

**NEW DRIVER**  
Dylan Doyle is on  
the road to being  
fully licensed



LEARNING TO DRIVE IS STILL A RITE OF PASSAGE, BUT MANY FIRST-TIMERS ARE WAITING TO GET STARTED, AND BEGINNER DRIVER EDUCATION COURSES ARE CHANGING TO OFFER MORE WISDOM BEHIND THE WHEEL

# driven to succeed

WRITTEN BY KRYSTYNA LAGOWSKI  
PHOTO BY IAN PATTERSON

## **G**REG BLANCHARD IS A LITTLE OBSESSED WITH ROAD SAFETY.

But that's what happens when you've been teaching people to drive for over 35 years.

"I'm always looking at the Highway Traffic Act to see what the new rules are and keeping my own skills up," says the Toronto-based CAA driving instructor.

Most of us who have been driving for years can sometimes forget what it was like to learn the key skills. Dylan Doyle, who has had his G1 licence for two years, initially found left turns to be nerve-racking. Especially that moment when you're in the middle of the intersection, preparing to safely turn left. Once, when Doyle went too far into the intersection, the instructor had to use his dual brake. "It was a little embarrassing," says Doyle.

Halifax native Avery Dakin-Clarke got her Class 7 learner licence, the equivalent of Ontario's G1, two months before her 17th birthday. She recalls being nervous about backing up. "My instructor showed me some techniques and I practiced a lot," she says. "We would go to a mall and I'd back into tight spots—that was helpful."

Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce a graduated-licensing program for new drivers of all ages. That was

back in 1994. Within five years the program was declared a success, with statistics that told a compelling story: an estimated 1,400 fewer emergency room visits, 15,500 fewer days in hospital, 9,900 fewer ambulance calls, 137,000 fewer hours of police time and an astonishing 58% decrease in the new-driver fatality rate. Now, all provinces and territories in Canada—and many jurisdictions around the world—have mandated graduated-licensing programs.

In Ontario, a Ministry of Transportation-accredited beginner driver-education course currently requires 40 hours of instruction: at least 20 hours in class and 10 hours on the road, plus 10 hours of flexible instruction, including homework. Blanchard says his students seem to enjoy the assignments, which include a 300-word dissertation on driver behaviour, an essay about global warming (to learn about the impact of cars on the environment) and drafting a contract with the learner's parents that outlines parameters around using the car, obeying the law, sharing costs and vehicle maintenance.

For his assignments, Doyle had to describe the demerit point system and explain functions like mirrors, wipers and wheels. "We also had to explain the consequences of drunk driving based on blood-alcohol levels and type of licence," he recalls. "Most of the questions ▷

## LEARNING TO DRIVE

### GRADUATED DRIVING

Everyone who is learning to drive works their way through a graduated driving program. Beginners must be at least 16 years old, have a zero blood-alcohol level, avoid driving at night and limit their passengers. Here's a snapshot of the requirements:

#### **G1**

▷ G1 holders can't drive on high-speed roadways

▷ Drivers must wait 12 months\* to apply for their G2

#### **G2**

▷ G2 holders are able to drive on high-speed roadways if there is another fully licensed driver in the car

▷ Drivers must wait 12 months to take the final road test and get their full G licence

\*Time can be reduced by four months if an MTO-approved Beginner Driver Education Course is completed

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were about the law and consequences of certain actions."

Although he's almost 19, Doyle, who lives in Vaughan, Ont., didn't jump to get his G1 right away. "I'm close to public transit and I can ride my bike to a lot of places." He notes that many of his friends don't have their licence yet either. "It's expensive to get insurance for people my age," Doyle says.

Blanchard confirms that in the past few years, it's been unusual to have a class of only teen student drivers; the ages now range across the board. "Young people are waiting until they're older to get their licence, especially in cities," he says. "They're waiting until it's an absolute necessity."

Novice driver James Cooper didn't get his G2 licence until he was 28. He felt that it was too expensive at the time, especially since he was able to get everywhere in Toronto by bike. But Cooper regrets waiting. "I should've done it a long time ago," he says. "It's not that hard and didn't even cost that much. I was relieved to have finally done it. Now I feel like an adult."

Not everyone is waiting. Dakin-Clarke says that all of her friends in Halifax have a licence. "Everyone who can afford driver training and has access to a car either has their licence or is working to get it," she says. Besides the essential safety lessons, Dakin-Clarke credits her mom with helping her understand how to drive for fuel economy. "She told me to keep at the speed limit and not to slow down or accelerate suddenly," she says.

Blanchard teaches what he calls "proactive driving": accelerating smoothly, anticipating traffic lights and keeping the car well maintained. Also, keep a proper following distance of three to four seconds on city streets and anticipate the other drivers' mistakes.

And cellphones are not allowed, even in the classroom. "We treat the classroom like the car," says Blanchard. "Cellphones are off limits. They get shut off and put away. You can't drive safely when you're distracted."

"We teach beyond the road test. We're teaching the skills that these kids will have for the rest of their lives." **CAA**