

A day in the life of a driving instructor

When Major John Hewson retired from the army at the age of fifty, he soon found himself at a loose end. He had grown used to army discipline and he found civilian life dull and boring. For the first few months he was quite happy in the house that he and his wife had bought on his retirement, but he soon began to wish he had something to do. His wife, Mary, also pointed out that his pension wasn't sufficient for them to live on and that they needed some extra money. Unfortunately the Major had no qualifications, but he did know a lot about motor cars. And so three months later he opened his own school of motoring. He called it the A1 School of Driving. At first the Major thought he would never get more than one or two clients, but everything changed on the day that the first of his pupils passed the driving test.

As usual, the Major rose early, ate his breakfast and was in his office at exactly eight o'clock. The Major was always punctual. People in the houses opposite the school checked their watches when he arrived; they knew that the moment he entered his office it was eight o'clock precisely. The Major's first job each morning was to go into the garage next door and check the car for oil, water and air. He returned to the office at eight fifteen. He looked at his diary and sadly noted that he had no appointments until midday. Nevertheless, he opened the office at nine o'clock as usual. Then he sat down at his desk, lit his pipe and opened the morning newspaper. He knew from many mornings spent in this way that if he read the paper very slowly he would finish it at half past eleven — just in time to get ready for his first client. But he was still reading the front page when the door opened and a middle-aged woman walked in. Mrs. Carruthers had read the advertisement for the A1 School in the local paper and had come for the free trial lesson. The Major offered one hour's free tuition to anyone; during this time he could judge whether a full course of twenty-five lessons was necessary or whether a short refresher course would be sufficient.

Mrs. Carruthers: I do so like the name of your school. A1 sounds encouraging, and as it's run by a colonel I know I shall be in safe hands.

Major: Thank you for the promotion, madam but I am actually a major.

Mrs. Carruthers: Oh dear, I'm so sorry. Now is that higher or lower than a colonel? I can never remember.

Major: Lower. But don't let's worry about that. I think I can fit you in for your free trial lesson now. But first I have to see your provisional driving licence. Thank you. Yes, that seems to be in order. Tell me, have you ever taken the driving test?

Mrs. Carruthers: Well, yes, I'm what you might call an old hand.

Major: You'll have to be more precise than that, I'm afraid. Have you taken it once? Twice?

Mrs. Carruthers: No, my dear captain, a few more times than that.

Major: Major, madam, if you don't mind.

Mrs. Carruthers: Yes, of course. I'm so sorry. I knew a captain once in the army. Or was it the navy?

Major: Perhaps you could just tell me how many times you have taken the test.

Mrs. Carruthers: Let me see. There was the time I had a little accident at a pedestrian crossing. And then there was the time I had a bit of bad luck with the gears. I also remember...

Major: I don't want to hurry you, Mrs. Carruthers, but I'd like to start at ten o'clock.

Mrs. Carruthers: Yes, of course. Well, let's make a nice round number, shall we?

Major: Yes, why not?

Mrs. Carruthers: Put down thirty then, Brigadier.

The Major took Mrs. Carruthers out in his car for the trial lesson. She broke almost every rule in the Highway Code and the Major was very glad that his car was fitted with dual control. When they were safely back in the office he told her she would have to take the full course -partly because she obviously needed it and partly because it was good for business. Mrs. Carruthers agreed to come for a lesson at ten o'clock every Tuesday for the next six months. The Major was not sorry to see her go, particularly as his next pupil was a young man who was learning quickly. He had had only three lessons and already he was driving quite well. At one o'clock the Major went home to lunch.

Mary: How was business this morning, dear?

Major: Let's just say it had its ups and downs.

Mary: I see. Haven't you got a pupil taking the test today?

Major: Yes, Miss Chalmers is taking it this afternoon. She's a first-rate driver. I'm sure she'll pass.

Mary: Do you mean that very glamorous girl with the long fair hair?

Major: I don't know what colour her hair is. All I know is that she's a very capable driver.

Mary: I don't believe you, John.

Major: I can assure you she's an excellent driver.

Mary: I'm not talking about her driving. I mean I'm sure you've noticed the colour of her hair.

Major: Well, maybe it is fair. Anyway, I must hurry now and see that the car's in order.

When the time came for the driving test the Major always asked his pupils to arrive at least half an hour early so that he could go over any points that needed attention. Lucy Chalmers arrived at the school at a quarter to two.

Lucy: Good afternoon, Major. Have you got your fingers crossed?

Major: There's no need to do that for you, my dear. I'm sure you'll pass.

Lucy: I'm very nervous.

Major: That's only natural. By the way, if I may ask, what's happened to all your long fair hair?

Lucy: Oh, I'm wearing a short wig today. I thought it would look more businesslike.

Major: That's a good idea. Now let me give you a final test on the Highway Code.

The Major and Lucy drove in silence to the centre where she was to be tested and sat in the waiting room. The chief examiner arrived and asked to see Lucy's driving licence; then he made her sign a declaration that she was, in fact, Miss Lucy Chalmers. The Major shook hands with Lucy and wished her luck; then she and the examiner left the room to go to the car. The Major watched the first part of the test from the window of the waiting room. As the car drove smoothly away he took out his pipe and sat down to wait for their return.

Lucy passed. The Major was delighted at her success. Lucy promised to tell all her friends and relations what a good instructor he was.

The Major's last lesson of the day was a difficult one. Mr. Green was a terrible driver, but unfortunately he didn't realize it. Whenever the Major tried to point out a mistake, Mr. Green told him that he knew very well what to do.

Mr. Green: You worry too much, Major. Look, I'm driving in a straight line.

Major: Yes, you're driving in a straight line, but you are supposed to drive on the left-hand side of the road, not in the middle. It's just as well there's not much traffic about.

Mr. Green: There we are. It's easy really. I expect you have to teach a lot of bad drivers, don't you?

Major: Yes, Mr. Green, I do. Now I think we'll increase speed a bit and go into second gear, please.

With Mr. Green safely out of the car, the Major felt that he had had enough for one day. He put the car away and went into the office. He decided to ring Mary and tell her of Lucy's success. Mary was very pleased. "I'm coming home now," said the Major. "I'm tired. It's been a very busy day. Good-bye, dear." But just as he put the telephone down three middle-aged ladies walked into the office. They must be Lucy's friends, thought the Major. She said she would tell her friends what a good instructor I am.

Major: Good afternoon, ladies.

1st woman: Good afternoon, Major. We want to enrol.

Major: Are you friends of Lucy's?

2nd woman: Yes, that's right.

3rd woman: Do you call her Lucy already? That's quick.

Major: Well, you know what Lucy's like. She's very friendly.

1st woman: We ought to know. We've known her for thirty years.

Major: Thirty years? But ...

2nd woman: Now then, Major, we all want to enrol for the six-month course. We're all as bad as Lucy — none of us can pass that wretched test.

Major: Just a minute, ladies, let's get one thing straight. You are all friends of Lucy Chalmers, aren't you?

3rd woman: Oh, no, Major. We're all friends of Lucy Carruthers!

New words and expressions

driving instructor	someone who teaches you how to drive (a car)
at a loose end	not know how to spend one's time
retire	stop working, usually on reaching a certain age
on his retirement	when he retired
pension	regular sum of money paid to someone who has retired
clients	customers
test	examination
punctual	on time
diary	book with space for each day of the year in which to write appointments, notes, etc.
precisely	exactly
free trial lesson	a lesson given at no cost to the client, to find out if he is a good driver or a bad driver
tuition	teaching
refresher course	lessons to refresh the student's knowledge
run by	managed by
in safe hands	well looked after
provisional driving licence	document that permits you to drive a car before you have taken the driving test, provided you are accompanied by an experienced driver

in order	all right, correct
an old hand	someone with a lot of experience
if you don't mind	if you don't object (slightly sarcastic in this context)
Highway Code	list of rules for drivers
dual controls	two sets of controls so that the instructor can steer the car if the pupil does something wrong
it had its ups and downs	it had its good and bad moments
first-rate	excellent
glamorous	very attractive
capable	good
go over	repeat, practice
wig	false hair
businesslike	practical
declaration	statement
delighted	very pleased
point out	show, indicate
it's just as well	it's fortunate
wretched	terrible
let's get one thing straight	let's get one thing clear and agreed
enrol	here means put their names on the Major's list of pupils

Questions and exercises

A. Comprehension questions

1. How did Major Hewson find civilian life?
2. What were he and his wife living on?
3. What was the Major's first job when he arrived at the office?
4. Does Major Hewson smoke?
5. What does Major Hewson want to see before he gives Mrs. Carruthers her free trial lesson?
6. Why did Major Hewson tell Mrs. Carruthers she would have to take the full course?
7. Why did Lucy Chalmers wear a wig for her driving test?
8. What side of the road was Mr. Green driving on?
9. Who did the Major think the three middle-aged ladies were?
10. What did they want?

B. Use the words in the list to complete the following sentences:

Pedestrian	middle-aged
boring	extra
examiner	test
instructor	first-rate

1. He found civilian life dull and _____.
2. He needed some _____ money.
3. How many times have you taken the _____?
4. I had an accident at a _____ crossing.
5. Miss Chalmers is a _____ driver.
6. The _____ made Lucy sign a declaration.
7. The Major is a very good _____.
8. Three _____ ladies walked into the office.

C. Change the following sentences into indirect speech:

Example:

"I'm coming home," said the Major.
The Major said (that) he was coming home.

1. "I find civilian life dull and boring," said the Major.
2. "I'll open my own school of motoring," he said.
3. "I think I can fit you (Mrs. Carruthers) in for a trial lesson," said the Major.
4. "I'm sure she'll pass," said the Major.
5. "I'm not talking about her driving," said Mary.
6. "I think a wig looks very businesslike," said Lucy.
7. "Do you (Lucy) know the Highway Code?" the examiner asked.
8. "I'll tell everyone what a good instructor you are," said Lucy.

D. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate adjective or adverb:

Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives	Adverbs
happy		provisional	
	unfortunately		safely
early		capable	
	precisely	late	
sad			smoothly
	slowly	terrible	

Keys to exercises

A.

1. Dull and boring.
2. His army pension.
3. To go into the garage next door and check the car for oil, water and air.
4. Yes, he smokes a pipe.
5. Her provisional driving licence.
6. Partly because she obviously needed it, and partly because it was good for business.
7. Because she thought it looked more businesslike than her long fair hair.
8. He was driving in the middle of the road.
9. Friends of Lucy Chalmers.
10. They wanted to enrol for the six-month course.

B.

1. boring
2. extra
3. test
4. pedestrian
5. first-rate
6. examiner
7. instructor
8. middle-aged

C.

1. The Major said he found civilian life dull and boring.
2. The Major said he would open his own school of motoring.
3. The Major said he thought he could fit her in for a trial lesson.
4. The Major said he was sure she would pass.
5. Mary said she was not talking about her driving.
6. Lucy said she thought a wig looked very businesslike.
7. The examiner asked her if she knew the Highway Code.
8. Lucy said she would tell everyone what a good instructor he was.

D.

Adjectives	Adverbs	Adjectives	Adverbs
happy	happily	provisional	provisionally
unfortunate	unfortunately	safe	safely
early	early	capable	capably
precise	precisely	late	late
sad	sadly	smooth	smoothly
slow	slowly	terrible	terribly