



CONFIDENCE BOOSTING COURSE

Chloë Hukin, our editorial assistant and resident motorhome novice, drives a motorcaravan for the first time. Now where's that ignition...

If you're a complete motorhome novice like me, you might understand what I mean when I admit that the thought of driving/parking/sitting in the driving seat of a 'van (no matter what the size), scared me silly. I arrived at the MMM offices back in 2009 with zero motorhoming experience but bags of enthusiasm - though I'll be honest, having only just passed my driving test, sitting in the driving seat of a 'van didn't excite me one little bit.

They say it's best to face your fears... In my case, this was MMM's long-term test 'van at the time - my nemesis the 5.41-metre Autocruise Jazz panel van (don't laugh). And the solution to my fear? The Caravan Club's Motor Caravan Manoeuvring Course. I just hoped my instructor didn't scare easily.

Launched 15 years ago, the course aims to create greater confidence in motorhome driving - something I woefully lacked - by introducing participants to simple driving exercises, plus general information and safety tips you may find useful when driving a (monster) outfit.

I picked the Diamond Driver Training centre in Newark, Nottinghamshire, but there are club-approved training schools throughout the country. To find one near you visit the Caravan Club's website at www.caravanclub.co.uk

THE THEORY

The course started with a 1980s' video accompanied by a reassuring cuppa. The film showed an HGV lorry tackling roundabouts, junctions, road positioning and spatial awareness - all of which are vital skills to master when driving a larger vehicle. After studying the truck's movements (and giggling at the haircuts), it was time to put it all into practice...

STARTING UP

After adjusting my seat and wing mirrors to the correct positions and familiarising myself with the cab, it was time to drive. Starting on a mock road (marked out in the driving school's grounds), my friendly instructor Karl asked me



to drive as I would on a 'normal' road, approaching junctions and negotiating mini roundabouts, using what I'd learnt in the video. As I drove, Karl gave suggestions and tips on how to drive safely and what to be mindful of when driving the motorhome, including where cars may try and squeeze past, how not to clip kerbs, keeping an eye on any overhang, etc.

PARKING AND REVERSING

When it comes to reversing into a bay-type parking space, I have been known to struggle with my Renault Clio: manoeuvring a motorhome without relying on a rear-view mirror was going to be more than a challenge! But, once Karl had set out cones and given me a few invaluable hints and tips, it was a breeze. After a few 'iffy' attempts, reversing into tight supermarket bays, parallel parking on a busy side road and reversing round corners all seemed somewhat achievable in the 'van - which now seemed less 'monster' and a lot more manageable.

ON THE ROAD

After a full day of training (about four hours in my case), advice and suggestions, it was time to test out my new-found skills on public roads. With deputy editor, Rachel, shoved into the back of the 'van and Karl sat reassuringly by my side, I took off into Newark's town centre at

rush hour.

With small cars scurrying around me, this was an excellent test of the skills I'd learnt during the day and I was soon more than comfortable in the captain's seat.

Before the day started, I had never even put a key in the motorhome's ignition, but there I was approaching roundabouts and junctions with bucket-loads of confidence.

Last August, just after my training, I jumped in the Jazz and made the three-hour drive to the Three Counties Showground in Malvern for the Western Motorhome Show, and I haven't looked back since... ■

Of course, the training is not aimed only at new drivers but may also be an option for anyone wishing to brush up on their motorhome driving skills, making motorcaravanning a safer and more enjoyable experience. On my course there were two ladies who simply wanted to gain confidence and share the driving with their husbands.

Also, look out for free taster sessions often held by the club at the NEC shows.

For more information about the course call 01342-316808, or visit www.caravanclub.co.uk

