

# **Skill for Life:** Evaluating the advanced driving test



## Introduction

Driver or rider error causes the vast majority of road accidents. Carelessness and negligence on the road costs lives. The IAM aims to reduce avoidable accidents by improving the awareness and skills of road users.

We promote advanced driving as a way of developing driving skills and fixing mistakes. Based on police driver training, the course teaches five phases of safe car control; information, position, speed, gear and acceleration.

While aiming to reduce accidents and casualties, the advanced test is not exclusively about safety. It also encourages the driver to feel more confident on the road, to make better progress, and to get greater enjoyment from the experience. The IAM relies heavily on its 5,000 volunteers who coach drivers through the advanced driving course.

The Skill for Life course includes:

- An initial assessment with an IAM voluntary observer from one of 200 local IAM groups
- As many on-road drives with an IAM observer needed to achieve 'test ready' status (typically six to eight drives)
- An advanced test with a qualified examiner (all IAM examiners hold the police advanced driving certificate)
- Membership of the IAM for the first year

Over 400,000 people have taken the advanced test and we currently have over 100,000 active IAM members. Although we receive regular feedback from our members and groups, we wanted to know more about what motivates people to take the advanced test and how it affects people's driving habits. Do advanced drivers consider themselves safer? Does the IAM have a long-term impact on driving?

### Evaluating advanced driving

Building on a previous study by Brunel University<sup>i</sup>, we commissioned independent researchers Hopkin and Sykes to carry out an 'Evaluation of Preparation for the IAM Advanced Driving Test'. They analysed survey results from over 2,500 members and held discussions with selected participants. Full details of the methods and results are available in the full report. This paper looks at some key findings of the research.

## Why do people sign up for the IAM test?

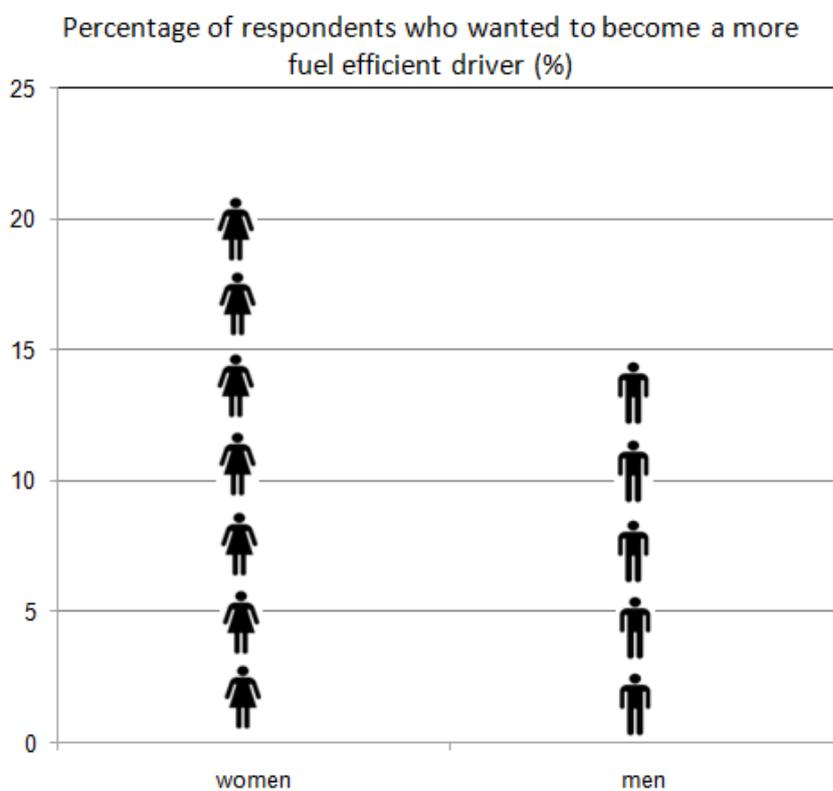
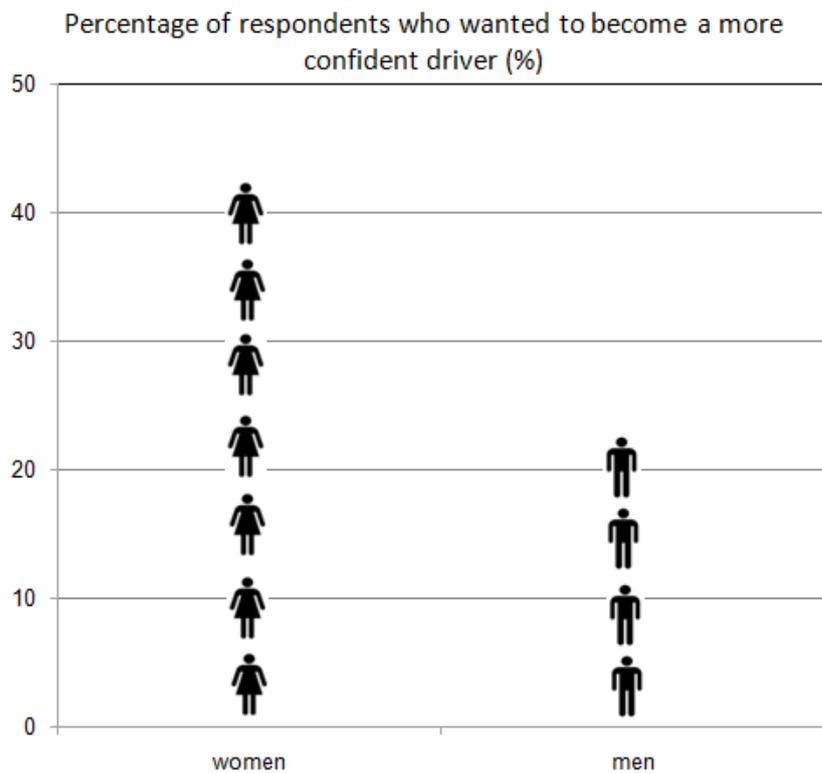
There are some common reasons why people sign up for the advanced driving course. The top reason is ‘to improve my general standard of driving’ with 80 per cent of people listing it as a motivating factor. Becoming a safer driver is also a top reason (73 per cent said this).

Reasons for preparing for the IAM test*	Respondents (%)
To improve my general standard of driving	80
To become a safer driver	73
For the achievement/ challenge	58
To eradicate any bad habits	52
To reduce the risk of being involved in an accident	49
To refresh my driving skills	49
To reassure myself that I am still a competent driver	39
To demonstrate to others that my driving is of a high standard	37
To gain greater enjoyment from driving	30
To become a more confident driver	26
To obtain cheaper insurance	23
To drive more fuel efficiently	17
To influence other people’s driving	14
For my job	11

## Gender differences in reasons for taking the IAM test

The reasons for taking the advanced driving test are broadly similar for men and women; however, there are a few differences:

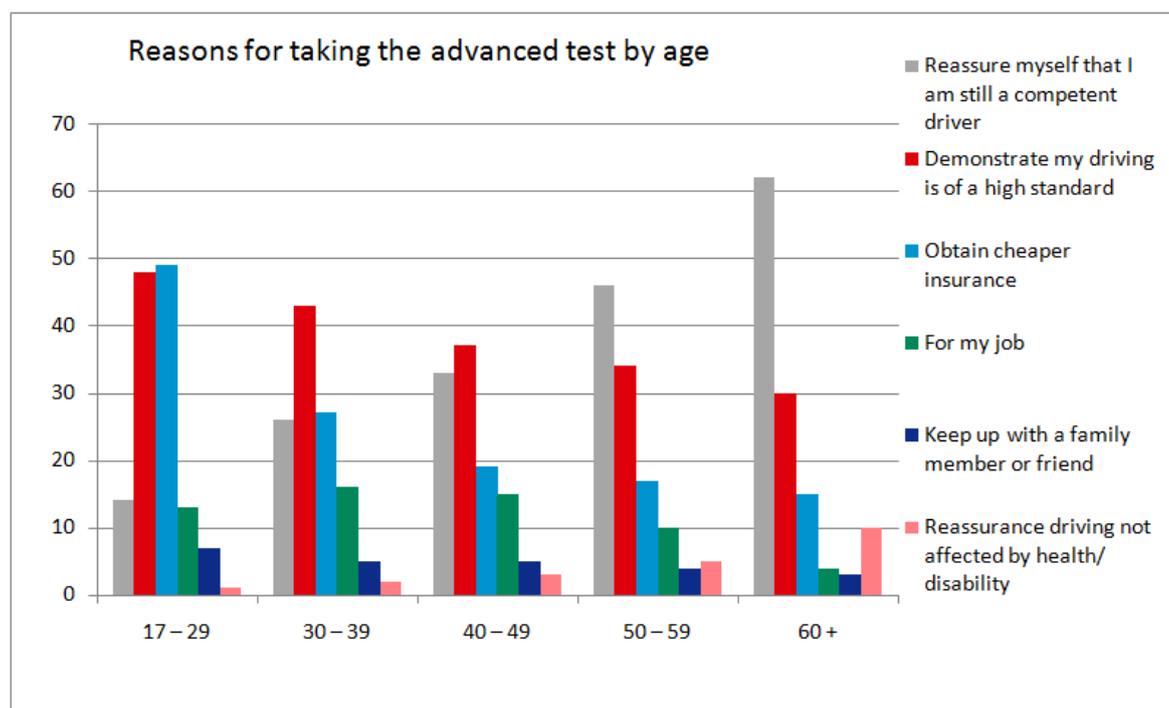
- Women are more likely to want to take the test to become a more confident driver and to be more fuel-efficient.
- Men are more likely to take the test to obtain cheaper car insurance.





### Age differences in reasons for taking the IAM test

All age groups were likely to say they wanted to improve their general standard of driving or become a safer driver. Age differences are visible in some of the other reasons given for taking the advanced test:



Older drivers (60+) are more likely to want to reassure themselves that they are still a competent driver. Younger drivers are more likely to take the advanced test to demonstrate a high standard of driving and to obtain cheaper insurance.

Respondents who had passed their IAM test recently were more likely to select fuel-efficient driving, cheaper insurance and refreshing driving skills as reasons for taking the advanced test. Reducing fuel and insurance costs to save money could show a trend relating to the recent economic recessions, if so this trend may continue in the current financial climate.

The survey looked at encouragement for taking the advanced test:

- Eighty per cent said that it was their own idea to prepare for the IAM test and 83 per cent had paid for it themselves.
- Friends or relatives had suggested it to 11 per cent, and employers had requested it for 5 per cent.
- Six per cent said their employer had paid for the test. The idea came from driving instructors or other professionals in a few other cases (two per cent).
- Car manufacturers had paid for the test in two per cent of cases - part of the 'package' when buying a new car.

## **What was the advanced driving experience like?**

Eighty eight per cent of respondents (around 2,200) prepared for the IAM test with an IAM group. Comments about the groups were overwhelmingly positive.

*It was fun. Meeting with other IAM members - people who are interested in the act and art of driving - is very educational. (Man in his 30s, IAM test in 2006)*

*The ... local institute was brilliant. Really nice people, always keen to help. (Woman in her 30s, IAM test in 2005)*

*I found the accompanied drives provided by my local group gave me the confidence to take the test. Very valuable training which I will always remember. (Woman in her 60s, IAM test in 1995)*

*It is better if you train with an IAM group. You need someone to be critical and advise honestly. (Man in his 60s, IAM test in 2000)*

Many respondents also highlighted the quality of IAM observers and remarked on their dedication to improving road safety.

*Volunteers for the Sunday runs are truly amazing people who give up their time for free. (Man in his 40s, IAM test 2006)*

*The observers ... were very special people and so very generous with their time ... I could probably have passed in May, but I was enjoying the sessions so much I waited until August. (Man in his 50s, IAM test 2006)*

*An enthusiastic, articulate and knowledgeable observer is probably the most important. (Man in his 50s, IAM test 1998)*

*I was always uncomfortable with the observed drives! I felt such a bad driver! My observer was a star! (Woman in her 60s, IAM test 2007)*

*The process was interesting and enjoyable particularly because of the mature and practical approach of instructors. (Man in his 50s, IAM test 2009)*

However, there was a small number of negative comments about the nature and diversity of some IAM groups.

*If the IAM is going to have a serious impact on young drivers they need to address the age and culture of the IAM driving clubs. (Man in his 20s, IAM test in 2009)*

*I changed my IAM group after the first few weeks, The group I originally went to was very male orientated and I felt it difficult to 'turn up' as a female driver, and found it hard to be accepted. (Woman in her 20s, IAM test in 2007)*

The IAM has recently improved how we collect feedback from drivers preparing for the advanced test. This means we can quickly resolve any issues about groups.

## **Preparing for the test**

Respondents' commented on the thoroughness of the test preparation, the well planned and numerous sessions and the value of driving with several different people. A few people also mentioned the usefulness of specific books.

*It was like putting my driving under psychoanalysis: really challenging but well worth it. (Woman in her 60s, IAM test 1997)*

*I found the preparation for the test quite demanding and took a long time to reach a standard that I felt confident about. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the preparation and felt it was a valuable experience whether I passed or failed the test. (Man in his 70s, IAM test 2007)*

*During the preparation for the advanced driving test I found that by better observation whilst driving I was able to anticipate the behaviour of other drivers and therefore reduce my own stress levels, I learned better car control and positioning also I gained more confidence.' (Man in his 50s, IAM test 2004)*

Suggestions for improvements included more emphasis on specific skills, a more targeted approach to different types of driver, and improved teaching methods. Some respondents also thought that refresher training and re-testing at intervals after passing the IAM test were a good idea. We are currently looking at how we can respond to these suggestions, and how we can adapt advanced driving to suit more people.

A large number of respondents felt that preparing for the advanced test had been hugely beneficial to their driving. They wanted the benefits of advanced driving to be more widely shared through marketing and publicity, so that more people could become involved.

## Effects on driving behaviour

Ninety-nine per cent of respondents said the advanced test had a positive impact on their driving. Those who reported no impact tended to already have other advanced driving qualifications.

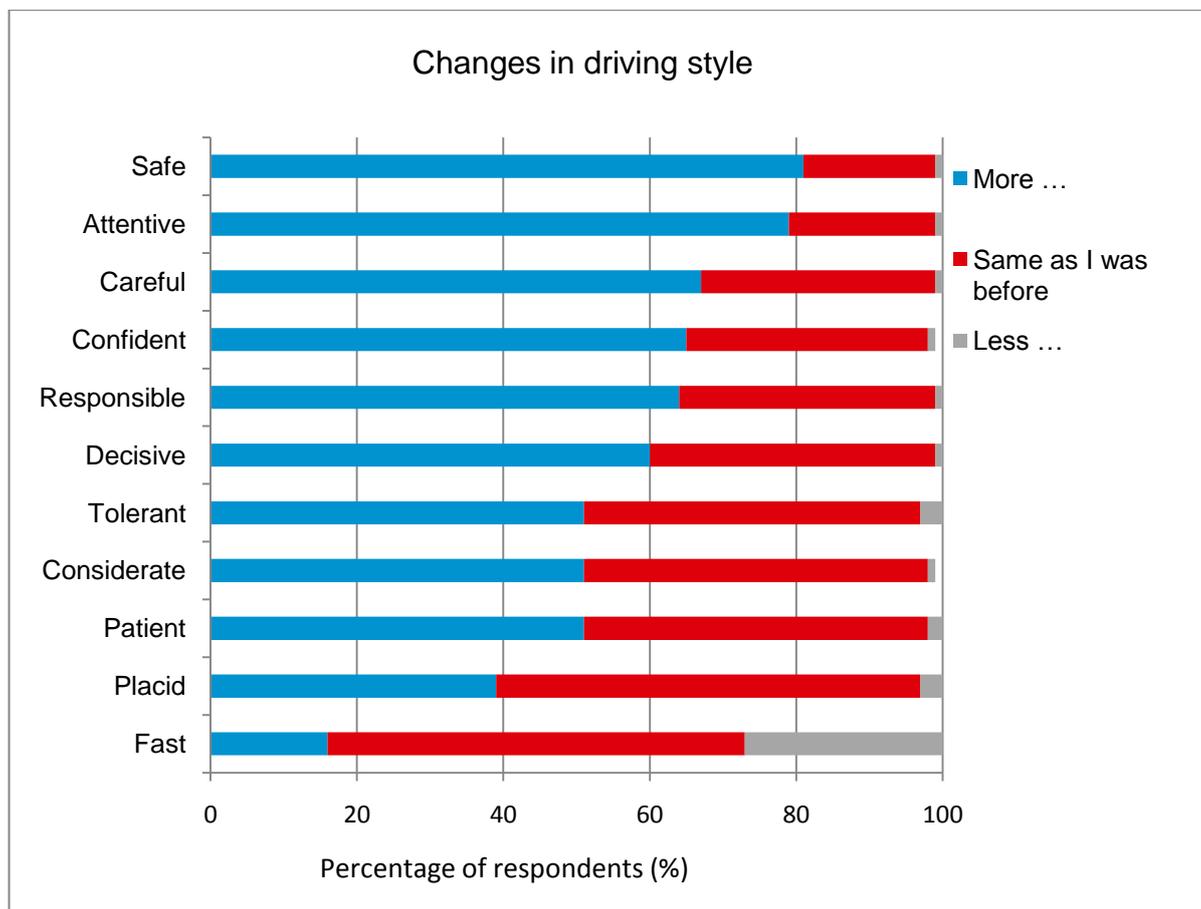
‘Greater sensitivity to and awareness of potential hazards and difficult driving conditions’ was the most widely reported lasting positive impact (91 per cent of respondents noticed this).

Lasting positive impact	Respondents (%)
Greater sensitivity to awareness of potential hazards & difficult driving conditions	91
Greater awareness of other road users	90
Improved general driving outlook/ philosophy	90
Improved planning/ anticipation	90
Smoother driving/ better progress	88
Improved use of road space	85
More conscious, less 'automatic' driving	85
Better car handling skills	80
Improved confidence in my driving	78
More tolerant and aware of the behaviour of other road users	78
Helped me to avoid specific incident/ collision	66
I have passed on what I have learned to others	62
More fuel efficient driving	60

Sixty-six per cent of respondents believed that advanced driver training helped them to avoid an incident or collision, and 78 per cent reported better car-handling skills.

In terms of driving style, the majority of respondents thought that they were more safe, attentive and careful after preparing for the IAM test.

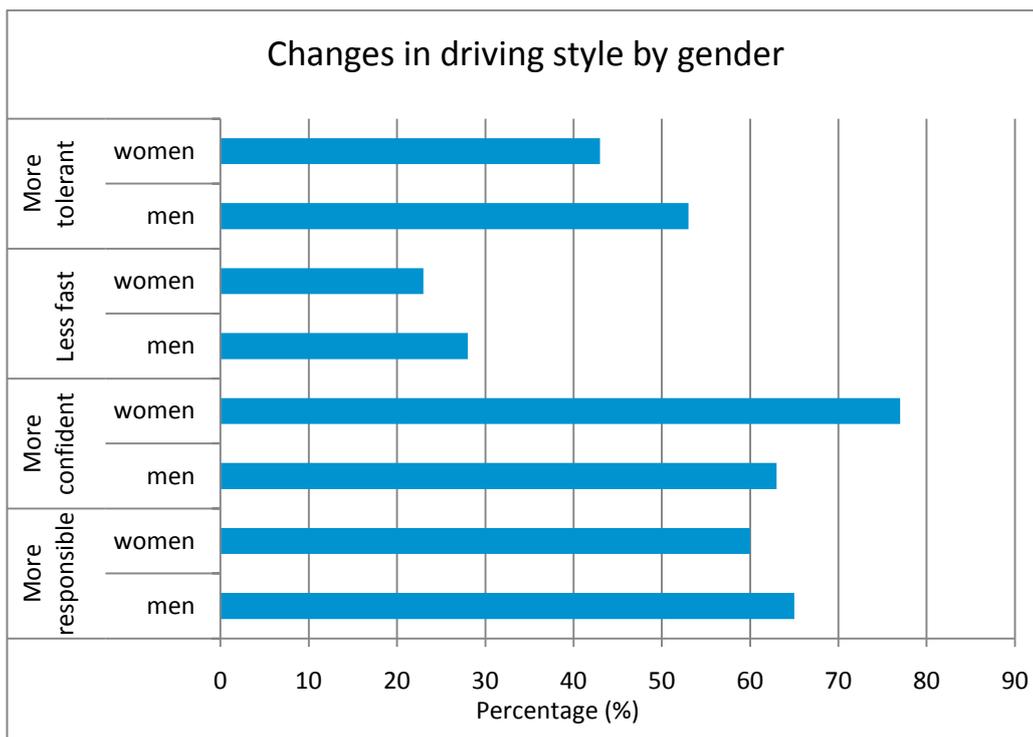
Ninety-one per cent of respondents also reported an increased enjoyment from driving; only 30 per cent gave this as an original reason for taking the test in the first place.



## Gender differences

Women were more likely to report lasting effects on their driving style than men. Men were more likely to say their driving became more responsible, placid, patient, considerate, and tolerant, and that they drove less fast. Women were more likely than men to say their driving had become more decisive and confident.

The differences appear to suggest that advanced driving may address some of the stereotypical differences between male and female drivers.



## Differences in mileage

Men with low mileage were more likely to say that they were more attentive than men with high mileage (81 per cent compared with 76 per cent). They were also more confident (66 per cent compared with 59 per cent) and safer (84 per cent compared with 77 per cent). Among women, those with high mileage were more likely to say their driving was more placid (41 per cent) than those driving low mileage (29 per cent).

## Age differences

All age groups reported lasting positive impacts:

- Drivers under 30 were more likely to say they now took account of their vehicle's limitations and features when driving.
- Younger drivers were also more likely to say that had become more attentive.
- Older drivers were more likely to mention driving more considerately or with improved awareness of other road users and being a more confident driver.
- Older drivers were more likely than others to report 'definite' permanent effects (and less likely to report 'probably' effects). This may be because younger drivers felt they need to wait and see if the changes are permanent.

## Qualitative research

The discussions with IAM members strongly reflected the online survey results. Most participants said:

- They were a much better driver after the test preparation.
- That they now drove at a 'different level' and that their driving was transformed after taking the test.
- They noticed improvements in everyday driving such as smoother journeys, and more confident, positive and enjoyable drives.
- They thought the changes in their driving were noticeable (and noticed by) family and friends.
- They had developed broad skills such as improved observation, anticipation and concentration.
- They often stressed the fact that they were more 'conscious' drivers than they had been and that their 'eyes had been opened' in such a way as to make this a permanent change.

Respondents also said they now had a heightened awareness of other drivers, that they were more conscious of how low standards of driving generally are, and that they feel that the basic driving test is 'just the start'.

All respondents involved in the qualitative research said that the IAM test preparation had positive effects, including people who were already driving enthusiasts.

*...It taught me to drive, whereas the DSA (Driver Standards Agency) test taught me to pass the test. (Man in his 30s, IAM test 1994)*

*'Before preparing for the advanced driving test I used to dread each journey due to what I considered to be inconsiderate driving by other road users... (Man in his 50s, IAM test 2004)*

## Concluding comments

An 'Evaluation of Preparation for the IAM Advanced Driving Test' (Hopkin and Sykes, 2012) clearly shows that drivers who prepare for the advanced driving test notice improved skills, awareness and control. All demographic groups noticed positive changes in their driving habits. The study also shows that the advanced test has long lasting positive effects on attitudes to safe driving.

We will use the findings in this report to promote the benefits of advanced driving and to continue improving how the IAM delivers the advanced test. We will use the comments about adapting the test preparation so that the advanced driving course suits a wider variety of people.

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## References

Hopkin, J and Sykes, W (2012) 'Evaluation of preparation for the IAM Advanced Driving Test' (Jean Hopkin Research Services and Independent Social Research)

Walker, G, Stanton N, Kazi T and Young M (2006) 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of IAM Driver Coaching – Executive Summary' Brunel University and Institute of Advanced Motorists, London