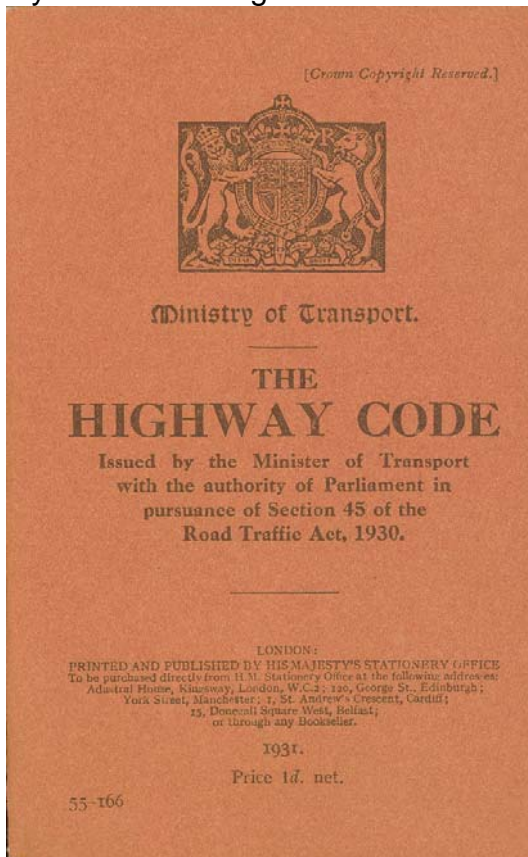


A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HIGHWAY CODE

Did you know that The Highway Code celebrated its 70th birthday in 2001? On average over one million copies of the Code are sold each year, making it one of the major non-fiction bestsellers. In fact it is one of the few books in print that can lay claim to saving thousands of lives.



When it was first launched in 1931 there were just 2.3 million motor vehicles in Great Britain, yet over 7,000 people were killed in road accidents each year. Today there are more than 27 million vehicles on our roads but, thanks to greater public awareness, advances in technology and the introduction of British Summertime, only half the number of road deaths occur. However, that still leaves plenty of room for improvement.

Some things have not changed over the years: the very first edition of The Highway Code urged all road users to be careful and considerate towards others, putting safety first. However, other aspects of the code have changed considerably. For example,

in 1931 mirrors were not even mentioned and drivers were advised to sound their horn when overtaking. Nowadays, advice on how to cross the road fills a whole chapter, but in the early days it only merited a paragraph. On the other hand, more than a third of the original 24-page booklet described the various hand signals the police and road users should use, compared to the single page given to the subject in the current edition.

The 1931 edition:

- cost one old penny
- was the only one to carry advertisements, for the AA, The Autocar magazine, The Motorcycle magazine, Castrol Motor Oil, BP, Motor Union Insurance and the RAC
- contained 18 pages of advice, compared to 93 pages in the 1999 edition
- included advice to drivers of horse drawn vehicles to 'rotate the whip above the head; then incline the whip to the right or left to show the direction in which the turn is to be made.'

Since those early days, regular revisions of the Code have reflected changes in technology and developments in traffic management and road safety. Diagrams of road signs - just ten signs in all - were first seen in the second edition, as was a warning about the dangers of driving when affected by alcohol or fatigue. Stopping distances made their first appearance in the third edition, along with new sections giving hints on driving and cycling.

The 1954 Highway Code, complemented by brand new colour illustrations, gave over the back cover to first aid guidance, while the expanded traffic signs section contained the first triangular warning

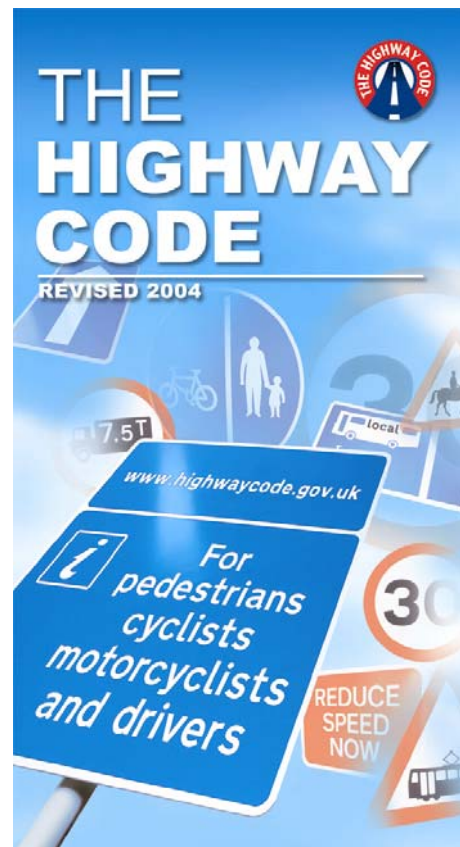
signs. The arrival of motorways in the late 1950s led to the inclusion, in the fifth edition, of a new section on motorway driving, explaining such things as how to use exit slip roads and advising drivers to avoid drowsiness by stretching their legs at the parking or service areas. By the sixth edition in 1968 photographs and 3D illustrations had been included to help make rules clear and the price had risen from 6 old pence to 1 shilling and 3 pence. After decimalisation reprinted editions cost just 6 new pence.

The 70-page 1978 edition introduced the Green Cross Code for pedestrians and the new orange badges for the disabled. Prompted by soaring car crime statistics, the amended version contained advice on vehicle security.

The 1990s saw a new format taller booklet and the inclusion of a section geared to the new driving theory test, which in the current edition has now become part of the Code itself.

Some key moments in driving history:

- 1923 First roundabouts developed.
- 1927 First automatic traffic lights installed – Leeds & Wolverhampton.
- 1930 Minimum driving age set.
- 1931 Highway Code first published.
- 1934 Cats eyes invented.
- 1935 First driving tests held – cost 10 shillings.
- 1950 Seatbelts introduced.
- 1951 Zebra crossings introduced.
- 1967 Seatbelts compulsory in new cars.
- 1976 Mini-roundabouts introduced.
- 1992 Speed enforcement cameras at permanent sites.



- 1996 Driving Theory Test.
- 1999 introduction of changes to 'L' test including extension of length of test, randomisation of emergency stop manoeuvre and failure for committing 16 or more driving faults.
- 2000 Introduction of touch screen theory test.
- 2001 Introduction of internet booking for theory tests.
- 2002 Separate hazard perception section added to make new theory test.
- 2003 'Show me' 'Tell me' questions added to beginning of practical test.

www.highwaycode.gov.uk