



## Tackling the Challenge of Novice Drivers

It is only when attending Roadsafe – a major national Road Safety exhibition - that one begins to appreciate fully the scale of the work of The Under 17 Car Club and the Pathfinder Project - what it does and the attendant ambition.

A series of conversations with Road Safety Officers and other professionals from across the country is comforting in the sense that everybody is doing something about novice drivers but disconcerting when the limits become apparent. Some areas focus all their activity on cycling, actively discouraging car use. Others run “experiences” varying in length from 2-4 hours during which the student gets battered with classroom theory and about 20 minutes at the wheel of a dual control car. One local authority insists on parents attending – then separates parent from student and gives each a completely different experience.

Commercial programmes are typically focused on the technical skills required to pass the DSA test, often conducted at space limited venues with expensive hourly rates, dual control cars, in some cases automatics (Autocar Smart Cars, Minis at Goodwood) and in all cases no parental involvement beyond taking the student along – for which they should be complimented – and writing the cheque. Of course, if the parent is wealthy enough the child can keep on attending and work through a series of ‘lessons’.....

Meanwhile, around 1 in 5 novice drivers continue to be involved in a reportable road traffic collision during their first year on the road.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmtran/506/50607.htm#n580>  
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/road-accidents-and-safety-annual-report-2010>

Compare and contrast as the examiners would say....

The Under 17 Car Club engages child and parent in an extended experience in which they can learn together over as much as 5 or 6 years. It has a proprietary tuition methodology based on Roadcraft and continuously refined and developed since 1976. It provides individual tuition manuals and maintains development records for Members, guidance manuals for Associates and Instructors. Supporting that there is an ‘operations manual’ (the essential operational, health and safety system), and ‘home-grown’ trained Marshals who have grown up with the Club, its ethos and values. It has evolved so much that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Members are able to say ‘Car Club wasn’t like this in my day’!

It is truly extraordinary that everything The Under 17 Car Club has done in its 38 year life has been done by volunteers.

The Club offers a range of experiences broader and deeper than most licence holders will achieve during a lifetime on the road. After mastering the basics in the parents’ car, many Members progress to close manoeuvring skills, skid training, first aid, advanced driving, a deep knowledge of driving theory, basic mechanical skills and always mechanical sympathy. At Grades 1 & X members are privileged to drive unsupervised – they have consent to drive anything in the car park – from a Nissan Micra to an Aston Martin, a Lotus Elise to a 6 Axle articulated lorry or a coach. Left-hand drive, right hand drive, manual, automatic, all are available, and facilities range from simple layouts on airfields to a race circuit and up to 14 miles of ‘real road’.

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Attitudinally, the Member learns to drive in a positive environment, encouraged, stimulated, engaged in a “why not” atmosphere with a tuition process that places as much emphasis on understanding “why” as it does on “what” and “how” and an organising team that actively pursues opportunities, finding ways by which Driving Members can do things, not ways of stopping them. Progress through the grading structure is made through demonstrable understanding of risk, safe, calm attitudes, patience and appreciation of others and consistency of performance as it is through technical skill.

Talking of consistency, the Grade One test requires 3 separate drives, with at least two different examiners and at least two completely different venues while Grade X requires 6 qualifying drives over 6 months before the 3 final tests can be taken – in each case the test covering a wide range of driving skills at up to motorway speed and at least two different vehicles, one of which the Member should, ideally, not have driven before and all the time expecting the candidate to demonstrate the attitudinal maturity of an experienced adult. Compare the results of all that with the DSA experience.....

	General Public	Combined surveys
1 <sup>st</sup> Year Accident Rate	1 in 5	1 in 15
DSA Test Pass Rate (X/1)	47%	89%
DSA Test Pass Rate (All)	47%	79%
Points on Licence	14.3%	4%
Pass Plus Participation	15%	37%
IAM/RoSPA Rate	0.5%	9%

All Car Club driving takes place with lots of other traffic and a wide range of skills amongst the other drivers. Visitors, especially on Magic Day, are always stunned by the quality of driving displayed by the Members – at all grades and ages!

The surveys (see table) in 2006 and 2012 have both shown that what the Under 17 Car Club is doing delivers substantial benefits in reduced risk and better driving for their Members when compared with their peer group.

In addition to this since 2008 The Under 17 Car Club has been delivering its Pathfinder Project: a highly intensive, 5 day programme for rising 17s. Pathfinder draws on tightly focused versions of the Car Club materials, supplemented by specially developed and highly participative classroom sessions but otherwise adopting the same ethos, values, process and methods of assessment. The differences in delivery are there so that the risk and safety messages can be conveyed in a shorter timeframe and Pathfinder students can develop appropriate attitudes in the much shorter timeframe than is available at Car Club.

Pathfinder is a scheme which goes well beyond that offered by anybody else – local authority, commercial, charity – nobody does what Pathfinder is doing.

Pathfinder succeeded in bidding for a grant from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in Gloucestershire and also receives volunteer support from Gloucestershire Constabulary, the Road Safety Partnership and the Local IAM group. Individual students may apply for bursaries and this ensures that anyone can take part, regardless of their means – but the bulk of the commitment and money still comes from the parents, the work is still undertaken by volunteers, many of them volunteers from The Under 17 Car Club.



The hard part of the learning still rests with the Students! A study is currently in hand to determine whether the safety benefits of Pathfinder are as encouraging as those of The Under 17 Car Club. So what, I anticipate you shouting!

The "So what" is that what Members, Associates and Volunteers of The Under 17 Car Club collectively undertake and achieve is extraordinary in providing a unique and life-changing experience to the students and parents they work with – and it is not unappreciated. The following are feedback comments following recent Pathfinder events:

"We keep our children safe as they learn to walk, tell them what is sharp, hot or poisonous, teach them to swim and about stranger danger. Thanks to Pathfinder I have now helped teach my son to be a safe driver. I can't thank you enough for the peace of mind!"

Kerry Swan, October 2013

"I would like to thank both you and the volunteers very much for taking the time to teach myself and others how to drive, how to reduce the risk we pose and what risks we might encounter."

Jo Salazar, October 2013

"A simple thank you is so inadequate for the wonderful experience we all had last week at Cheltenham racecourse. Luke left with his expectations considerably exceeded both in terms of what he achieved personally and of the course itself. The openness and frankness of the presentations (especially the statistics relating to young male drivers) were extremely well delivered. This sort of information, delivered as it was, carries so much more coming from someone who is NOT the child's parent. They were all listening!!

"Given your stunningly inclusive attitude to youngsters with disability (you can only imagine the depth of my feelings watching my daughter driving my car yesterday) coupled with the positivity of the volunteers I believe your group to be outstanding. I doubt you have any idea just how difficult it is to find a group with the attitude yours has."

Steph Ridal, October 2012

To find out more about The Under 17 Car Club:  
To find out more about Pathfinder:

[www.under17-carclub.co.uk](http://www.under17-carclub.co.uk)  
[www.under17driver.co.uk](http://www.under17driver.co.uk)

