

Accompanied driving

Summary

Accompanied driving means that a novice driver is only allowed to drive when accompanied by an experienced driver. This measure has already been introduced in several countries. The most widely used variant allows youths to take driving lessons and get a driving license from the age of 16, but allows only accompanied driving until the age of 18. Research has shown that these young drivers are less often involved in crashes once they participate in traffic independently. However, accompanied driving's effectiveness depends on the number of hours or kilometres that are driven accompanied, the variation in routes, and on the quality of the supervisor. It is expected that early 2011, accompanied driving will be made possible in the Netherlands.

Background and content

Accompanied driving means that a novice driver is only allowed to drive a car when accompanied by an experienced driver. There are many different variants of accompanied driving. Within Europe two main variants can be distinguished: accompanied driving as a continuation to having passed the driving test (an 'experience module'), and accompanied driving *without* having passed the driving test. Late 2008, the Dutch Minister of Transport announced in a letter addressed to Parliament that he wishes to make accompanied driving possible in the Netherlands (Dutch Ministry of Transport, 2008). In this proposal, youths can obtain their driving licence from their 17th birthday by taking a standard driving exam. Then, until the 18th birthday driving is only allowed when accompanied by an experienced driver. This driver must meet certain requirements, for example regarding the years of driving experience and his driving behaviour.

From the age of 18 it will remain possible to pass the driving test and to drive independently immediately after.

This fact sheet mainly discusses the experiences with accompanied driving in other countries, its effectiveness in reducing the number of crashes, and the expected effectiveness in the Netherlands. The level of safety during the period of accompanied driving and the requirements for the experienced driver will also be discussed.

What is the value of accompanied driving?

Novice drivers are often involved in crashes because of their limited driving experience. Young, novice drivers are involved in about 20% of all serious crashes in the Netherlands, while they make up only 8% of the driving licence holders. In addition, their involvement in serious crashes per kilometre travelled is much higher than that of experienced drivers. Accompanied driving gives novice drivers driving experience under relatively safe circumstances before they become independent road users. The expected result is that they will be involved in fewer crashes. Lack of experience, though, is not the only cause of their high crash rate. The fact sheet [Young novice drivers](#) gives a detailed survey of these causes.

Is accompanied driving widely used?

Accompanied driving is applied in a large number of countries. In Australia, the United States and in New Zealand it is often part of a 'graduated driving licence' (see also the fact sheet [Graduated driving licence](#)). In Europe accompanied driving usually is a training option beside the traditional driver training from the age of 18. *Table 1* gives an overview of the European countries that have made accompanied driving possible. It is expected that the Netherlands will join in early 2011: youths can obtain their driving licence from their 17th birthday, after which they can drive only when accompanied by an experienced driver until they are 18 years old.

Country	% of novice drivers that engage in accompanied driving	Average number of hours or kilometres of accompanied driving per person
Spain	Minder dan 1	
Estonia	5	
Luxemburg	10	
Austria	15	3,000 km
Germany	20	
Finland	20	1,000 km
France	30	3,000 km
Northern Ireland	34	10 uur
Belgium	55	
Graet Britan	60	15 uur
Latvia	80	
Norway	82	2,000 km
Sweden	90	80 hrr (= 4,000 km)

Table 1. *Popularity of accompanied driving and the average amount of accompanied driving in kilometres or hours in European countries in 2006 (Source: CIECA, 2006, in Twisk & Stacey 2007). An empty cell means that no information is available.*

How effective is the measure?

Before the effectiveness of accompanied driving is discussed further, the difficulty of evaluating such a measure should be mentioned. The difficulty lies, among other things, in the effect of *self-selection*. *Self-selection* is a phenomenon that occurs when one can choose oneself whether or not to participate in a programme. If a difference is found between those participating in a programme and a *reference group*, the cause may lie in the characteristics of the participating group rather than in the effectiveness of the programme.

A pre-test is necessary to gain insight in the effect of self-selection. Unfortunately, for accompanied driving it is impossible to do a pre-test and a post-test on crash involvement with the same subjects; after all, they are beginners without any previous history as a driver. Therefore, this type of study compares the crash involvement of the group that participated in accompanied driving with that of novice drivers in the period before the measure was introduced, a *reference group*. This is done during the first years after having passed the driving test. Collecting background data on the subjects is another way to check on self-selection. If the data shows that the group differs strongly from the entire group, it is clear that the results cannot be generalized across all young drivers.

In addition to the existence of a reference and a pre-test, the validity of the assessment results also depends on the proportion of novice drivers that chooses accompanied driving. If the proportion of participants grows, for instance to 90%, there will be more certainty about the total effectiveness of the measure. A more detailed description of the assessment of this type of measure is given in the fact sheet [Contents and assessment of traffic education programmes](#).

Positive results

In Sweden youths can choose for accompanied driving in preparation for the driving test. There, the minimum age for accompanied driving was lowered from 17.5 to 16 years old in 1993. The age that allows independent traffic participation remained 18. This caused an increase in the number of hours of accompanied driving from an average of 47.9 hours to an average of 117.6 hours per person. 45-50% of the youths made use of the possibility to start with accompanied driving at a younger age than 17.5 years old. It has been investigated whether this increase in hours of practice resulted in fewer crashes once independent driving was allowed at the age of 18. Because many novice drivers choose this variant, the results apply to a relatively large group of novice drivers. The study showed that over a two-year period the crash rate of the accompanied driving group decreased with 40% (Gregersen et al., 2000). The effect of self-selection may be important here, because the young novice drivers were mostly from a higher socio-economic class. The decrease in crash rate was still great after correction: 35%. This is a very substantial effect, much larger than the effects of, for example, changes in the driver education or the introduction of a demerit point system. It is especially remarkable that this

sizeable effect was found in Sweden, as Sweden already is one of the countries with the safest road traffic in Europe. Logically, it is difficult to achieve further safety gains in a country that is quite safe because many measures have already been taken.

In 1999, Austria introduced the possibility to obtain a full driving license at the age of 17 on the condition that a training was followed consisting of 26 theory lessons and twelve practical lessons, and at least 3,000 kilometres were travelled in the form of accompanied driving. Assessment showed that the programme was especially effective during the first 2,500 kilometres. Although these results are promising, it cannot be excluded that self-selection has played a (large) role, because the conclusion was based on only a small part (8%) of the novice drivers. In addition it also needs to be taken into account that by lowering the age for independent driving to 17, the novice driver is exposed to traffic dangers earlier. This will probably increase the crash involvement, rather than reduce it (Twisk & Stacey, 2007). Later in this fact sheet, this will be discussed in further detail.

In Germany accompanied driving was introduced in 2005. Here, youths from the age of 16.5 can begin their driver training. From their 17th birthday they are allowed to obtain their driver's licence by taking the standard driving test. After that follows a period, until their 18th birthday, in which they can only drive when accompanied by an experienced driver. The first data from Germany show that these drivers commit around 20% fewer offences and cause around 30% fewer crashes once they participate in traffic independently, compared with drivers who had no period of accompanied driving. These positive results are mentioned in a preliminary report (Feddersen & Heinzman, 2007) and a presentation (Bressensdorf, 2008). Since the final evaluation has not yet been made, nothing can be said about possible interfering factors such as self-selection.

Finally, indications for the effectiveness of accompanied driving can also be found in the effects of the American systems for a 'graduated driver license', which accompanied driving forms part of (see also the fact sheet [The graduated driving licence](#)). Studies assessing these systems show a positive effect on crash involvement (Shope et al., 2007). This effect is assumed to partly be due to accompanied driving. However, the precise extent cannot be determined because accompanied driving's effect cannot be separated from the other parts of the graduated license.

Negative results

The experiences in Norway and France are less positive. Just like Sweden, Norway lowered the minimum age to start a driver training from 17 to 16, under the condition of accompanied driving until the age of 18. This extended period of accompanied driving hardly had any effect, because it did not lead to more accompanied driving in practice (Sagberg, 2000; in OECD & ECMT, 2006). However, those who had had a long period of accompanied driving turned out to have a lower crash rate (Sagberg, 2002; in OECD & ECMT, 2006). This conclusion must be drawn cautiously, as self-selection may be involved: careful novice drivers may drive more kilometres accompanied.

Although initially, based on assessment studies, the conclusion was drawn that accompanied driving in France had a positive road safety effect, the most recent research reports negative effects (Page, Ouimet & Cuny, 2004). In this optional training variant, 16 year-olds first receive a 20 hour professional driver training, followed by at least 3,000 kilometres of accompanied driving until they are 18 years old. Page, Ouimet & Cuny used insurance data on injury crashes in which drivers were involved who had chosen accompanied driving at the age of 16. They compared these with data on crashes of novice drivers who had received the traditional training from the age of 18. Against all expectations, the group that had participated in accompanied driving was involved in crashes more frequently than the group that had received the traditional driver training. The authors give a number of possible explanations: the driven routes may have contained insufficient training moments, the novice driver may have been too dependent on the supervisor, or there may have been too few hours of accompanied driving. An important factor may have been the supervisors' bad driving habits.

What determines the effectiveness?

The assessment studies show that the effects of accompanied driving very much depend on:

- the number of hours of accompanied driving;
- the variation in the routes and circumstances;
- the supervisor's skills.

In addition, the absolute effectiveness in a country of course also depends on the number of novices that choose accompanied driving.

What is the minimum of accompanied driving hours required?

As research has shown that the effectiveness of the measure very much depends on the number of accompanied driving hours, the question arises which number of hours is the minimum required. Based on a comparison of Norwegian and Swedish data, Sagberg (2000; in OECD & ECMT, 2006) concludes the minimum number of accompanied driving kilometres required lies between 5,000 and 7,000 kilometres. In Australia, several states aim at novice drivers doing a minimum of 120 hours of accompanied driving (Vicroads, 2005; Western Australia, 2005). Whether this type of guideline will actually be followed remains to be seen, even when it is incorporated in legislation. It is, after all, difficult to check this.

How (un)safe is the accompanied driving period?

The conditions during accompanied driving differ from those during the driving lesson: the supervisor is not a professionally trained instructor, and the car is not equipped with double controls. Is this still safe? Official figures about the dangers in the period of accompanied driving are only available in Sweden. These figures show that during the period of accompanied driving, the number of crashes per person is 33 times lower than when driving independently after passing the driving exam (Gregersen, Nyberg & Berg, 2003). Since independent driving takes place three times as much as accompanied driving, the crash risk *per kilometre* for accompanied driving is around 10 times lower than it is for independent driving. In Sweden, this accounts annually to three road deaths in crashes during accompanied driving on a population of nine million. An important difference between the Netherlands and Sweden is that the Dutch novice drivers will first receive a full basic driver training before they start accompanied driving. In Sweden no basic driver training is required.

Which is the supervisor's role?

The supervisor does *not* give instructions. The supervisor's role is to advise, to supervise the way the driving task is carried out, and to judge when traffic's complexity surpasses the driver's skills. Many countries support the supervisors with courses and manuals. In England, manuals like 'Driving Standards Agency's Official Guide to Accompanying L-drivers' have been written to ensure accompanied driving being in line with the professional instruction. The *Helping L Drivers* website (www.helpingldrivers.com) supplies the supervisors with free information.

However, not every experienced driver will be a good supervisor. The passing on of bad practises must be prevented. A Canadian study, for example, showed that the parents of youngsters who were involved in severe crashes, had a bad safety record themselves (Mayhew et al., 2006). Therefore it is appropriate that most countries require the supervisors to meet certain standards. They, for instance, must be of *unimpeachable* conduct, and they are not allowed to be under the influence of psycho-toxic substances while supervising.

What is the expected safety effect for the Netherlands?

The above illustrates that the effectiveness of accompanied driving is dependent on a large number of factors of which the exact interpretation/elaboration for the Netherlands are still unknown. In addition to the previously mentioned kilometres driven, the supervisor's skills, the variation in routes, and the number of youths who choose accompanied driving, two other factors are important in the Netherlands: the effect of age reduction and the effect of a shift in transport modes.

Effect of age reduction

To make accompanied driving possible, many countries have chosen to lower the age at which the driver training can be started. In this construction the age for independent driving remains unaltered. This construction is also chosen in the Netherlands. The effect on road safety remains to be seen as crash studies also show that the crash rate is inversely proportional to the age of the driver. In theory, accompanied driving can result in a younger age for independent driving: youths can take driver training before their 18th birthday, and as soon as they then reach the age of 18 they can start driving unaccompanied. At present only Swedish data is available which shows that the positive effect of having gained more experience outweighs possible negative age effects. (Gregersen et al., 2000).

Effect of a shift in transport modes

Lowering the age at which it is *allowed to begin a driver training*, for example at 16 or 17, may have an added positive effect if it makes the moped a less attractive transport mode for this age group. After

all, a distance travelled by moped means a distinctly higher risk for this age group than the same distance travelled by bicycle or passenger car.

Expected effect and the need for evaluation

On the basis of a number of presumptions, such as the number of youths that will choose for accompanied driving, SWOV estimates that in the Netherlands, this measure can lead to 16 fewer deaths annually (see Wesemann (2007) for detailed information on presumptions and calculation methods). However, only well performed evaluation research can show the actual effects in the Netherlands. It is intended that SWOV will perform such an evaluation study.

What other measures need to be taken?

Accompanied driving ensures that novice drivers are more experienced once they participate in traffic independently. However, it will remain necessary to limit their exposure to the most dangerous traffic situation during their first period of independent driving. This can be achieved by applying restrictive measures like a ban on the use of alcohol, on carrying passengers, and on driving in weekend nights. With increasing experience, the bans can be lifted one by one. This way the driver license becomes a graduated license which gradually gives the driver access to more complex and more dangerous traffic situations. See the fact sheet [The graduated driving licence](#) for further information.

Conclusion

In addition to a professional driver training novice drivers can use accompanied driving to safely increase their driving experience. The effect on future crash involvement very much depends on the number of kilometres that is driven accompanied, the variation in routes, and on the quality of the supervision. Accompanied driving appears to be an effective measure for reducing the crash rate of novice drivers.

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