

# Vehicles

## What's involved in getting a DVLA Minibus Licence

### Acquiring a DVLA category D1 Licence

Since January 1st 1997 the standard UK car driving licence only covers vehicles up to 9 seats including driver. (and up to 3.5 tonnes maximum weight). Anyone who has passed their car driving test since that date will not be able to drive either of the two minibuses in the main WRG canal camps fleet without taking a further test. (there is in theory an exemption for minibuses under 3.5 tonnes for some types of non-profitmaking organisation, but as (a) one of our buses is over that weight and (b) we cannot be entirely sure that WRG qualifies without a there being a test case in court - WRG has decided not to take advantage of this exemption)

**James Butler recently became the first WRG driver to pass the necessary PCV (minibus) driving test: this is his report of what it entailed...**

When I first started out on this mission I didn't realise quite how much needed to be done.

1. You need to go to the doctors to have a medical done.

**Cost: approx £40**

2. You need to apply to DVLA for provisional entitlement in the necessary categories to be added to your licence. A tip here is get both D1 and C1 (or if you're aged over 21 you can go for C not C1) added to your licence as it is the same amount of money and enables you to provisionally drive both minibuses and Large Goods Vehicles over 3.5 tonnes (only up to 7.5 tonnes in the case of C1).

**Cost: approx £30**

3. You need to study the theory driving test book for buses.

**Cost: approx £15**

4. Now you have looked long and hard at the book you need to take the theory test. Although most minibuses don't have air brakes, spray guards etc. it is the same theory test for minibuses and anything up to double decker buses. The hazard perception test is harder as you need to react faster on the computer to hazards than you would for a car theory test. This part I found very stressful!

**Cost: approx £30**

5. Now you have passed all of the above you can now go for a driving assessment to see how many days' training you will need. For an average person 4 days' training is the norm for a minibus.

**Cost: approx £10**

6. This is where you finally get your hands on the wheel and start training. How you drive a WRG van is completely different from how to drive a minibus for a DVLA test. Firstly the good old BSM shuffle-steer comes back. No driving one handed now! The main thing to remember is to keep looking in your mirrors.

The trick I was taught is to count to five in your head then do a mirror check and **make sure you move your head not just your eyes**. When it comes to the test, the examiner needs to see your head turn. Also when you stop **always** put the hand-brake on and put it in 1<sup>st</sup> gear and whilst waiting to move off keep looking in your mirrors and both blind spots. You should always check blind spots and mirrors when you are about to take off the hand brake. **You are expected to use bus lanes where possible**: the only bus lanes you **CANNOT** use are signposted with the word "local" on them. It feels very wrong driving in bus lanes!

After having the lessons you should hopefully be ready for the test.

**Cost approx £150 per day inc vat**

7. The day of the test comes. So what do you need to prove to the examiner that you can do? Firstly the examiner will ask five questions. For example, "What safety equipment do you have on board?" (You will show him the first aid kit and fire extinguisher.) Another may be "where is the emergency fuel shut off?" (In my case it was turn the key back as far as it will go.) You could get "How will you make sure the doors are shut? - and show me." (I said "I will go round and open then close them all, and pull the handle and see if the door moves.")

Next is the reversing exercise. (see the diagram) You will be asked to drive forward in a dead straight line and stop with the front of the bus level with 2 cones. If you turn the wheel here you will fail. You then need to reverse around a cone which you have previously passed on your nearside - it now needs to pass you on your off side. You will need to apply full lock to the left, the second you start to move. The cone behind you is one and a half times the length of the bus from the cones you stopped by, and again one and a half times the width of the bus from a yellow line on your right hand side. Do not cross the yellow line with your wheels at any point. You can lean your head out of the window to check if you like.

## IWA Training Awards

WRG's parent organisation The Inland Waterways Association provides funding for volunteers to be trained via its Training Award grants. These can be awarded twice a year for sums of up to £750 for any form of relevant training. In the past they have supported volunteers taking machinery and forestry skills courses, for example. Feel free to apply for one for minibus driving if you feel that it will fulfill the scheme's aims by helping to support waterway restoration. Contact IWA head office on 01923 711114, email [iwa@waterways.org.uk](mailto:iwa@waterways.org.uk), or see [www.waterways.org.uk](http://www.waterways.org.uk) for information.

After passing the cone without touching it you then reverse round in an S shape and reverse into a box marked with cones, which will be the same length as the bus, and one and half times the width. The back of the bus must stop within a defined yellow box marked on the ground.

A good trick here is when practising to look for something on the bus that looks like it is over the line. In my case when I looked at the bumper in my mirrors it looked like it was just past the box. (It is cheating but legal!) You are allowed two "shunts" (which means going forwards) but you will get 1 minor fault for each attempt and on the third shunt that is a fail. For this exercise you don't need a seat belt on, and you can cross your hands. (So long as you can keep control of the bus you can drive on your head whilst handcuffed if you like...) There are no restrictions except to get between the cones and not hit them, and to be in control of the bus.

After this the examiner will get into the bus and ask you to drive up to 20mph, and as the front of the bus passes two cones to stop as fast as possible - within one vehicle length, without locking the wheels up. (It didn't help that there was a load of salt thrown down where I did it...)

You will then leave the DVLA yard and go for a drive on the roads lasting about 40 minutes. You will be asked to stop at two or three bus stops and pretend that passengers get on or off - the door should be near the bus stop sign. Also you will need to pull away from the kerb twice, an uphill start, and a downhill start. For a downhill start you need to put it into 2<sup>nd</sup> gear, foot on brake, hand brake off, and then move away when safe - not forgetting those mirrors and blind spots! There is also a gear changing exercise. To do that you will be asked to go through the gears to 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> gear and then on the examiners say so start going down through the gears one at a time, driving a little distance in each gear. When you get to 1<sup>st</sup> gear you need to crawl along but not stop.

The examiner will then say "now please drive on using your gears as normal" Obviously a mirror check will need to be done and a blind spot check, change into 1<sup>st</sup> gear and then pull away from the kerb and drive on. It is mainly common sense to get you through - for example make sure your foot is right off the clutch with foot flat on the floor so he can't do you for riding the clutch. And make sure all the doors are unlocked when performing the test, as **it is illegal for a door to be locked while the minibus is in use.**

**Cost of the test: £70**

8. Then if you pass, it is time to send all the documents to DVLA.

**Cost: free**

If you are over 21 you can go and do the biggest bus going without doing the minibus test first, but that involves more days worth of lessons, and the examiner will be looking even more closely for any slip-ups.

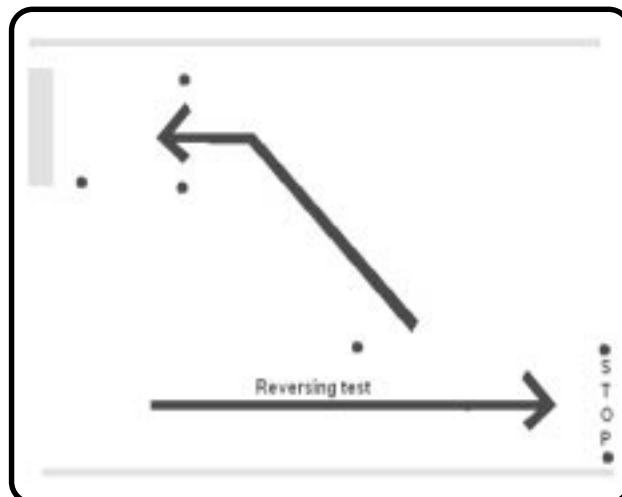
Also another point to remember is if you have passed the towing test in a van you CANNOT tow trailers heavier than 750kg behind a minibus - and vice versa if you took the towing test in a minibus.

**So to sum up:** It does take a long time to do. It took me three years. It is expensive. It cost me approx £550 as I only needed three days training and I got away with paying for two days. I got one day free as I used to deliver to the owner of the training school. A perk of being a postie!

If you are taking the trailer test then it is the same basic test but you won't stop at bus stops or use bus lanes, and also you don't need to take a theory test.

All it is left to say is good luck and if you would like any more advice I will be happy to help.

**James Butler**



*The reversing test*