

Graduated licencing coming but students not happy

By KAREN SMITH
The Champion

Graduated licencing is close to becoming a reality, but many local youths wish it was a dream.

While the provincial government regards the move as a safety plus for Ontario roads, those approaching driving age see it as an inconvenience.

If approved, graduated licencing, a two-level system requiring new drivers of all ages to develop driving skills gradually, will take effect in the spring. Given that the majority NDP government came up with the idea, there is virtually no chance of it being derailed.

Provincial Transportation Minister Gilles Pouliot introduced legislation at Queen's Park last month.

"We're going to make Ontario roads the safest in North America," he said. "This legislation is a key component of our comprehensive road safety agenda."

"We believe graduated licencing will work in Ontario, as it has in

other jurisdictions, as part of a package of measures designed to improve all driver behaviour — the cause of 85 per cent of Ontario collisions."

Some recently interviewed grade 10 Milton District High School students, planning to be driving soon, are not as excited about it.

Two levels

The proposed system means new drivers must hold a learner's permit (Level One) for eight months to a year before they can undergo a road test conducted by a government examiner and, if successful, acquire Level Two licencing.

During the Level One period, certain restrictions would apply. New drivers would have to be accompanied by a fully-licenced driver with at least four years' experience.

Beginners would also only be permitted to drive Class G vehicles (cars, vans and small trucks) and could only do so between 5 a.m. and midnight. They would also have to stay off 400-series highways and

certain designated urban expressways.

New drivers would be allowed to operate motorcycles (Class M), but also only under certain restrictions.

"The whole point of driving is being independent and this just takes it away," says Pam Parkinson, 15.

The Level Two stage would last a minimum of a year for all new Class G drivers, but would permit more driving privileges than in Level One.

The restricted driving system, if approved, will make it tough for new motorists to gain confidence, says Paul Hume, 15.

The five students interviewed, however, agree with one graduated licencing rule for those with Level One or Level Two permits. New drivers must maintain a zero blood alcohol level while operating a vehicle.

But something else the students agree on is that, after hearing a variety of information from different sources, they're confused about the specific rules of graduated licencing and its timing.

To enter Level One, all new drivers would be required to be at least 16 years of age and pass both a vision test and a knowledge test on the rules of the road.

Those requirements are the same

as the ones which currently apply to applicants for Class L, 365-day learner's permits (automobiles), and Class R, 60-day learner's permits (motorcycles).

Restrictions

Other restrictions and options under Level One (Class G) would include:

- Carrying only one passenger in the front seat, that person being the accompanying driver;
- Carrying only as many passengers as there are seat belts in other positions in the vehicle;
- Drivers have the option of dis-

playing a standard novice driver sign in the vehicle.

• The Level One period lasts a year, but drivers have the option of reducing it to eight months by successfully completing an approved driver education course.

• At the end of Level One and before entering Level Two, all drivers are required to pass a road test conducted by a government examiner.

Under Level Two, drivers must also:

- Carry only as many passengers as there are seat belts in the vehicle;
- Drive Class G vehicles only.

Police chief James Harding seriously ill with pneumonia

Halton Regional Police Chief James Harding remains seriously ill after being hospitalized for pneumonia.

Chief Harding, 59, was admitted to Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital December 5, according to regional police.

"He is still seriously ill, but has been stabilized," said Inspector John VanderLelie, a spokesperson for the chief's office.

The pneumonia is a complication related to his heart attack a year ago, police said. The chief, who has diabetes, suffered a mild heart attack in November, 1992 and was off for seven weeks. He spent a week in intensive care.

Inspector VanderLelie said doctors are waiting for Chief Harding's condition to improve and for him to build up strength before he undergoes needed heart surgery.

The chief is scheduled to retire at the end of the month and accept a position as head of operations at Ontario's Special Investigations



James Harding.

Unit, which probes serious police incidents, including shootings.

Filling in as acting police chief is Deputy Chief John Barratt. Peter Campbell, OPP Deputy Commissioner of Field Operations, has been hired to assume command of the service January 1.

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