

ROAD TRAFFIC AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2) 2007

Second Reading

Resumed from 17 October.

HON RAY HALLIGAN (North Metropolitan) [2.37 pm]: Yesterday evening I was talking about young people and the fact that they are often bored, and that causes them to do things that more mature drivers may not do. They believe they are indestructible and can handle any situation they find themselves in. However, it is particularly important that we take note of the fact - it is my belief at least - that when people are provided with a licence to drive a motor vehicle, what they have been taught is how to operate the controls: how to steer the vehicle, how to use the accelerator and how to use the brake pedal. What they have not been taught for many a decade - some efforts are being made to change that - is how to control the vehicle, particularly in differing circumstances. Apparently, what was hoped in the past was that people who were taught to operate the controls would, over time, without killing themselves and others, learn how to control a vehicle. I think it was Hon Murray Criddle who mentioned that young people, quite often very young people, on farms in particular, are taught, initially, how to operate the controls and over a period, sometimes through misadventure - meaning experience - find out how to control a vehicle.

Hon Murray Criddle: It is a lot easier to do that in an open paddock.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I could not agree more that it is easier to drive on an open paddock than it is to drive on a congested road. Two of my four children learned to drive on an open paddock in a small vehicle in Papua New Guinea. Fortunately, the vehicle was put in one gear and they did not have to change the gears. I jumped out of the car and they then steered it in a circle.

Hon Jon Ford: Is that the reason you jumped out of the car?

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I did not jump out of it to get away from them; I jumped out so that the car would not stall because I started it in second gear and it had to keep moving. The point is that they learned something about driving a vehicle from a very early age. If they hit a bump and it turned the wheels, they knew how to correct it. I am not suggesting for one moment that that means they were capable of driving on a road. It comes down to experience. I believe that that experience made them better drivers. They were not necessarily perfect drivers, but they were somewhat better drivers earlier than most. Currently we are trying to pass a law so that young people and people who are obtaining their driver's licence for the first time must have someone beside them who has experience while they drive on the roads for the first time. I know not whether that is likely to work. In my experience, and it appears to be the experience also of Hon Murray Criddle, many young people learned to drive on their own. It was their responsibility to be in total control of the vehicle. I said earlier that I do not know the answers to the many problems. A difficulty I have is that we tend to encompass the many in legislation that is created for the few who create the problems. That is not necessarily done to protect them but to cause them to fall into line with the rest of the population. The problem with that is the rest of the population must also fall into line. Again, I am not sure what the answer is. This bill appears to be aimed at the young people who are killing themselves in great numbers, particularly as a percentage of the total population. I will refer to that in a short while.

I am concerned also about the great number of people on the road who have yet to learn how to drive properly on the roads. They might know how to operate the controls, but that is about all they do know. The only thing they know is how to start and stop a vehicle, which concerns me greatly. This morning when I drove to Parliament House, as well as on numerous other occasions, I saw drivers on St Georges Tce whom I consider to be not only inconsiderate and inattentive, but also irresponsible and incompetent. I wonder how they ever got a driver's licence in the first place. There is more to the problem, as we are trying to define it, than just the younger people. It is not just about introducing legislation; it is about what is done with that legislation. For some considerable time we have had legislation to require people to be tested to prove - do not ask me to define "prove" - that they are capable of driving. I will need to analyse this legislation a lot more. Much more must be done to analyse what is happening now, even without the bill before us. Why are there so many people on our roads whom I define as incompetent, inconsiderate and irresponsible? They are not concerned about the other road users. I do not mean only the hoons. I refer to people who drive from home to work on a day-to-day basis. They create problems and frustrate others. Why does road rage exist? I am not condoning it for one moment, but why do we have it? There are often two sides to even that story. Often people create situations that should never have been created in the first place. For example, we have laws to enable people who drive under 80 kilometres an hour on a freeway with a limit of 100 kilometres an hour to be prosecuted, and we have laws to keep people to drive on the left-hand side of the road. However, people flout those laws. They drive well under the limit and in the right-hand lane. They are not always young people; they are mature-aged people. Issues relating to road use contribute to a great number of road crashes and fatalities. I am not suggesting for one moment that the provisions in the bill before us are unwarranted. However, it is not the panacea and it will not

reduce the road toll. The government and Mr Grant Dorrington must think again about providing a better way of improving the situation.

We have heard about the antihoon legislation. It appears from what I have seen on television that a great number of people who have been caught by that legislation belong to the younger generation. It would be interesting to see the statistics on the age groups of those people. We might then have to accept that it is the younger generation that is affected. I am not suggesting for one moment that they do not comprise the greater number of people who have been affected by that legislation, but I am interested to know what the age groups are. I forewarn the minister of a number of matters mentioned in the second reading speech that I will raise during the committee stage. The second reading speech states in part -

. . . changes to affect the government's novice driver reform package . . .

I believe that the word "affect" should be "effect" because the government wants to change something. I note also - it has been said before, particularly by Hon Simon O'Brien - that we have a tendency to say that this will be brought in as Mike's law because of something that happened in 2004. That concerns me a little. For something that happened in 2004 we now have a remedy in 2007. Why has it taken three years to effect something that appears to be as simple as the provision contained in this bill? I am aware of uniform legislation and the like, but that is another issue that I will speak about. The second reading speech reads -

This bill amends the relevant penalties to provide a strong deterrent for leaving the scene of a crash.

I can understand that under normal circumstances, but what if a person is in need of medical treatment and one needs to leave the scene of the crash to get medical treatment for that person? I am sure it was never intended as it reads; that is, under any circumstances if one leaves a crash -

Hon Jon Ford: There are a number of defences, and we can talk about them.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: That is good. We also need to be a little careful when we use statistics. The second reading speech reads -

Every year, scores of young people aged 17 to 24 years die on the roads, despite making up only 14 per cent of all Western Australian licence holders.

The second reading speech refers to scores and 14 per cent, and the two do not equate. If they make up only 14 per cent of licence holders, I would like to know what percentage in fact die. I think it would be preferable to put it in that manner, otherwise it becomes scare tactics. The expression "scores of young people" looks bad, but the question is how many. It could be scores out of a million, and scores of course would only be multiples of 20 out of a million. That is why if the government is to use percentages, they should be used in both areas. If it is only 14 per cent of licence holders, what percentage are in fact dying? I am not suggesting for one moment that we have no need to do something about this, but let us not try to make it bleaker than it really is.

I understand that someone who gains his licence is now a provisional driver for two years, whereas it was one year previously. Within that two-year period the first year will be novice 1 and the second year will be novice 2. The second reading speech obviously could not guarantee anything, even from the legislation, but it states -

This bill will introduce the first wave of a series of important safety measures aimed at reducing the wasted loss of young lives.

I think that needs to be explained a little more. If this legislation is but part of a whole strategy - because it talks of a series of important safety measures - I think we need to know exactly what that whole might look like, so that we can see that the bill fits comfortably as part of that whole.

The legislation refers only to alcohol; it makes no mention of drugs. I think we would all be aware that many of our younger generation tend to look to drugs as well as alcohol as a form of recreation, unfortunately, so I wonder why drugs were not mentioned in this legislation, even by reference to some other legislation. I note also that it is intended to have a Henry VIII clause, with no explanation. I think it particularly important that an explanation be given of the form of this Henry VIII. Members in this place know my feelings about Henry VIII clauses, having been on the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation for some time.

Hon Bruce Donaldson interjected.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I have no intention of going through all that, save but to say that there are occasions when I believe that Henry VIII clauses are applicable and when they are acceptable. However, they need to be spelt out. Hon Norman Moore has made mention of one set of circumstances in which there was a transitional phase and a time limit of 12 months, and that is fine. There have been other circumstances, for example in agricultural legislation in which additional plants could be added to a list of noxious weeds or whatever.

Hon Kim Chance: Yes.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I am quite comfortable with that because it is quite an appropriate way of doing things. As long as that is explained, I think the logic would be seen by members here. However, the second reading speech reads -

The bill also creates the power to make regulations to place further conditions on the licence of novice drivers.

I would like to know what it is that the government thinks those further conditions might be, because I think it is particularly important that we know. The second reading speech also reads -

Following the successful passage of this bill, we will introduce new regulations to require learner drivers to spend a minimum of six months in the second learner phase.

Here we have new terminology again, I believe. If someone is a learner, he is a learner before he gets his provisional licence. What is the learner's second phase? I am not sure that has been explained. I may be ignorant of something that already exists, but if the minister could enlighten me in that regard, I would be most grateful. It is particularly important because it is an imposition on people. Because it is a Henry VIII clause, the government put forward a particularly cogent argument for why it should be allowed to succeed in this place. The second reading speech goes on to read -

Currently, learner drivers are required to complete 25 hours of supervised driving before moving to the provisional stage. The government has indicated its wish to extend this to 120 hours but will not mandate this until access and equity issues are addressed.

I am not sure what those access and equity issues are. If the government could provide some information, again it would be most helpful. The second reading speech reads -

These changes will ensure novice drivers spend more time accumulating valuable supervised driving experience in a variety of conditions after they have passed their practical driving assessment.

There are therefore a number of situations here. I must admit that it is 50 years since I got my licence, so I am a bit unsure about what people currently have to do, but some sort of chart may not go astray, particularly in view of what I believe is new terminology, the timing of all these different phases and, particularly, what the government is proposing. Causing people to jump through a particular number of hoops does not necessarily mean, of course, that they will be proficient drivers at the end of the day. Some people will catch on very quickly and have no problems; others will go on indefinitely and continue to have enormous problems. Why are there people who use professional businesses to teach them to drive who have been back 20 times and still cannot convince the person testing them that they should be driving on the road? All members know that it is simple enough to create a square hole, but not all people are square pegs. Is there any flexibility in this bill? Are there things people might be able to do to either make themselves proficient or find others who might assist them to become proficient? The second reading speech states -

It is therefore critical that the training and licensing system gives learners as much opportunity as possible to develop the skills . . .

I agree with that statement, but what checks will be undertaken along the way to ascertain whether learner drivers have reached a particular point and are able to move on to the next? When a person wants to move from one year to the next in school or university, he must show that he has reached a particular proficiency before he is allowed to do so. Does the government have in mind anything of that nature within this system? According to the second reading speech, it is also the government's intention -

. . . to restrict the carrying of peer-age passengers during the first six months of provisional driving.

When is the first six months of provisional driving? Western Australia has a two-year period of provisional driving, in the first year of which a person is a novice 1 and in the second year a novice 2. Where does the six months come in? Again, the chart I mentioned would come in very handy because, to tell the truth, I am becoming totally and utterly confused. The second reading speech also goes on to state -

The safety benefit of this package cannot be denied.

On paper, minister! On paper it sounds wonderful, but the government said that years ago about the road toll, and it could not be higher now! Everything the government has said over the past few years about how it is going to bring the road toll down means absolutely nothing. Here it goes again, stating -

The safety benefit of this package cannot be denied.

Therefore - the "therefore" is my word - this bill is not the emperor's new clothes. I am sorry, but I am yet to be convinced. I have not been convinced and I ask the minister to convince me -

Hon Jon Ford: That is the second time the house has heard "emperor's new clothes" today.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: He gets around stark naked of course, as we know!

The second reading speech also states -

We know that these changes will save lives . . .

I think the government is convinced: "Just bring in a piece of legislation and everyone will abide by it. No need for more police or prisons. As soon as the government brings in a piece of legislation which says, 'You shall not', people will not." It is as simple as that! That attitude concerns me. The second reading speech states -

We know that these changes will save lives and we also know that the community is demanding changes to the way young drivers are trained and licensed in Western Australia.

Is it? I do not know about other members in this place, but no-one has come to me suggesting that the government needs to change the way drivers are trained and licensed. I am interested to know whether other members have been asked. The wording in the second reading speech is purely political rhetoric, which is most unfortunate and most unworthy in a piece of legislation of this type.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Do you think that they may update the colour of the licence or the application or something?

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: Paint it a different colour! Who knows? Yes.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: We will see what happens!

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: Another sentence in the second reading speech states -

Similar measures are in place in jurisdictions in other parts of the world and have been shown to deliver long-term reductions in fatalities and serious injuries among novice drivers.

Where are the statistics, minister? I want to see some. Two of my sons live overseas, and they tell me this sort of statement is rubbish. Can the minister prove to me that they are wrong and that my belief in them is wrong? This bill is not the emperor's new clothes - there is the third time, and the minister will hear it many times still! The government is making statements that it cannot back up. Come up with something meaningful!

Those comments are from the second reaching speech alone; now I will go to the explanatory memorandum: The explanatory memorandum has bits and pieces in it: bland statements, no statistics, no references; "Just believe me; I am the government"! I am sorry, I do not believe the government, and I will continually ask "why?" until I am convinced. It is incumbent upon the minister, as part of the government, to try to convince the opposition, not just expect it to accept what is said. By the government's own statement, these changes to the law are but part of a series of amendments that will be made. That whole has yet to be explained, this part has yet to be explained and, more importantly, how this part fits into the whole has yet to be explained. No information has yet been provided to explain the whole, and it is incumbent upon the government to provide that information.

I understand there are some difficulties associated with this bill and certain clauses of it, but what will become a possible judicial nightmare is the time of commencement of any number of these clauses. The bill is all over the place. If the government can convince the opposition, we may accept the bill; that may be the only way the bill will be passed. The nightmare is that when someone has an accident, the judiciary will have to find out under which part of which law the person was operating. I can see the lawyers having a field day yet again.

One important aspect of this bill, and probably the major part of the bill, is the way it will be determined that someone is driving when he is over a particular blood alcohol limit. The report, and Hon Simon O'Brien, went to some considerable lengths -

Hon Simon O'Brien: I went to considerable depth!

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: Some considerable depth, in that case!

Hon Norman Moore: There are differences between lengths and depths!

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: It is particularly spelt out in the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review's twentieth report, which deals with the Road Traffic Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2007. I find certain aspects of the report interesting. I may be well off the mark, because I have not had the time to research this to the extent that I would have liked. It has been explained that the terms .05 and .08 will continue to be used because they have been in use for some time and people understand them. I have no problems with that. We have heard about the 210 litres of breath and so on. I will not go through all that, because the Minister for Regional Development has heard it all before in considerable depth. However, I will quote from report 20. I apologise if I repeat something of which Hon Simon O'Brien has already made mention. I refer to page 14 and to a statement made by Ms Neilson -

The reason that we need it is that we continue to express our offence provisions throughout the act in terms of the number of grams of alcohol in 100ml of a person's blood. There are a number of ways that we could have done the amendment: rather than referring throughout the act to the number of grams per 100ml of blood and per 210 litres of breath every time we talk about an offence we have stuck with blood because it is the alcohol in a person's blood that affects his or her ability to control the vehicle.

That causes me to ask: why are we moving to 210 litres of breath when it is acknowledged that the effect on a person's ability to control a vehicle is associated with the alcohol in his or her blood? I am not aware of any explanation other than that is what is done nationally and internationally. However, I again want to question the government - I am questioning it rather than querying it. Before the states accept a treaty, the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties asks them whether they have any objections. Were any objections put forward in this instance? The report continues -

The breath is just an indicator of what is in the blood, so we have stuck with blood, but what we are saying is that if a device measures a person's sample of breath, and it gives a reading using the unit of measurement of 210 litres of breath, it will be deemed to be regarded as the number of grams in 100ml of blood, . . .

It will be deemed - not calculated. Is that a subtle way of reducing the amount of alcohol that a person can have in his blood? We can call it .05 and .08, but there is nothing to suggest otherwise.

Hon Jon Ford: The report explains it really well.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: The calculations as well?

Hon Jon Ford: And Hon Simon O'Brien explained it very well.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I am quoting Ms Neilson. It says that it will be deemed. It does not say that it will be calculated plus or minus .01 per cent.

Hon Jon Ford: We can have an argument about Federation too. That is exactly why we find ourselves in this situation.

Hon Norman Moore: They are saying that deemed is close enough.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: Yes. There are no calculations. Has the government bothered to look into this, or has it merely rolled over and asked the commonwealth to tickle its tummy again?

Hon Jon Ford: If we don't, there is a real risk people will never be convicted.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: Is the minister talking about the national competition policy? That has never been queried either.

Hon Jon Ford: Yes it has.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: Not to the extent that I would have like it queried.

The report continues -

. . . whether the device itself gives that reading or if it is derived by the deeming provision.

We are expected to trust that. There is nothing that suggests that one figure equates with the other. I am quoting Ms Neilson's words, not what I believe.

Although the opposition agrees with the sentiment of the legislation, I have grave concerns that the government has rolled over yet again and accepted things, and that it is not necessarily in a position - although it will be asked during the committee stage - to explain why these provisions have been included in the legislation. I advise the minister now that I will not accept a "because" or "It's national competition policy" or "The commonwealth government will remove \$10 million of funding." I want the government to put up a fight. If it believes that there is something wrong, it should bring it to our attention and fight for the people of Western Australia. If everything is right, it should convince us that that is the case, because the second reading speech and parts of the report do suggest that everything is necessarily as it should be. It may well be that things are as they should be. I have heard people talk about the quality of debate in our houses of Parliament. Information must be brought forward. The government must make a convincing argument. The government must get its act together and put forward convincing information about certain aspects of the bill. If it had done that, I would not have had the need to stand on this side of the chamber to make the type of remarks that I have just made.

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the Opposition) [3.18 pm]: Over the past couple of years, I have been one of those licensed drivers who has supervised a learner's 25 hours of supervised driving and, as a result, I have serious reservations about the process. The Road Traffic Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2007 does not provide for an extension of that 25 hours to 120 hours that is contemplated. I can see some merit

in requiring a person with a provisional licence to spend time under the supervision of a person with a driver's licence. My concern is that that supervisor may be the worst driver in the world and that he or she will not impart good driving techniques to the learner driver. Although I have been driving for a long time, I do not regard myself as an advanced driver. I have not taken any advanced driving courses. Given that I have survived this long - touch wood - I am obviously a reasonably successful driver, but I do not understand driving as well as a driving instructor. Requiring a learner driver to sit in a motor car for a period with a supervisor will not provide much benefit to the learner driver unless the supervisor can impart good understandings about driving techniques to the learner. If the supervisor cannot do that, I do not believe much would be gained, other than that the presence of the supervisor would discourage the learner driver from taking risks that he might otherwise take if he were alone. That might be the benefit of the presence of a supervisor. However, if that is the only benefit, I question whether a significant increase in supervision will make a lot of difference.

That brings me to the next point I want to make about driver education. When my son learnt to drive with a driving school, I asked the driving instructor whether it would be a good idea to send him off on an advanced driving course. The advice given to me by the instructor was to not do that at that time, as young kids who do an advanced driving course as the first part of their driver education tend to think they know everything the moment they get into a car by themselves; they think they know how to handle a motor car in every circumstance; and in fact they take more risks than they would otherwise. He said that I should let him drive for a few years and to send him off on an advanced or defensive driving course after he had reached a reasonable level of proficiency and confidence. I do not know whether the minister knows that it was good advice, but I took the advice and my son therefore has not done an advanced driving course. I am of the view that perhaps he should, and perhaps I should too for that matter. Perhaps we should all do an advanced driving course. However, my concern with this legislation is that although it is quite punitive in many ways, I struggle to find any provision in it that will make people better drivers in the context of driver education.

I recall that when I was a schoolteacher many years ago many schools were provided with motor cars by motor vehicle companies and that an activity for kids at school out of school hours was driver education. I do not know whether that is a practical option that is available these days, but it perhaps ought to be considered. It has always been my view that educating people to do things in a proper way is far better than simply telling them that if they do the wrong thing, they will go to jail, lose their driver's licence or whatever. The old carrot-and-stick approach is a better approach than simply providing a range of penalties for doing the wrong thing without providing an opportunity for young people to learn to drive skilfully in the first place.

I raise that matter because I commend the government for seeking to do something about this issue. Every time my children drove off on their own after getting their licence I was absolutely horrified about the prospect of not seeing them again, because statistically they are the people most at risk. Throughout my life I have known very many young people who have been killed or badly injured in motor vehicle smashes for all sorts of reasons - alcohol, inattention, skylarking, inexperience and bad road conditions. They simply could not avoid the crashes that occurred and were, regrettably, killed or badly injured in those smashes. I am therefore supportive of anything that can be done to reduce the road carnage, particularly for young people. It is a terrible thing to read about young people who are killed. For the ones I have known, it has been such a terrible waste of young lives. Something really must be done about it. The government is making an effort to do something about it, and I congratulate it for that. However, I wonder whether the government can go further in the context of driver education and put a serious concentration of energy and effort into teaching people to drive properly. As a simple analogy, we do not allow people in front of a classroom in a school if they have not been taught how to teach, yet we allow kids to get behind the steering wheel of high-powered motor cars when the training they have had to handle them has been quite minimal. If the minister could respond to whether he has any plan down the track for that issue and whether he thinks this legislation goes far enough, I would be pleased to hear his views. The opposition, obviously, supports the legislation. Any measure that can be taken to eliminate fatalities on the roads will be supported. However, can the government spend more time and energy on ensuring that young people actually learn how to drive competently, efficiently and sensibly before they have too many opportunities to get out onto the open road and take the risks they sometimes take?

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [3.25 pm]: I rise to say a few words on the Road Traffic Amendment Bill (No. 2). I note with interest where we are heading with road traffic laws to try to reduce the number of deaths and crashes on the roads. I commend the government for the three points in this bill: firstly, the provision for the use of a breath analysis machine that will be uniform across Australia from July 2008; secondly, the duties of a driver following an accident and an increase in the penalty for failing to stop; and, thirdly, the provisions for novice drivers. It is the provisions for novice drivers that interest me. Of course, the term "novice driver" applies to anyone who has not held a driver's licence for two years; therefore, a novice driver can be of any age. However, we continually appear to use a big-stick approach, to which Hon Norman Moore alluded, instead of providing incentives to good drivers. There is no reward for a good driver. There is no reduction in the driver's licence fee for a driver who has not incurred any demerit points for a number of

years. There is no reduction in the vehicle licence fee for a good driver. I believe we need to take a different approach. In the time that I have been driving, the accepted blood alcohol concentration rate has gone from .08 per cent down to .05 per cent. With this bill, it will be just about nil. Road speed limits have been reduced, and an allusion has been made to reducing them further, but we do not appear to be making any mileage on improving road safety. Perhaps it is time to look at a different method for improving road safety, such as a carrot-and-stick approach instead of a big-stick approach, and rewarding people for good driving. We could even create a graduated demerit point scheme for novice drivers; for example, a novice driver who accrued three points in his first year of driving would be disqualified from driving. If the driver did not accrue any demerit points in the first year, it would be recorded as minus three points and the driver would then have 10 points in the second year. That would actually encourage people to drive very carefully in the first year. There is no consideration for that in the bill. Instead, the 10 points will be reduced by three down to seven. There should be some form of encouragement and reward for people who actually meet the criteria for a good driver.

I have always held the view that the education process for drivers is of paramount importance for young drivers. I believe that we should consider driver training for people in years 11 and 12 at school. A member spoke a day or so ago about the importance of driver education at a younger age. Hon Murray Criddle said that he taught his kids to drive at 10 years of age. All my kids could drive at 10 years of age. I was fortunate to live on a large area of land and could let them loose on it. I have a son who is 31 years old now. He has not had an accident, although he has been driving since he was 10 years old. He has, therefore, had that much experience. He has not done an advanced driver course. I am unsure whether an advanced driver course should be given to a novice driver, but I do know that there is no course for teaching people about the mechanics of a motor car, which can be a lethal machine. When one learns to fly an aircraft, the first thing one has to know is how everything works in that machine, including the engine, the brakes and the carburettor. I believe that we are putting young drivers - or any drivers for that matter - behind the wheel of a machine that is absolutely lethal, without them understanding what they are driving. It is of paramount importance that driver training include learning how everything works. That could be done at a younger age, such as when students are in years 11 and 12 in our educational system.

I was talking to someone who said that learner drivers need to attend driving school for a minimum of 12 hours. At \$50 an hour, that is a pretty expensive operation. Most of these driving schools teach the rules of the road, traffic signs, hill starts, parking, indicating etc. They do not teach anything about the particular vehicle that students are driving, such as whether it has four cylinders or six cylinders, or what happens on the open road when the vehicle is travelling at 80 to 100 kilometres an hour and a front tyre blows out. Those are the things that are not taught. Those are the things that actually matter when we are driving vehicles.

I also think there is an attitude that we have a problem with. People in the United Kingdom are used to melding into the traffic. In Australia there is always somebody who wants to jam up between the next vehicle and ourselves so we cannot get in if we want to turn into another lane or whatever. I think the appropriate attitude has to be taught at a very young age - when students are in years 11 and 12 in schools and in those driver courses.

Before I left school I lost two of my friends in road accidents. I remember one incident well because it was the first funeral I had ever been to and the first time I had to be a pallbearer. I was 17 years old and I had to lower my friend into the grave. That stuck with me. I learnt a lesson, a hard one, that made me a safer driver.

I believe that there are many ways we can improve road safety. We can improve our roads. I always like to refer to regional roads and some of the dangers that are out there. Giving somebody a driver's licence in the city does not prepare him for regional roads. A constituent of mine wanted to sue Main Roads. He was on a dirt road going across to Tom Price and came to a patch where a bit of bitumen was missing. His vehicle and caravan hit that spot, he lost control, hit the edge of the bridge and went over. It was not his fault. He said that it was the fault of Main Roads because there was no bitumen there. He had this absolute attitude that he wanted to sue somebody because that piece of bitumen was missing. That is just a small example. People need to be prepared when they drive on country roads, not just when driving around the streets of Perth, because it is on country roads that most deaths occur, particularly of young people. These driver training courses should be offered to students at a young age so that they know how to get out of a skid if they are on a gravel road. There will be circumstances in which they will be driving on gravel roads. In fact, they probably relish driving on gravel roads at a young age, particularly if somebody has given them a flash motor car that they are not able to handle.

Although I support the amendments in the bill, I will be very interested to see what results these measures bring in the future. We continue to introduce these tougher measures but we do not achieve anything. I make the point to the minister that I believe we need more of an incentive to stop these deaths on our roads and to encourage better driving.

HON BRUCE DONALDSON (Agricultural) [3.35 pm]: Road safety is probably paramount in all our minds during our life, especially when our kids are growing up. My kids were fortunate enough to have a bit of farmland on which to start learning how to drive. I remember my four-year-old daughter riding a small motorbike. She used a tin to step onto this little motorbike. My wife - her mother - was very upset one day to see this little helmeted kid riding around our circular driveway in front of our house on the farm. She suddenly realised it was her four-year-old daughter. She wondered who had taught her to drive. By the age of six, she was standing on the seat driving one of our four-wheel drives while I was probably feeding stock with hay or lupins. By the age of six or seven, she had also got to the stage where she was quite capable of driving through a gateway. By the age of 10, all our kids were quite capable drivers.

I learnt to drive on a farm. By the time I was 10, I was driving all our vehicles. By the time I was 14 or 15, I was driving a semitrailer on our farm. When I was 15 years old, when my sister and I came up to the farm during the school holidays, we used to drive into Koorda, my home town, once a week to see a movie. The policeman said that as long as I was not stupid afterwards and ran around making doughnuts but just came into town and drove home quietly, there was not a problem. I did that.

Hon Jon Ford: Things have changed.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I know that things have changed, but I have driven two million kilometres since. Our kids have never had any problems driving. The story I am relating would be similar to that of many kids brought up on farms. A lot of them drive to the school bus long before they finish primary school. Mum and dad buy them an old car or ute. They may have to drive a mile or two miles to where the school bus picks them up and the car sits there all day. The kids get off the bus - some of them are only 10 years old - and they drive back home. When they get home from school, they have something to eat and if times are busy, at harvest or seeding time, especially at harvest time, they drive around, clean out the troughs and check the sheep at the dams. They all learn how to drive.

In this day and age, we are really hypocrites because all our advertising is geared towards the you-beaut glamour of the big fast motor car. The faster it goes and the better the sound system, where the car is jumping off the road, the better. This is the sexy promotion of a motor vehicle.

Hon Kim Chance: Doof, doof, doof!

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Does the Leader of the House have one of those too? He has not grown up. I am sure he learnt how to drive on a farm as well. I think any kid brought up on a farm would be able to tell the same story.

Like Hon Ken Baston, I remember that in the lead-up to the 2001 election, I wanted our party to create some incentives to encourage safer driving. I suggested that if people did not accumulate any demerit points over a two-year period, they would get a reduction in their licence fee. That is not the third party section of a licence; I am talking about the licence fee. It would be like a no-claim bonus on the insurance on a motor vehicle, for argument's sake. I have always felt that it may not have been a lot but it would have rewarded safer drivers. There should be some rewards within the system.

We have spoken about speed. I can remember Murray Nixon, a member for the Agricultural Region in this Parliament for eight years. He was a colleague of mine. Being a great car enthusiast, he did a lot of work on what happened after speed limits were introduced into Western Australia. The number of fatalities and injuries actually increased after speed limits were introduced. I think Hon Kim Chance would remember that Murray told the house this on two or three occasions, and quoted the sources. We all sat there thinking that it could not be right, but he had all the documented proof that it was the case. Maybe speed in this day and age is not as big a factor as inattentive driving or fatigue.

Who these days would like to drive a car like those we used to drive, with their braking systems, gearboxes and rag tyres? They were not decent tyres. We were driving cars that were almost deathtraps.

Hon Ken Baston: They were time bombs.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: They were time bombs. Today we have antilock braking systems, most people drive vehicles with automatic transmission and these vehicles have excellent tyres. We do not have blow-outs; we may have slow-outs, but not blow-outs. A lot of accidents were caused by blow-outs of those rag tyres, as we called them. Things have changed a lot. Reducing the speed limit on some suburban roads from 60 to 50 kilometres an hour was a great benefit, but I do not think it should be brought down to 30 or 40. That is when people become aggressive, because they become impatient. We have cars that almost stall at 30 kilometres an hour. It feels like someone could almost walk alongside a car at that speed in this day and age. What I am getting at is that reducing the speed limit is not a panacea. Like the Leader of the House, I believe that anything we can do to reduce fatalities and injuries on the road should be welcomed, but I do at odd times think that some

of the commonsense approach is left out. As someone pointed out, just because words on a piece of paper say that something will happen, does not necessarily mean that it will happen.

The Minister for Regional Development will recall that recently he and I had the privilege of travelling in the United States and looking at its road system. Roads there have five, six or seven lanes, and carry peak-hour traffic 24 hours a day. It is a magnificent road system. The speed limit is 55 miles an hour, which is equivalent to 90 kilometres an hour. At times I looked at the speedometer of the car we were driving, and found we were doing a bit more than 90, but everybody was doing the same speed. We hardly saw a policeman. As long as drivers are not weaving in and out of the traffic and driving stupidly, the police just let the traffic flow. They have to do that, because otherwise there would be monumental congestion. How many accidents did we see? That is the point. With the amount of traffic, they are using commonsense in letting the traffic flow. Sometimes cars can not go more than 30 kilometres an hour, but at other times, on some of the outer roads, the speed might be up to 100, 110 or even 120 kilometres an hour. In fact, I think we got up to 130 kilometres an hour at one time.

Hon Jon Ford: We did see a spectacular road chase.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: Yes, quite true. A couple of times it was a bit hairy and scary, but I did not see any road rage. I think education is a great thing.

Hon Jon Ford: That is because they have guns!

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I guess no-one would get out of their vehicle until they were told to, I will say that! It does happen. The opposition supports this bill, but I feel at times that there may be too much focus on slowing the cars down to the lollipop days, when someone had to walk in front of the car. There may be jobs for old guys like me, walking around Perth and on the freeway in front of the traffic, and the traffic can bank up behind me. It might be very good money, and very good exercise. The minister and I could probably fill that role!

Hon Ed Dermer: There may be danger money if you are not fast enough!

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: There could be. It is one of those things we would like to see happen. The other issue is seatbelts. Education in this matter starts in the schools. We should start looking very closely at making sure that most of the high schools have cars available for driver training at school. That experience will create a sense of responsibility. Everyone is responsible for their own actions. Most young people these days have lead feet. I do not know what is in their shoes, but I see them rip past me on the freeway, and I wonder where they learnt to drive. I support the bill.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 6413.]

Sitting suspended from 3.45 to 4.00 pm