

Motoring



The 1930's was an era of motoring. Developments in manufacturing and engineering made the dream of owning a vehicle a reality not just for the rich, but the rising middle classes too.

In 1931 the first £100 car, a Morris Minor, rolled off the production lines.



This was closely followed by the Austin10



And the Ford Model Y



These cars were all aimed at upper and middle class families to whom the benefits of 'days out in the countryside' were heavily marketed. They were comparatively cheap to buy too – The Ford model Y was the first car to sell for only £100. Sales rocketed.

For those who couldn't afford the luxury of a car, a motorbike was much more affordable. The typical motorbike of the 1930's was a 350 or 500 cc model, with two exhaust pipes and a shiny chrome petrol tank.



Many owners however, treated riding a motorcycle as a sport, racing one another through towns and down country lanes, with passengers riding on luggage racks or even side saddle, none of them with helmets! As with Aunt Alberta, motorbikes were also popular with women: (Note the metal stocking guards)

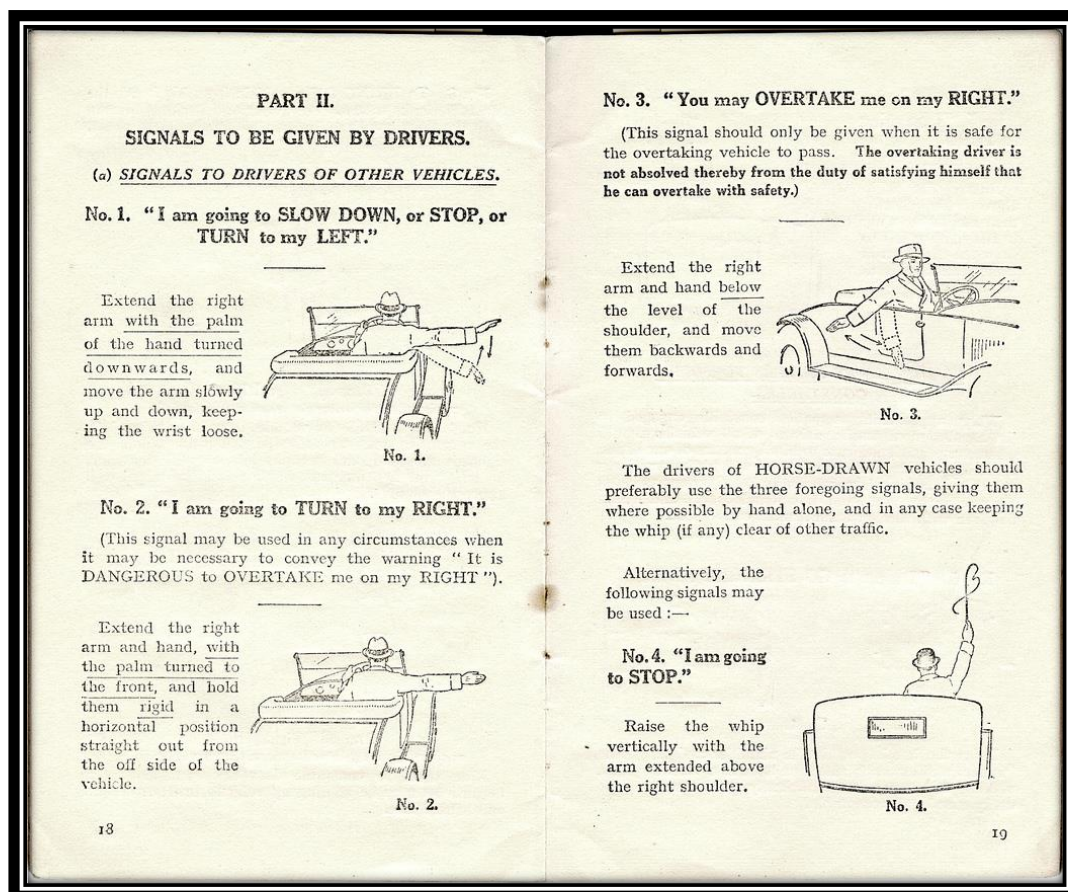


For families and couples who wanted a safer ride, sidecars became popular:



By 1934, around two and a half million motor vehicles were on Britain's roads and just over half of them were private cars.

This did not come without problems. Traditionally the speed limit had been set at twenty miles per hour, but this was abolished in 1930 as it was usually ignored and the courts were overwhelmed with speeding cases. With no speed limits and a vast number of new and inexperienced drivers, the early 1930's saw some of the highest road casualty figures ever recorded. In 1931 the 'Highway code' was introduced for the first time, but it was fairly basic. It did not cover stopping distances, or road signs but it did show hand signals:



Exercise 1

- In pairs, try out the four signals above.
- Can your partner tell which way you are going to turn?

In 1934 there were 7343 deaths and 231,603 injuries, mostly of pedestrians, on Britain's roads. Something had to be done, and that year saw the

introduction of a 'Road Traffic Act' by Leslie Hoare-Belisha, the Minister for Transport, which set a limit of thirty miles an hour in built up areas where there were street lights, and brought in a compulsory test for every new driver. Before this, anyone could drive a car provided they had a Doctors' signature confirming they were physically fit to do so – no matter how incompetent they were behind the wheel. Cat's eyes reflectors were also introduced, which indicated the centre and sides of the road at night. To keep pedestrians safer, Hoare-Belisha introduced pedestrian crossings at designated safe points. These were marked on the road, but also highly visible from a distance because of the electric beacons by them – named Belisha beacons by the press rather than the minister. Penalties for dangerous driving were also made harder hitting.



Exercise 2

- Imagine it is 1934 and you are working in the Department of Transport.
- The new traffic act is about to be introduced and it is your job to make sure it is understood by everyone.
- In groups of three or four, devise a presentation for young children to teach them how to cross the road safely.
- Try out a few of your ideas with the rest of the class acting as children.

Exercise 3

- In order that this information gets to the widest possible audience, you need to produce the information in booklet form.
- The instructions need to be as clear and precise as possible yet the leaflet must look attractive enough to make all children want to read it.