

Driving teacher wants tougher licensing rules for new drivers

By **KAREN SMITH**
The Champion

An upgraded system of licensing new drivers is needed to "stop the slaughter" that is taking place on today's roads, the director of a local driving school said Wednesday.

Car accidents — particularly those involving death and serious injury — could be substantially reduced if a system called graduated licensing became law, said Tim Danter, director of Young Drivers of Canada centres in Milton and Oakville.

"It's something that's long overdue. It's got to be done," said Mr. Danter noting that motor vehicle accidents remain the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24.

A growing number of organizations are lobbying the provincial government to introduce the system which restricts new drivers of all ages to certain conditions until they gain more experience on the road.

Conditions could include a curfew on night driving and supervision by an adult, fully-licensed driver in the car. Limited access to high speed roads and mandatory hazard-perception testing are also possibilities.

Ontario's auto insurance industry believes a full, unrestricted driver's licence should be earned gradually, in stages, said Jim Harries, spokesman for the Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) which has been promoting

graduated licensing for the last eight years. New drivers are five times more likely than experienced drivers to be involved in an accident, according to statistics released by the IBC.

To date, no new licensing legislation has been introduced by the Province, but Mr. Harries said he is satisfied that Bob Rae's NDP government is "taking a serious look" at ways to improve the current system.

Graduated licensing has already reduced accidents involving novice drivers in New Zealand, said Mr. Danter. The country adopted the system in 1987, and according to reports, has reduced death and serious injury accidents involving novice drivers by 25 per cent.

An Australian state recently adopted graduated licensing and in Canada, the idea is being considered in British Columbia, said Mr. Harries.

The system would have a "favourable impact on insurance rates," he added, because less accidents would reduce claims.

The graduated licensing system also demands a zero blood-alcohol content, and an 18-month minimum period of accident and conviction free driving before an unrestricted licence (upon completion of a recognized driver training course) is granted.

Among the growing number of organizations in favour of the system are the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canada Safety Council, and the Driving School Association of Ontario.

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