

## NEW DRIVERS

### HOW TO TAKE THE ON-THE-ROAD SKILLS TEST

**KELLY MANNING:** Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Kelly Manning, Infocast Editor.

We are here today with **Sgt. Wayne Chappell** from DMV's Hamden Branch Office. Sgt. Chappell is here to give us an insight on what to expect during the on-the-road portion of the driver's test.

**KELLY MANNING:** Sgt. Chappell, I know a student has to use his or her own vehicle for the driver's test and that not all vehicles are allowed. For example, a person cannot use a company vehicle without a letter from the company. Are there any other situations that are similar to this?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** That's a very good question. One of those circumstances is that you can't use rental cars. It can be a long-term lease vehicle your family owns, but you can't use a daily rental if the car breaks down, and people will come in and be all excited about their test and find that that isn't allowed.

The other issue is that you can't use any dealer cars with dealer plates. If they're just a loaner car from the dealership, that's prohibited also. And the main reason behind this is usually insurance issues with the insurance companies that insure these vehicles. They don't allow it and put it sometimes specifically in their language that road tests aren't allowed with their type of vehicles.

The other thing is that people will bring an out-of-state vehicle. Now, that is allowed on a limited level, and that is that if the person can show by the declaration page of their insurance that they are insured to at least the Connecticut minimum standard, they are allowed to use that car on a test.

**KELLY:** Let's say I come in today to get my driver's license, I pass the eye test and the knowledge test, and we're heading outside to take the on-the-road test. What is the first thing I should do when I get in the car?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** Okay. The first thing the inspector will ask -- or the agent will ask you do to is when you approach the vehicle is to sit down and get ready. As part of your training you should already be prepared to do the basic things. Put your seatbelt on without prompting. You should be able to adjust your mirrors and clearly show the agents or speak to them and tell them, I'm adjusting my mirrors. So if they're looking at paperwork, you've made note to them that you're doing that specifically. Make sure your seat is adjusted correctly and that you know where your controls are because the next thing that will happen after you're in the seat and comfortable is that the inspector's going to give you instruction as he walks around the vehicle to check the safety of the equipment.

He's going to ask you about your lights, and turn those on. Where are your wipers? Do you know how to turn them on and off? Does the horn work? He's going to look at your tires as he walks around. And that all will be part of the pre-road test walk-around.

**KELLY:** After the walk-around and I put the car into drive, what should I expect next?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** Well, the next thing you should expect is not any surprises. Folks think that we're out to trick them, and they talk amongst their friends and they're all upset that we're going to try to trick them on a test, and that's not what occurs at all. What we're going to ask them to do in advance is to make any legal maneuver on the test or during the test that we feel is necessary at that point in time.

The one thing applicants should understand as they come in to take a test is that every office is geographically located in a different place and that, as simple as it sounds, makes a difference as to how we test.

If you went to, say, the Old Saybrook Office, where I spent some time, we do on every test a section of highway driving because it's a natural part of the test based

on the way the office is laid out. In some of the bigger cities or in the rural areas you won't get any city driving because you'd have to drive 20 minutes from the country office to get to it.

So there are variations, and don't make a mistake when you're coming for a test in assuming that because I'm going to this office I don't have to parallel park, or I won't have to back up. It's the wrong way to think about preparation for the test. We're testing whether you can drive the vehicle. And at any point in time on the test we may ask you to perform a maneuver you're unfamiliar with because you didn't expect it. But it is required of you to know what to do under any circumstance that's legal that we ask you to do.

When we ask you to make turns and everything, you should expect us to give you warning. The only time we won't is if we notice an emergency prior to you noticing it, and that happens often because we're the experienced operator versus the person being tested. We won't have time to adequately warn you. And if we say stop now, you may want to do it. But other than that, we will give you plenty of time. We'll tell you in advance what we'd like you to do, and we won't try to trick you. We won't make you do anything that's illegal.

**KELLY:** What are some of the driving skills that you will ask me to perform?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** Well, we do have a minimum amount of skills that we ask you to perform on the road. Basically on a typical road test in Connecticut, you're going to be asked to park the vehicle, one of the big weaknesses people have. They say I can drive straight down the road. Well, that's well and good, but parking causing a lot of property accidents with vehicles banging into other vehicles.

You're going to be asked to make left and right turns at intersections at stop signs. You're going to be asked to properly respond to changing traffic conditions, that is if it's snowing, you have to know what your speed should be, generally speaking. Not on that particular road, but in general anyway. The book will talk about that if you read that carefully about changing weather conditions.

You're also going to be asked to do a three-point turn. Depending on who taught you, your generation instructor might call it a K-turn, that was the older term, and it's still out there. So if you hear either a K-turn or a three-point turn, basically we're asking you to safely pull to the curb, to the right side of the road. And when it's safe, we ask you to turn around in the street. That's really what a three-point or a K-turn is.

And other than that, it will be just speed control, your awareness of other hazards that are possibly coming up as you drive down the road and how you handle those if they do come up.

We've had a person that had a bicyclist that didn't follow the bicycling rules and pulled out into the path of the motorist who was our test applicant. It doesn't happen it every day. It's pretty rare. But they handled it correctly. And it goes back to that philosophy of you'll have to be prepared if it arises to react to any situation any other driver may, and it won't be the same as your buddy that went out a day or two earlier because the weather might have changed, the traffic condition might have changed. And we also use multiple driving routes during our daily testing. We don't use the same course day after day.

**KELLY:** If I come to take my road test on a day weather conditions are poor, let's say it's snowing, will you go a little bit easier on me or will you expect me to perform just as well?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** Well, that's one of the exciting parts of driver testing is that you never know what you're going to get as you go out on a particular day or you sign up for a particular appointment because we can't control mother nature. She dictates what we're going to do. And unfortunately, if you show up on a day we are testing and there was snow on the ground, and you had started training say in late summer, early fall, and hadn't seen snow yet, you are going to be expected to be able to react to that. It may put you at a disadvantage, but it's the way we work because when we give you

that final license, it's as random as any day you go out and drive with that license whether it's going to rain or snow.

So we can't tailor our testing conditions to be a standardized road surface or weather condition. We have to go with what we've got. If it's really bad, you don't have to worry about we're going to put you in a dangerous situation. Again, public safety is paramount. Not only in how you drive and whether we let you loose with a license, but also is it good enough to let a new person out that doesn't have advanced experience.

So what we'll do is if you come in, and you make it here and it's a day we've decided to stop testing because of road conditions, we'll usually give you the law test, and that way that's out of the way. And then we'll reschedule you in-house for another day to come driving when the conditions are better. But you should, again, approach your driving experience and your training with the philosophy that you get a license that's unrestricted and you can drive in any weather any time of day or night. And you should be prepared for that.

So if you find that it's snowing that day, and you haven't driven in it before, if you don't think you can handle it, the mature thing to do is write off that test and make another appointment for the road. We can still give you the law test.

**KELLY:** What tips can you give me on the day of the test?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** I think one of the first things is before we get to the test, and that is to make sure that you take the time and look over the letter we gave you very carefully. And we probably get almost a third on a bad day of everybody that shows up doesn't come properly prepared with registration and insurance documents that are accurate. So you want to make sure that it's not a faxed card. You want to make sure it's not an outdated insurance card, and you want to make sure that the names on the insurance and registration match.

The other thing is to make sure that people bring their proper documents for who they are. To fight terrorism and fraud in America, we need to know who people

are as government entities when we test them. And we do tell them in that letter, once again, that they have to bring original documents, not photocopies, not faxed documents, not laminated documents.

And in regards to the tips of driving itself, one thing I would suggest, this office, we're talking in the Hamden office, we have a lot of adults as opposed to young people that just went through training fresh, and it's sometimes tougher for the adults. I'll give them a tip because when the adults come in to test, they may have had prior driving experience, and the problem is we always tell them half kidding to drive like you're supposed to, not like experienced drivers do. Because unfortunately, the mindset of a lot of motorists out there quickly forget the reason for all these rules and don't take them seriously enough and they start rolling stop signs, they start speeding 15, 20 miles an hour over the limit because it's something they did every day.

They come in to take a test, we actually tell them, make sure you don't do what people routinely do once they're experienced drivers. Don't roll a stop sign like you may have seen mom or dad or your friends do. Come to a full stop. Make sure you use your signals all the time. Don't be casual about the signals. They're on there for a reason. They didn't come as an option on the car. They're mandatory. Make sure when you're going down the road you put your headlights with the wipers. Just because people you know don't, and they drive around in the rain with just the headlights on, that doesn't mean that you should ignore the law.

We want you to drive to the best of your ability when you're out there so we can see and evaluate accurately what you're able to do. The bottom line is the tip about being prepared to drive is just come prepared to do what an experienced driver should do.

**KELLY MANNING:** What happens if I do fail the on-the-road section of the test? Do I have to come back and retake it? Do I have to retake all the sections?

**SGT. CHAPPELL:** Well, the answer is yes, you have to come back. And no, you don't have to take all the sections of the test. So it's good news, bad news. The good news is that the law test as of this moment is good indefinitely. So if you took it last year or

three or four months ago, you can drive and just take another driving test if you've passed the laws and it can be proven in the past.

As far as failing the driving portion of the test, there is a regulatory requirement that you wait 14 due to demands of the workload in our agency and other factors. That does fluctuate. That is a policy issue, and that does fluctuate. We've had you in the recent past have to wait 30 days. On a second failure you would wait several months. We're trying to meet public demand and our manpower doesn't match the demand. So we usually are months behind. It really becomes kind of a moot point. It's rare that you be able to find a test again for the road again in any office in less than 14 days if you should be unfortunate enough to fail your test.

And that's another concept, while we're talking about that, I'd like to just slip in. You'll hear people say, oh, well, I didn't like that agent, he failed me, or I don't like that inspector. You know, he failed me. It's an important concept to remember that the people that are doing this testing are not instructors. They're testers evaluating your skills. A person passes or fails themselves. And that's again, a personal responsibility issue and something you should be aware of. Don't let it rattle you that you are sitting there waiting for your road test and you get somebody who appears to be a little bit grumpy or is particularly nice and, oh, I hope I get him, and then you don't, and you let that affect your mindset as far as how you're going to do on the driving test.

Come well-prepared. Come with a positive attitude that you're going to do well. And do the best you can and show us what you have. And if you pass, you'll be all right. If you don't, we just want you to come back because you failed for some skills you need to upgrade.

**KELLY:** Well, thank you very much Sergeant Chappell for being us here today. I'm sure you've helped prepare students for the on-the-road section of the drivers test and hopefully calmed some of their nerves.

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