

NEWSDAY DANGEROUS ROADS

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Alfonso A. Castillo
I've been covering transportation for Newsday since 2005. Each week I'll bring you insights about Long Island's dangerous roads, along with in-depth news, reporting and analysis from our transportation experts. Reach out with tips, questions or suggestions at gonzo@newsday.com



A score of 70% is needed to pass and earn a driver's permit — the first step toward a driver's license. Credit: Barry Stein

After reporting on criticism about New York's U.S. History and Government Regents exam, legendary Newsday education reporter John Hildebrand was challenged by a state education official: "If you think the exams are so easy, maybe you should try taking them yourself."

And so John did. **Scoring a 97**, despite the fact that he "hadn't cracked a history textbook in 40 years."

A few months back, I **questioned whether New York's** licensing standards for new drivers were too low, relative to other parts of the U.S. and the world. Inspired by John, who recently retired after more than a half-century at Newsday, I decided to also put to the test how much I've learned covering my beat, and take the DMV's written driving exam.

The quiz comprises 50 randomly selected, multiple-choice questions similar to those that appear on the actual driver's permit test, which includes just 20 questions for the in-person test. A score of 70% is needed to pass and earn a driver's permit — the first step toward a driver's license.

The DMV administered 1,161,194 permit tests last year, with 63% of test takers getting a passing grade, officials said.

If I'm being honest, this idea wouldn't have seen the light of day in a newsletter if I flunked. But I scored 97%, which I'd like to think is respectable, considering, like John, I did no studying.

Among the five questions I got wrong:

- "On a New York State highway where there is no posted speed limit, the fastest you may legally drive is:"

Having cut my teeth driving on the Bix Parkway in Queens, I answered 50 mph. The correct answer was 65.

- "Seat belts can be most effective as injury preventive devices when they are worn by:"

I chose "all occupants of a car being driven on an expressway." (How can you go wrong with "all occupants?") The right answer was "passengers and the driver whenever they are in the car."

I was also not aware that "rear-end collisions are the most common type of crash in work zones" and that bicycles used after dark must have "a front headlight and red taillight." I thought reflectors sufficed. And I confused a "merging traffic" sign (approaching from the right) sign with a "right lane ends, stay to the left" sign.

Many of the questions seemed less like legitimate queries, and more like public service announcements. Here's an example:

- Drinking alcohol and driving is:
 - a. A minor traffic safety problem
 - b. A serious traffic safety problem
 - c. Safe if you only have a few drinks
 - d. Only dangerous to the driver who drinks

The right answer, obviously, was "b," but I imagine there's no harm in reminding potential drivers why a, c and d are so, so wrong.

Was taking the test enough to make me reconsider my previous criticism of New York's licensing standards? Not really, but I acknowledge that the practice quiz was a little tougher than I expected, and included several questions that an unexperienced driver could struggle to answer correctly without some serious studying. My 16-year-old son, who had to take the test six times to pass, can attest to that.

Readers speak up

This reader of Newsday's Dangerous Roads series questions if it's truly the roads that are dangerous.

The roads haven't changed. People's driving habits have changed. There is a disregard for driving safely and a disrespect for others who share the road. It seems to be more of a "me attitude" while driving. Consequently, the result is "get out of my way and get out of my way" for you. No investigation needed, instead, more driver education should be required.

Peter Scott, Centertown

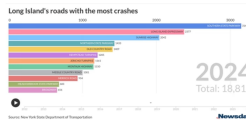
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