

# Driving Commentary

Driving commentary is a subject that puts fear into the best and most accomplished of today's drivers if they are truthful. Yet, to be honest, it is one of the simplest of tasks one can do and can certainly improve and put polish to your driving skills all because you are already doing everything and yet now, you are putting them all into words.

Driving commentary provides the instructor with an insight to what you are thinking about, what you are doing with your driving and what you are looking at. The other advantage you learn with this process is the ability to read the road and conditions well in advance and fine tune your senses to seeing more which makes you more prepared and this in turn, gives you the most important piece of driving skill anyone can have – **TIME**. Time to avoid and/or minimise your own exposure to risk. It will also ensure that you are using the '**system of car control**' properly.

So how does one go about learning how to do this? To start off, just tell the person in the passenger seat what you (*the driver*) can see in front of you out of that windscreen (*its your storyboard*). Once you can do this then look at other things such as what's happening in your mirrors, what you can see when approaching that roundabout or that T-junction, can you see round that bend, can you see anything in that parked car etc.

Of course when you are learning this new skill, there is a trade-off in everything else you are doing and have got so good at – your steering becomes erratic, gear changing is like being in a ship on a stormy ocean and braking is so harsh that the seat belts lock up all the time!!!! Never worry as once you get the hang of commentary, the rest of your driving will actually be enhanced.

Now I hear you say, 'OK fine but how does one start'. Well, quiet simply describe the car you are driving and the weather/road conditions

**Example –** I'm driving a VW Golf 2.8l V6 with a 6 speed gear box, and 4 wheel drive. The weather is dry and sunny with dry roads and very good visibility.....

What should I be pointing out to the instructor?

What is important and what isn't?

From this you can begin to describe what you see and what you are actually doing i.e. braking to a stop, or changing down to a lower gear to be able to drive through the corner, etc....

Below are some of the objectives to be covered during a driving commentary;

**Typical classes of road** – A'or B' road, Motorway, Dual Carriageway, Urban or Single track.



**Type of surface:** Tarmac, Concrete, Surface dressed (Chip),

**Condition of road surface:** Rough, pot-holed, Good, cambered, wet, dry, icy, oily,  
(*Typical example at TRL is the pine needles from the trees, which make it slippery especially when, wet.*)

**Traffic:** What is approaching you or behind you, or maybe waiting to enter from a side road.

**Distances:** Let the instructor know you are giving extra room to the vehicle in front because they are a lower grade (*or in reality have L' Plates*). Explain the safety around your vehicle and apply the reason to the current condition on the road. I use the term 'personal bubble' to explain this, make it as big as you can, then you are more likely to have the time to make a more qualified decision and avoid an incident.

**Weather:** What is it like? Wet dry, wet but no longer raining, etc if wet or foggy, what is the visibility like, even when sunny visibility can be poor due to momentary sun blindness?

**Road Markings & Signs:** these tell you and help you to assess what comes next on the road. White lines tell you if you are allowed to overtake or not, when they are short and close together it is more likely the visibility up ahead is relatively good, when they get longer and closer together, it is less safe to consider alternative manoeuvres such as overtaking as a bend may be approaching or a hidden dip or adverse camber. Don't forget the difference between give way and stop road markings.

**Environment:** What is around the road, a hedge, trees, and footpaths.

**Alert ahead:** As you drive down the road, ensure you observe hazards well in advance, comment on a road entering on my left, or a zebra crossing in the distance with no people near it, other observations can be helped due to local knowledge, these can be known hidden junctions around corners, so precautions are being taken before you can see the hazard. Comment on all you see from that hazard back to where you currently are.

**Advanced driving system:** Comment on the '**system of car control**' as you approach and navigate bends, junctions or hazards. This will include your approach to braking, gear change and steering.

**General Observation:** Comment on other road users and their situation, type of vehicle if it is unusual such as tractors etc. Observe possible dangers that may be lurking in lay bys, farm entrances, driveways, pedestrian walkways, people, children, anything!

Always remember your stopping distances.