the sweaty ordeal of the driving test, and - as I recently discovered - few delights to compare with the gratification of passing it. But as my euphoria subsided it was replaced by a deep suspicion that my newly acquired qualification was rather bogus, considering the doubts and fears that assailed me every time I fumbled with the ignition key.

My suspicions were confirmed on my first foray without benefit of L-plates. My mouse-like driving was no match for the car I had borrowed - an insidiously responsive monster, quite unlike the domesticated Datsuns of the driving school. As I made erratic progress through the busy streets, demonstrating less-than-perfect lane discipline and missing parked cars by a whisker, my volunteer passenger (who happened to be the car's owner) displayed creditable self-control, although he paled noticeably after my skirmish at a roundabout.

The driving skills I now needed were very different from the simple manoeuvres I had carried out during the test. Then the roundabouts had been blessedly clear and we never strayed on to a dual carriageway. My most glaring weaknesses - timid incompetence in the hurly-burly of traffic and lack of skill in getting out of tight corners - hadn't been exposed at all. It seems obvious to me that the driving test is due for a retreat.