

English for Life in the UK

29 July 2020

Episode 28 Driving in the UK

(Mark) Hello and welcome to episode 28 of the podcast English for Life in the UK. This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the Saint Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice for those in need and, in particular, to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

The aim of the podcast is to help those of you wanting to improve your English and, at the same time, to learn more about life in this country. This episode is concerned with driving in the United Kingdom and it starts with a section based on the information in the official government publication: "Life in the UK: A Guide for New Residents", which helps prepare people to take the test required to become a British citizen. Then, we have a discussion about driving, including our own experiences. Then, in the language section of the podcast, we are focusing this week on something called modal verbs. Finally, we will have a short quiz, based on the kind of questions that you will be asked in the citizenship test, should you decide to take it. You can find links to all our other episodes, and the transcripts, at our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

(Music)

OK, so this week we're going to talk a bit about driving in the UK. Now, many of our students, many of our listeners, may not have a car and may not drive at the moment, but I guess many of you may want to drive in the future. So, we thought this would be a useful topic to do and it is one of the things that is in the official government guide and handbook on which there may be questions in the citizenship test. So I'm going to start with a little bit that is from that official document.

And the first thing that says that you must be *[at least]* 17 years old to drive a car or a motorbike, in the UK. You also must have a driving licence and to get a UK driving licence you must pass a driving test and I'll say a bit more about the test in a minute.

(3 minutes:19seconds)

The age limit is different for other vehicles, particularly for larger vehicles like vans and lorries - we won't worry about that, at the moment. And you can drive using your driving licence up until the age of 70 (seventy) and, after that, you have to renew it every three years, so that's something I'm going to have to think about next year, for the first time.

If you are from a country abroad and you bring - you have a driving licence from another country, then you can drive for up to 12 months on that driving licence, but after that, you have to get a UK driving licence. Now there is an exception for some countries, including some European countries, but as that may be changing anyway with Brexit¹, I think it's best to stick with that general rule.

You have to have a - you have to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency which, for short, is the DVLA - you have to register your car with the DVLA and you have to pay an annual vehicle tax. You also must have valid motor insurance and it is a serious criminal offence to drive a car, or a motorbike, without insurance. Also, if your car, your vehicle, is over three years old, you must take an MOT test every year, which shows that the car is in a good condition to drive it on the road. So the MOT test - MOT stands for Ministry of Transport.

So those are some of the basics there - a few other things - one thing we should say straight away when you do get out driving on the road, you must drive on the left. Some of you will be from countries where that isn't the case.

Before you take your test you can get something called a provisional licence - that's when you're learning to drive - but to drive with a provisional licence, you must have someone with you, in the car, who is over the age of 21 and has had a full licence for

¹ Brexit is the word used for Britain leaving (exiting) the European Union

at least three years. And you also have to have on your car - an "L" plate. That is literally a a label with a big red "L" on it. You'll probably see cars with that on, as you go around.

A little bit about the test - the driving test. There is a theory test and a practical test. So, in the theory test there are some multiple-choice questions², testing your knowledge of particularly, what's called the "Highway Code", which is a booklet that tells you about driving in this country, and you will need a copy of that, if you are going to take your test. The other part is called a "hazard perception test" and there you are shown some video clips and you have to spot what are hazards: that is, dangers that might be there, that you can see. And you can do both those tests on line: that's how you do the tests. So that's the theory test and then there is the practical test where you have to drive the car with an examiner in the car with you, on different types of roads, to show that you can drive safely and that you know about the Highway Code and how to apply it in practice.

(8:07)

So that's a little bit about the tests. A couple of other things - types of roads: there are really three main types, there are motorways, there are dual carriageways - that means two lanes going each way in each different directions - and then, single carriageway - that means one lane, going in each direction, and there are both major and minor roads, which are called A roads and B roads, within that.

Speed limits - normally, in towns and cities, built-up areas, the speed limit is normally 30 miles an hour, although increasingly, it is now 20 miles an hour, in some areas. On single carriageways, the speed limit is 60 miles an hour and on motorways and dual carriageways, it is normally 70 miles an hour, although you will find there are signs on the motorways that often tell you different speed limits because they will change the speed limits, depending on the weather and if there have been accidents, and things like that.

² Multiple-choice questions are questions where you are given a number of answers to choose from

You must not drive a car when you're over a certain limit of alcohol and so the safest thing is not to drive when you've been drinking alcohol at all. If you are stopped by the police, they can do something called a breathalyser test, where you have to breathe into a tube and that will tell them whether you've got any alcohol in your blood and if you are found to have alcohol above the limit, then you can be fined and disqualified from driving. So that is very important stuff.

And finally, the last official thing to say from here is - if you have an accident of any sort, you must stop, and if anybody has been hurt, then you have to inform either the police or an ambulance.

So those are the official things that were in the Guide. We thought that we would just reflect a little bit on our own experiences of driving. So, Sheena, would you like to start us off? Tell us a bit about your experiences of driving.

(Sheena) OK - erm - I passed my test in Halifax. I took my test first, I think, when I was 22.

(Christine) So that was 10 years ago, was it, Sheena?

(S) More like 40, I'm afraid. It doesn't seem it. I remember the test very well. I wasn't worried or nervous before the test then, suddenly, as soon as I was sat in the car with the driving instructor³ watching what I was doing, I got very nervous and I failed my test, the first time. The second time I took the test - and I think maybe this is how it used to be - it was the same driving instructor and this time he was very pleasant. I didn't have to do some of the things because the first thing often you have to do in the test - the practical test - was to read a number plate on a car - I think it had to be 20 metres away - you have to be able to read the number. I didn't have to do that in the second test so I think that relaxed me and luckily, second time round, I passed.

(12:07)

³ Sheena means the test examiner

I didn't drive then for quite some time - probably, three years maybe even four years, when I had to start to drive for my job. And I had a few incidents because what I should have done, I think, was to have some refresher lessons and I didn't do that, so I also had to travel on the motorway, which when I did my driving test you didn't actually go on the motorway as part of your driving test and things I think are quite different when you're driving on the motorway.

(M) Thanks, Sheena - what ... you said you had some incidents. Were there any serious accidents or ...?

(S) First incident - I was driving up to the motorway and there was a lorry in my way and I was on a small B road, and really I should have just waited and gone slowly, behind the lorry but I was in a rush and I went to overtake the lorry; unfortunately there was another lorry approaching me as I tried to overtake. I couldn't go back behind the lorry I was overtaking but luckily both lorry drivers braked quite heavily and I was able to just pull in front of the lorry. No one was hurt. I touched the lorry, but I didn't damage it - I just think of the nerves of those, both those lorry drivers, they were both quite shocked and worried, so I really regret that now. There were a few more as well but I don't think you need to hear about those.

(M) We don't need all the details of your various incidents, Sheena. But I'm very pleased to hear that no one was hurt.

(S) No - no one ever.

(M) One of things we should say here is one of the things to do if you are involved in an accident is to stop and exchange ... erm ... information with the other drivers - so you should give them your 'phone number and your name, and email address, I think probably would be wise, these days, but also you have to give them - tell them what your insurance is so ... and they should do the same for you, as well. I think that's right.

(C) Yeah - I think so too.

(M) Christine, have you got any interesting driving stories for us?

(C) Well, I was gonna *[going to]* start this week, Mark - when we were preparing for this and we knew we were going to be talking about driving. I thought, 'Oh they have a hazard perception test and a driving theory test - I'll see what they're like'. Because I didn't do either of those. Like Sheena, I learnt to drive a long time ago - I think it was 1971, I passed my test. Anyway - so I went on line to do the practice test you can do on line - and I'm pleased to say I passed the hazard recognition or "hazard awareness test" but I failed the driving theory test. It fairly shocked me. Because I have been driving for - what is that? 50 years nearly - and I consider myself to be a very safe driver, but I didn't know the answer to these questions.

And you know, when I passed my test, it was in a small town in Scotland and there weren't even any traffic lights. There were very few cars on the road and it was very straightforward⁴, but I do have a lot of experience. But I would like to tell you, perhaps, Mark about my partner, who is also normally a very good driver but he, just a few years ago, he had a - I would say - a lapse of concentration: he was on a motorway and he went to overtake - he pulled out into the lane to overtake, not realising that somebody was already in that lane behind him, and he basically caused an accident and there were about three cars involved in it. Nobody was hurt, fortunately, but the car was badly damaged and the other cars were also damaged, partly. And it was very shocking for him and for all the people involved, as well. And what he did - as a result, he was so shocked, that he decided he needed to do the equivalent of taking a test again, but instead of taking, you know, the ordinary driving test which he doesn't need to do, because he's not 70 - he doesn't need to - he has the right to carry on driving - but he decided to do the Institute of Advanced Motoring - the IAM test. So, he ... It took quite a bit of doing: he had lots of material to read and swot⁵ up - and he had to go out and do practice drives with a mentor⁶, and then have another test. You know, a practical test with somebody alongside you, and it has made a huge difference - he feels much more confident and he has become a better driver as a result.

⁴ straightforward means easy, not complicated

⁵ informal word for 'studying'

⁶ a mentor is someone who supports you with a task, works alongside you

(17:53)

(M) That's very interesting. Well I - again it was a long time ago that I passed my test, but I have to say my view is that the best drivers always fail their test the first time and then pass it ... pass it second time, because that's what happened to me. I actually ... my dad taught me to drive and erm ... which is quite amusing 'cos [*because*] my dad started driving before you had to take a test at all, so he had never passed a driving test - and then he taught me to drive. So maybe it wasn't that surprising I failed first time and anyway, I did eventually pass.

A couple of things - I have been involved in one that could have been very dangerous accident, on a motorway, but I'm glad to say, in the end, nobody was hurt and it wasn't my fault, either. It was a lorry that pulled out and knocked into my car as it went ... and I actually ended up on the fast lane of the motorway, facing the wrong way.

(C) My goodness!

(M) Yes - which could have been very dangerous but actually, it was OK. There wasn't a lot of traffic at the time, so I was lucky. I think the other thing I am going to confess too, is that there are speed cameras on a lot of roads and one of those cameras caught me doing, I think it was 35 miles an hour, in a 30 miles per hour limit. Erm ... and you ... I had a choice of either paying a fine⁷, or going on a course - a driving speed awareness course, it was called - and it was half-a-day, and actually, I thought it was quite a good course. And, you know ... There was a room full of people, all of whom had been caught speeding, and the tutor - the person who was teaching it - I felt a bit sorry for - because most of the people didn't want to be there, but actually she did a really good job and I learnt some things - I'm sure it's nothing like as systematic as the thing that Ian has done, that you talked about, Christine, but it did make me a little bit more aware about certain things and I think I became a slightly better driver as a result of that.

(C) Well I should confess, I too have done one of those courses.

(S) And I confess, I have too.

⁷ financial penalty sometimes levied instead of any other form of punishment

- (C) We're talking about driving - but actually one of the main concerns for drivers, at the moment, is often about parking - it's often very difficult to find a parking place, these days.
- (M) That's something for our listeners to be aware of - that you know, when you are parking your car, you have to be careful that you are parking somewhere that you are allowed and that you only stay for the amount of time that you're allowed as well, otherwise you will get fined, as clearly you have been, Christine.
- (C) Yes I have. But the important thing is, if you come back to your car and you have one of those stickers, those yellow and black stickers, on the windscreen - is that you read what it says and you pay the money, because otherwise, you could be fined twice as much, if you delay payment, and you might even be taken to court.
- (M) This episode has turned into a bit of a confessional hasn't it? (Laughter)
- (C) It has.
- (M) Well, we hope our listeners have found this useful.

(Music)

(21:55)

Language Support

- (M) In this part of the podcast, we are going to do some grammar and today we're going to focus on something called modal verbs. In this episode, we used a lot of these modal verbs - see if you can spot them. So, for example - I said - "many of you **may** want to drive in the future" "You **must** be 17 years old to drive a car" ... "you **will** need a copy" ... "you **must not** drive a car with any alcohol in your system" ... "I **should** have waited" " I **couldn't** go back" ... "I **would** say he had a lapse of concentration" ...
- Now Christine is going to tell us a bit more about these verbs.
- (C) Modal verbs which we used in that section are very common English words. They're verbs, but they are different from other verbs - they're special verbs - they go alongside another verb. So, the principal modal verbs in English are:

can, must, may, shall, will, could, might, would and should

and so they you use them to show how *certain*, how *possible*, or *impossible*, something is:

My keys **must** be in the car ...it **might** rain tomorrow..... that **can't** be Sheena's bag, it's too small,for example.

We also use them to do things like talk about *ability* - what you *can* or *can't* do - and to ask *permission* - to make **requests and offers**, for example:

I **can't** type ...**may** I ask a question? ... **could** I have a biscuit, please?
... **would** you like some help?

That's how they're used. They're very simple words to get used to. They don't change - so, I **can** is the same whether you're saying - **I can, we can, or he can, or she can**. Unlike other verbs where you have to put that -s at the end of it, you don't for the modal verbs. **She can, she must**, for example: they don't change. And they always go with another verb. And it's just that the main part - the stem, if you like - the main part of the infinitive, without the word 'to' - so you wouldn't say 'I must to write', you'd say "**I must write**",...." **I can type**", ..." **I may go to Scotland, on Wednesday**" ... "**you must not drive on the wrong side of the road**" ...and that's it.

To make a negative, you use the word "**not**" and you have to put it after the verb. So :

You **must not** drive on the wrong side of the road.

I **will not** go to town this evening.

Sometimes the **not** is shortened; so instead of saying

"I **can not** speak Italian", I would say

"I **can't** speak Italian"

and sometimes, the word really does change - I **shall not** see my sister - changes to -
I **shan't**

so it is quite a different spelling.

"I **shall (not)**" becomes "**shan't**" and "**will (not)**" becomes "**won't**"

"whether I **will** go to Halifax or I **won't** go to Halifax"

so they're a bit different, but it is quite straight forward - you put the word 'not' *after* the modal verb.

And they're very common - that's the other thing to say and really quite simple to use.

(M) And finally, this week, here are two quiz questions based on the kind of questions you might be asked in the citizenship test.

So here we go:

Question number 1: which of the following statements is correct?

- a. You must be at least 17 years old to drive a car in the UK
- b. You must be 16 years old to drive a car in the UK

Give you a moment ...

The correct answer is (a) - it is 17 years old, when you are allowed for the first time to drive a car.

Question 2 - which two of the following are needed to be allowed to drive in the UK?

- a. a doctor's report
- b. a driving licence
- c. motor insurance
- d. a breathalyser test

So - the answer to this one is (b) and (c) - you must have a driving licence and you must have motor insurance; the other two things might be needed in certain circumstances, but it is the other two that are necessary for anyone wanting to drive in the UK.

That's it for this week. I hope you've found it useful - don't forget that the transcript of this episode, and all the others, is available on our website :

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

We will be back with you soon, for another episode, until then, take care.

(Music)

(29:45)