

Press Release

Findings from the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2022

Novice drivers often misjudge dangers

- Overestimation and high willingness to take risks play a major role
- Expertise of experienced drivers only develops through constant practice
- Survey shows frequent misjudgment of own competence

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Lack of experience, overestimation of one's own capabilities and an increased willingness to take risks are among the most dangerous sources of error for novice drivers – not infrequently resulting in serious crashes. “It is therefore all the more important to focus not only on vehicle handling and rules during driving school training, but also to teach higher-level skills such as self-control, acceptance of traffic rules and the importance of perceiving danger as early as possible”, says Dr. Thomas Wagner, traffic psychologist and head of the department of officially approved centers for the assessment of fitness to drive at DEKRA in Germany. “This would help to prevent numerous accidents which, in the worst case scenario, could end fatally”, adds Wagner, referring to the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2022 “Mobility of Young People”, which, among other things, also takes a closer look at the accident risks resulting from misjudgments and risky driving maneuvers.

The driver's license test has been passed, and you can finally get started. Of course, there is no question of sufficient expertise at this point. Passing the theoretical and practical driving test initially “only” confirms proof of driving competence that meets the requirements. “Just like learning a new sport, knowledge of the rules, training practice and situational observation and movement sequences in daily road traffic must be combined”, says the DEKRA expert. Step by step, he says, the theoretical knowledge is transferred into practical action patterns. “The linchpin here is the reliable processing of the relevant information of a situation in order to develop an immediate understanding of the driving task to be solved”, the traffic psychologist continues.

According to British psychologist David Crundall, who, among others, is quoted in the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2022, the fact that novice drivers in particular are repeatedly involved in accidents has to do not only with risk factors such as impulsivity, distraction and impairment due to alcohol and drugs, but also with deficits in hazard perception. In other words, with the ability to recognize dangerous situations on the road in time to react appropriately and avoid an

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accident. Behind this lies a complex chain of behaviors that only develop with increasing driving experience in the direction of improved road safety and the associated competence to act.

This already begins with the recognition of a possible “hazard precursor”. This could be, for example, an oncoming vehicle that wants to turn into a side street and has to cross the lane. Or a vehicle whose structural dimensions obscure a pedestrian. Ideally, if the resulting indications of potential danger are small, one continues to search the environment, and over time a priority hierarchy forms. This ranking is constantly in flux as new items are added to the list, old items fall out, and current items are reordered according to the dynamic situation. Failure to fix a “precursor” before a hazard actually emerges may mean it is already too late to respond appropriately. With potentially fatal consequences.

Susceptibility to risky driving maneuvers

An important issue with novice drivers is the acceptance of and compliance with traffic rules. Whether or not a driver obeys a traffic rule depends not only on their ability, but also on their willingness to behave appropriately on the road. The “unwillingness” has mainly to do with the willingness to take risks, which is more pronounced in young people, especially in men.

In addition to socialization, hormones such as testosterone are among the causes of this phenomenon. Since the organism of men has a much larger amount of this hormone compared to women, a neuroendocrinological “tsunami” occurs during puberty while the maturation process of the brain is still delayed. The balance between “playing with fire in the sense of risk-taking and the “brake of reason” by neuronal circuitry in the frontal brain has not yet been established, because brain maturation takes place from the posterior to the anterior brain area. The brain structures first completed in their development are those which are responsible for simpler control processes such as motor activities or sensory tasks during information processing. This is followed by more complex processing structures that are responsible for planning, deciding, deliberating, and executing plans of action.

According to Dr. Thomas Wagner, the temporal differences in brain development mean that spontaneous action is more pronounced in young people than in people from middle age onwards: “This influences the way we deal with risks in road traffic and the willingness to accept or even consciously seek out risks in order to savor our own supposedly high level of driving ability.”

In this context, the results of a Forsa survey conducted on behalf of DEKRA among 18- to 24-year-olds are also interesting. According to this survey, 54 percent of the young men surveyed in Germany thought they drove much or at least somewhat better than the average of all drivers. Among the young women surveyed, 37 percent thought so.

“This phenomenon of overestimating oneself is also reflected in the so-called subjective age”, the DEKRA expert refers to a meta-analysis published in 2021 by

Martin Pinguart and Hans-Werner Wahl. Based on 293 studies available worldwide with around 1.5 million study participants from youth to old age, the two psychologists found that up to the age of 25 there is a systematic overestimation of one's own age by up to five years. This is linked to an exaggerated positive self-image with attributes such as life experience, maturity, and competence.

Background information on the subject as well as further information on road safety is provided in the current DEKRA Road Safety Report 2022 "Mobility of Young People". It is available for download online at www.dekra-roadsafety.com. All previous reports since 2008 can also be found there.

About DEKRA

DEKRA has been active in the field of safety for almost 100 years. Founded in 1925 in Berlin as Deutscher Kraftfahrzeug-Überwachungs-Verein e.V., it is today one of the world's leading expert organizations. DEKRA SE is a subsidiary of DEKRA e.V. and manages the Group's operating business. In 2022, DEKRA generated preliminary sales totaling almost EUR 3.7 billion. The company currently employs over 48,000 people (as of 30.09.2022) in approximately 60 countries on all continents. With qualified and independent expert services, they work for safety on the road, at work and at home. These services range from vehicle inspection and expert appraisals to claims services, industrial and building inspections, safety consultancy, testing and certification of products and systems, as well as training courses and temporary work. The vision for the company's 100th birthday in 2025 is that DEKRA will be the global partner for a safe, secure, and sustainable world. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.