

Review of the Western Australian Motorcycle Graduated Licensing System

**RAC response to the Department of
Transport and Major Infrastructure**

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For the better

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RAC response to the *Motorcycle Graduated Licensing System Review*

We thank the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure (DTMI) for the opportunity to provide feedback to inform the development of recommendations for changes to Western Australia's (WA's) Motorcycle Graduated Licensing System (M GLS).

Summary of recommendations

1. RAC supports separating the M GLS from the Car GLS, which must also include a review of the novice driver categories to ensure that novice motorcyclists who already hold a car licence are subject to appropriate alcohol and demerit point restrictions.
2. RAC calls for moped rules to be reviewed as part of the Government's licensing system reforms.
3. RAC supports increasing the minimum age to acquire a learner motorcycle licence from 16 to 18 years.
4. RAC supports the proposal to increase the provisional period from 2 years to 3 years, which should also be reflected in updates to the novice driver categories.
5. RAC supports the replacement of mandatory supervision with new mandatory training and assessment – and associated changes to the learner's permit validity and to learner restrictions on late-night riding. Further consideration should be given to the length of the new training courses.
6. RAC supports restrictions on learner and provisional motorcycle riders from carrying pillion passengers.
7. RAC supports banning mobile phone use for learner and provisional motorcycle riders, but the proposed exemption for playing audio should be reviewed further.
8. The Government should monitor the impacts of requirements in Victoria and New South Wales for novice motorcyclists to wear protective gear.

About RAC

RAC is a purpose-led member organisation. Since our foundation in 1905, RAC has existed to be a driving force for a Better WA – this is our purpose. We act as a voice for more than 1.3 million members in more than 60 per cent of Western Australian households. We work collaboratively

with government, industry, our members and all Western Australians to champion change that will deliver safer, sustainable, and connected communities – this is our 2030 vision:

- **Safe** – We want fewer people killed or seriously injured on our roads;
- **Sustainable** – We want to reduce harmful vehicle emissions for cleaner, healthier air; and
- **Connected** – We want well-planned communities and transport that better connect people and places.

Introduction

RAC supports a GLS and M GLS to enable people to gain practical driving and riding experience in lower risk situations.

In September 2024, RAC participated in the State Government’s Road Safety Roundtable held to address an increase in WA’s road deaths and the rate of young people being killed and injured on WA roads. One of the key issues raised by RAC was the need for the GLS for both car drivers and motorcyclists to be strengthened. In relation to motorcycle riders, we called for the M GLS to be strengthened to reflect best practice from other states, for example:

- increasing the minimum age
- introducing an off-road pre-learner training course
- introducing restrictions on carrying pillion passengers and hands-free mobile phone use

RAC welcomed the October 2024 State Government commitment to commission a comprehensive review into the existing learner and provisional driver licensing schemes, as well as skills and training requirements for motorcycle and heavy vehicle licences. RAC was represented on the Graduated Licensing Review Reference Group, through which we helped to identify potential changes to the GLS and M GLS and provided input into the development of discussion papers regarding improvements to the current licensing systems. In particular, RAC highlighted the need to treat motorcycle licensing distinct from car licensing and to base the M GLS on research evidence and best practice models specifically focused on motorcycling.

Separation of GLS for motorcycles and cars

RAC supports the separation of the motorcycle licensing process from the car, acknowledging the fundamental differences between driving a car and riding a motorcycle.

Data included in the consultation discussion paper indicates that, in 2024, 96 per cent of people issued a motorcycle learner’s permit already held a car licence. Under a unified GLS, a full car licence holder is exempt from many of the M GLS elements designed to enable people to gain practical experience in lower risk situations, despite their lack of motorcycling experience. This includes requirements to display P plates, have a zero blood alcohol concentration (BAC) and to follow night time riding restrictions and would also include other restrictions for provisional licence holders being proposed as part of this consultation (for example passenger and mobile phone restrictions).

Full car licence holders have demonstrated an understanding of the road rules and the ability to safely operate a car, but riding a motorcycle is far riskier (Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q), 2020) and requires higher levels of both vehicle control and cognitive skills than car driving, including specialised control skills such as countersteering and dynamic balance (Haworth & Mulvihill, 2005). To reduce crash risk, all novice motorcyclists should be required to gain riding experience in low risk situations (e.g. daytime riding with no passengers or mobile phone use). In addition, requiring all novice motorcyclists to display P plates serves a dual safety function: externally, they warn other drivers that the operator is

inexperienced and may react unpredictably, encouraging greater caution and space; internally, they reinforce the rider's novice status, reminding even experienced car drivers that they are beginners on a motorcycle.

The case for separation is supported by an Austroads international review of effective motorcycle rider licensing systems and interventions (Austroads, 2014). Based on the high risks attached to novice motorcycle operation, the report recommends that motorcycle novices complete all requirements of the GLS regardless of a full/open car licence status.

Minimum age for learner's permit

RAC supports increasing the minimum age to acquire a learner motorcycle licence from 16 to 18 years.

Riding a motorcycle is riskier and more difficult than driving a car, hence it makes sense that the minimum age for a learner's permit be older than the equivalent for a car licence (which is set at 16 in WA). This encourages young people to learn to drive a car before they learn to ride a motorcycle.

The Austroads discussion paper (Austroads, 2014) recommends a minimum age of 17 for a motorcycle learner's permit along with the requirement to have held an Australian car licence (provisional or open) for at least 12 months. This was based on research suggesting that the higher the entry age to motorcycle riding the lower the rider crash risk at any licence level. Queensland is the only Australian jurisdiction that currently requires a learner rider to already hold a car licence (for at least 12 months). The Austroads recommendations translate to a minimum age of 18 where the minimum provisional driver age is 17 (which applies in most Australian jurisdictions, including Queensland and WA).

Transport for New South Wales' evaluation of their M GLS (Transport for New South Wales, 2019) states that an 'older versus younger minimum age' is beneficial, and that the learner licence should not be available for motorcyclists at a younger age than the minimum provisional driver age, which in WA is 17. This reflects that in New South Wales both learner riders and provisional drivers are permitted to use the roads unsupervised.

In recent years, the Centre for Automotive Safety Research (CASR) has published reports to inform reviews of the M GLS in both South Australia (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2018) and Tasmania (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022). CASR notes research findings that younger riders, whether new or fully licensed, have more crashes per distance travelled than older riders. CASR states that the minimum age for a motorcycle learner's permit should be at least 17 to ensure it is not lower than the minimum provisional driver age. However, they recommend a minimum age of 18 to allow people to reach a greater level of maturity before being exposed to the risks of motorcycling. A minimum age of 18 is already in place in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia for most riders.

Minimum periods for the learner phase and learner's permit validity

If the Government proceeds with the proposal to allow learner riders to ride unsupervised, RAC supports reducing the learner permit validity period from its current three year validity, with renewal based on redoing mandatory training and assessment prerequisites.

With supervision requirements removed, it would be important to restrict how long people can ride on their L plates for, to avoid a situation where learners are lacking an incentive to progress to the next stage of the M GLS (and therefore continue to ride without completing further training or testing). This is reflected in other jurisdictions that allow learner riders to ride solo, where a validity period of around 12 months is typical.

The New South Wales M GLS evaluation (Transport for New South Wales, 2019) found indirect research suggesting potential benefits for longer (95+ days) rather than shorter minimum learner periods, while the Austroads model M GLS proposes a minimum learner period of six months, which WA already meets. CASR suggests that if an M GLS includes pre-provisional training then it is preferable for this not to take place too long after the pre-learner training to avoid diminishing the effectiveness of these two components of the overall training program (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022).

A learner period with a minimum of six months and a maximum of 12 months appears to offer a reasonable balance between giving riders sufficient time to develop skills and experience while encouraging them to complete further training and testing in a timely manner. Renewal should involve repeating pre-learner training and testing so that learner riders are receiving formal training at least once a year.

Minimum period for provisional phase

RAC supports the proposal to increase the provisional period from 2 years (6 months P1 and 18 months P2) to 3 years (1 year P1 and 2 years P2).

While the optimal length of time for a provisional licence is unknown, extending the provisional period to 3 years aligns with the planned changes to the WA car GLS as well as with most other Australian jurisdictions. It also aligns with recommendations from CASR (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022) to give novice riders sufficient time to gain on-road experience while risks are minimised by restrictions.

Transport for New South Wales' evaluation of their M GLS (Transport for New South Wales, 2019) found that the introduction of a two-year P2 period in 2009 contributed to declines in casualty crash rates for both P2 riders and full licence riders.

The Austroads discussion paper (Austroads, 2014) observes that age is significantly more important than experience for motorcycle riders with young riders being at greatest risk. In addition, age and experience factors are more important for motorcycle riders than for car drivers.

A 3 year provisional period would mean that the minimum age for unrestricted riding would be between 20 and 21 ½ years of age, depending on whether the minimum learner age is increased from 16 to 18 (noting the current minimum provisional age is 17). This ensures that GLS restrictions are in place for all 17-19 year olds, who have a significantly highest rate of deaths and serious injuries than any other age group, at approximately double the overall rate (Road Safety Commission, 2025).

Supervised riding requirements

RAC supports the removal of the supervised riding hours requirement, alongside the introduction of mandatory pre-learner and pre-provisional training and assessment.

The Austroads discussion paper (Austroads, 2014) recommends excluding on-road supervision of learner riders from the M GLS due to lack of evidence of effectiveness, a position that is supported by CASR (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022) and has been implemented in most Australian jurisdictions. This relates to fundamental differences between a motorcycle (where a supervisor must either ride as a pillion passenger, ride in a sidecar or supervise from a separate vehicle) and a car (where the supervisor can sit next to the driver).

Requiring (and even allowing) a supervisor to ride as a pillion passenger makes a motorcycle more difficult for the learner rider to handle and so can increase crash risk. Supervising from another motorcycle risks distracting both the learner and the supervisor from the primary riding task. The learner needs to take note of the supervisor and respond to their directions, which could distract from the primary riding task. Similarly, the supervisor will need to monitor the learner and so will themselves also be distracted from the primary task of riding, which could increase risk.

Unlike with some car supervision, a supervising rider also has no ability to intervene through operating vehicle controls to help a learner avoid a crash.

While RAC is not aware of any evidence that the rider supervision requirement has increased learner crashes, there is also no research evidence that learner rider supervision reduces crashes (whereas there is such evidence for driver supervision).

Late-night riding restriction

If the Government proceeds with the proposal to allow learner riders to ride unsupervised, RAC supports the introduction of night time riding restrictions during the learner phase.

This would be a commonsense change to mirror restrictions already in place for the P1 stage, and ensure learner riders did not have greater freedom than P1 riders. It reflects that late-night riding is riskier than daytime riding, due to reduced visibility of the rider and the road and due to association with risky behaviours.

Both Austroads (Austroads, 2014) and CASR (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022) recommend night curfews for learner riders.

Passenger restrictions

RAC supports restrictions on learner and provisional motorcycle riders from carrying pillion passengers.

Carrying a passenger makes the task of balancing a motorcycle more difficult and in some circumstances can result in distraction and encouragement of risk taking (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022). Moreover, pillion passengers are often more likely than riders to be killed or injured in crashes (Austroads, 2014). Transport for New South Wales' evaluation of their M GLS (Transport for New South Wales, 2019) identified pillion passenger restrictions through the learner and provisional phases as a best practice M GLS element, and most Australian jurisdictions have implemented this, at least for the L and P1 phases.

Mobile phone restrictions

RAC supports banning mobile phone use for learner and provisional motorcycle riders. The consultation document proposes to still allow hands-free use through in-built navigation systems and playing audio, if set up prior to commencing the journey. RAC supports allowing hands-free use for navigation, but we have concerns that allowing hands-free use for playing audio could distract the motorcyclist from the riding task and mask important auditory cues such as traffic sounds, sirens, or engine noises. This proposed exemption should be reviewed further.

Western Australian research has shown that drivers are about four times more likely to end up in hospital following a crash where they were using their phone. Even legal acts such as using hands-free (e.g. Bluetooth) devices have been shown to increase the risk of having a serious crash (McEvoy, et al., 2005). While there has been little research examining mobile phone use and motorcycling, some studies have noted mobile phone use at the time of the crash among

hospitalised riders and a higher risk of crash involvement being associated with self-reported phone use while riding (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022).

Transport for New South Wales' evaluation of their M GLS (Transport for New South Wales, 2019) identified restricting all mobile phone use through the learner and provisional phases as a best practice M GLS element, and most Australian jurisdictions have implemented this, at least for the L and P1 phases. It also aligns with the planned changes to the WA car GLS.

Mandatory pre-learner and pre-provisional training and assessment

RAC supports the introduction of mandatory pre-learner and assessment as a prerequisite to obtaining a learner's permit and pre-provisional training as a prerequisite to the provisional driving assessment during the learner rider phase. However, careful consideration needs to be given to the length of these training sessions to ensure they are adequate. For example, the proposed one day pre-learner training prior to permitting learners to ride unsupervised compares with two days in several other jurisdictions.

The Austroads discussion paper (Austroads, 2014) affirms that novice riders should be subject to competency-based skills assessment of the three key riding competencies of braking, curve riding and obstacle avoidance before being allowed to ride on-road. It notes that the effectiveness of mandatory rider training has not been established, but novice rider training programs may assist novices to gain the skills required for solo on-road riding.

Transport for New South Wales' evaluation of their M GLS (Transport for New South Wales, 2019) identified mandatory pre-licence education and training as a best practice M GLS element.

In 2015, the WA Government recommended investigating a competency-based practical riding assessment for motorcyclists, as well as investigating the feasibility of off-road pre-learner training. They recommended that assessments should verify if riders can safely control their motorcycle and demonstrate essential on-road skills like hazard perception and understanding of their vulnerability (Motorcycle Safety Review Group, 2015).

Particularly in the absence of on-road supervision, it is important that learners can demonstrate they can safely operate a motorcycle off-road before being permitted to practice on-road. A mandatory training course provides a more comprehensive way of both developing and assessing a learner's competency than a standalone test.

The consultation paper notes that research suggests a new learner rider will require approximately four days of pre-learner training to ride solo, but most jurisdictions currently offer this training as a condensed two-day course. In addition, the New South Wales Government has committed to extending its pre-learner course, alongside introducing group on-road coaching and assessment (New South Wales Government, 2025). In this context, the consultation paper proposal for WA to introduce a one-day pre-learner course raises the question of whether this training will be sufficiently comprehensive to enable a learner motorcyclist to ride unsupervised on the roads.

Other comments

Moped licence

The consultation paper identifies three classes of motorcycle under WA legislation, namely mopeds, learner approved motorcycles (LAMS) and unrestricted motorcycles. A moped is defined as a motorcycle designed to not be capable of exceeding 50 km/h and either has an engine capacity that does not exceed 50 cc or is not powered by a piston engine. The consultation

paper notes that moped licensing largely falls outside of the current Motorcycle GLS requirements and is not part of the proposed reforms.

The Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure website lays out the existing process for riding a moped in WA (Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure, 2025). Currently in WA, if you already hold a WA driver's licence (not a learner's permit) to drive a vehicle of another class, for example a car licence, you are legally able to ride a moped. Alternatively, someone can apply for a moped learner's permit from the age of 15½. Once they have been granted a learner's permit, they can learn to ride, but they must ride with an approved supervisor – either as a pillion passenger, in a sidecar or on another moped or motorcycle. They are subject to similar existing learner and provisional restrictions as motorcyclists (e.g. displaying plates and a zero BAC requirement) but do not have to record minimum supervised hours. Someone can take their practical driving assessment for a moped licence once they are 16 years old.

Other Australian states do not have a specific moped licence class. Residents of South Australia and Queensland can ride a moped if they have a driver's licence for another vehicle class (as is the case in WA), meaning they cannot ride a moped until they are at least 17. Residents of New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania can only ride a moped if they have a motorcycle learner's permit or driver's licence. This means that people cannot learn to ride a moped in Victoria until 18 years old.

The Austroads discussion paper notes that mopeds handle like motorcycles and carry a crash risk similar to motorcycles, and so argues that riders operating a moped on Australian roads should hold either a moped licence/permit or a permit/licence for a motorcycle class, but in either case should be subject to the same novice rider conditions and requirements as the riders of larger scooters and motorcycles (Austroads, 2014).

CASR's research report informing South Australia's M GLS review (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2018) highlights 2013 research analysing five years of police reported crash data in Queensland. The research found similar crash rates per registered vehicle for motorcycles, scooters and mopeds, but mopeds had four times the crash rate per distance travelled. Based on this research, CASR recommended that riding a moped without a motorcycle licence be prohibited and that those riding a moped should have to progress through the M GLS in the same way as those wishing to ride a scooter or motorcycle.

RAC believes that moped rules must be reviewed as part of the Government's GLS review process. Failure to update moped rules could result in:

- Young people still being permitted to ride a moped from age 15½ and to ride solo from age 16, which provides an incentive to learn to use the roads in a vehicle that provides far less protection than a car, and compares with a minimum age of 16 to ride an e-scooter.
- Moped learners being required to gain experience with a supervisor, even though this would be banned for motorcycle learners due to safety concerns.
- Provisional moped licence holders not being subject to the same passenger and mobile phone restrictions as provisional motorcycle licence holders.
- Car licence holders continuing to be permitted to ride a moped even where they have no training or experience in how to operate one.

Novice driver categories

As part of reviewing the minimum learner period and the length of the provisional period, the novice driver categories under the demerit point system should be reviewed and simplified to align with the new periods. Under the current system, a novice driver type 1 is someone who is either a learner who does not yet hold a driver's licence or has held a driver's licence for up to one year or periods adding up to one year. A novice driver type 2 is someone who has held a driver's

licence for more than one year but less than 2 years. This means that the novice driver type 1 currently includes learner's permit holders, red P plate holders and some green P plate holders, which is a potential source of confusion. In addition, people who spend longer learning to ride are subject to the novice driver type 1 limit for a longer period of time.

Furthermore, the novice categories only apply to the first licence, so a motorcyclist who has already progressed beyond the novice period through holding car licence is not currently subject to either reduced demerit points or to a zero BAC requirement. WA appears to be unique among Australian jurisdictions in motorcyclists with a provisional licence not needing to have a zero BAC if they have held another driver licence for two years beyond the learner phase (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022). As indicated by the data in the consultation paper, this means that most learner motorcyclists are not subject to reduced demerit points and, on obtaining their motorcycle licence, most are no longer subject to a zero BAC requirement.

The approach taken in Victoria is to apply a lower demerit point limit to any period of 12 months to all learner and provisional /probationary licence holders (including those with novice rider restrictions on a full licence) in addition to the standard 3-year demerit point limit. Since both the 12-month and 3-year periods are rolling, this removes the need to define novice driver categories or compare offence date against the date a licence was issued.

Victoria also requires riders to have a zero BAC if they have an 'E' condition on their licence, which applies for the first three years of holding a motorcycle licence. There is extensive evidence that alcohol is a risk factor for motorcycle crashes and higher injury severity, and a recent study found that increases in BAC to 0.02 and 0.05 had a negative effect on a whole range of riding metrics, with the effect greatest for novices (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, 2022). CASR recommends that all novice motorcyclists (i.e. people on a learner's permit or restricted licence) should have a zero BAC regardless of any other licences held. Based on this research, and on the Government's stated aim to separate the motorcycle licensing process from the car, the Road Traffic Act should be amended so that a zero BAC applies to novice motorcyclists even if they already hold a full car licence.

Protective gear requirements

The WA Government should monitor the impacts of requirements in Victoria and New South Wales for novice motorcyclists to wear protective gear. As of 1 July 2026, both jurisdictions will require learners to wear a hi-vis jacket or vest and New South Wales will also require learners and provisional riders to wear protective gloves.

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