

My Standards Check: Lynne Barrie

Arrived home from a relaxing day out recently to find the dreaded letter had landed on my door mat. Why do standards checks always seem to appear out of the blue! After a coffee and a quick think about who I could take on the day, I replied by email to say I was attending. That made it definite in my mind and from that point I tried very hard to see it as a positive event. When there are industry changes it's probably better to be on the new system and to understand completely how it works. I knew that it was an opportunity to gain a good grade. I tried hard to ignore my inner voice saying "what if you don't do well?" and decided I would deal with that if and when it happened.

Some of you may be surprised to know I was nervous before the day. I present training workshops on the standards check; have written a book about it and constantly help other people achieve their goals on their standards checks. Maybe it was because it felt quite lonely as I made a decision that I wasn't telling anyone that it was coming up, except my family. I wanted to deal with it and on reflection I used my coaching skills to coach myself ready for the day. I do get nervous and apprehensive but over time I have learnt to deal with nerves better; I see them as my body preparing me for an event that is important to me. With some Bach's Rescue Remedy, highly recommended, I find I can tackle most situations successfully! I've also learnt not to fear failing because you can always pick yourself up and have another go: we all fail at things because we are human. I knew that my own goal for the day was a result of 51 out of 51 marks. I set my standards high and if I am helping other people, I need to be able to show I can get full marks.

I only have a few learners so my choice of pupils wasn't enormous; I decided to take a learner who was partly trained with around 15 previous lessons and had a reserve in mind too. I knew I had good rapport with the chosen pupil, that he trusted me and that we always have a calm atmosphere in the car in lessons. He is willing to talk about what happens and is used to setting goals for himself because we have always held lessons that way. I think it's really important that the standards check feels like any other lesson for the pupil. If we turn up over dressed, acting in a way we wouldn't usually do then they will wonder what is happening. I wanted him to think of it as an opportunity to have a passenger and to see the test centre he would be using in the future. I assured him it would feel like any other lesson when we left the test centre car park. I find thinking about the day from the point of view of my pupil helps put me at ease as it gives me more to focus on. The day becomes about them in my mind, not about me.

We had chatted at the end of the previous lesson and reflected on what he had learnt, what went well and what he could improve. At that point we set the goals for the lesson that would take place on the standards check day. These were:

- To understand and make better use of his mirrors

- To look further ahead when he was driving to give himself time and space to deal with hazards.
- On the actual day we added another one which was to assess how the car handled with 2 passengers on board

I always give my pupils options with locations and a route. On the day, he wanted to cover some rural roads, the town centre and dual carriageway driving. I'm always aware that any lesson needs to be flexible and that if we had needed to change these goals we would discuss it together and change them. I had an idea of roads I could use but no set plan as to a route we were taking.

There is always a sense of relief when the pupil turns up on the day. We drove to the test centre in a relaxed manner as the lesson was due to start from there and I explained that to him. We were about 10 minutes early and when we had parked the examiner came out to explain there would be 2 examiners in the car that day as the senior examiner would be sitting in as well. That's a new experience for me as I've never had that happen before. However, I was given time to explain it to my pupil. Both examiners were kind to the pupil and tried very hard to put him at ease.

Thankfully, once we started the lesson my nerves seemed to disappear: probably because I am doing a job I feel comfortable with and enjoy. My priority at that point was to look after my pupil and help him achieve his goals. We recapped the last lesson and talked about goals for the lesson about to take place. We had an interactive discussion about using mirrors; we used a 1-10 scale on how he felt he used them and how he could improve his mirrors and why it was important. We also looked at some photos of road situations and hazards and talked through how to cope with them and plan ahead. Before we set out I asked him how he thought the car may handle differently. We related it to having passengers after he passed his test and the risks involved if it was a distraction and how he might cope with that. I made sure he understood how we would share the risks that day. I was happy for him to make the decisions at the roundabouts and junctions when we emerged as we had started to do that on the previous lesson. I reminded him that if I needed to I would help him by coming in verbally if I thought his decision wouldn't be safe or as a last resort I would use the duals but let him know if I had. I rarely use the duals in lessons.

During the practical section of the lesson we worked on his mirror use and used opportunities to help him see the importance of using them. We got overtaken a couple of times, not because we were being slow but in fact because in the country road the overtaking was dangerous. We pulled over to discuss how mirrors had helped keep him safer and how he felt when we got overtaken and he came up with suggestions to keep the overtake safer. He had only really thought of us overtaking before not really about the

dangers in being overtaken. I did need to use the dual brake at one point as we entered a very narrow country road and a car was coming far too fast towards us. Whilst he did well to get us into an immediate passing place he hadn't noticed the state of the road there and the huge pot hole in front of us. I slowed him to avoid going in to it as it would certainly have damaged the car. Again we discussed what had gone well and what he would do differently on another similar occasion and he understood why I had used the duals. His mirror work was improving from the previous lesson and he began to look well ahead on the road reading the signs and reacting to hazards as the lesson went on. Learning was certainly taking place.

The route we did on the day did challenge him enough; in parts it was harder than he had done before. Some of the roads were new and there was a difficult exit off the dual carriageway with little space on the slip road. However I would have changed the roads we used if he hadn't been coping. I noticed that the time was moving on and we started to drive back towards the test centre. We reflected for a few minutes on the whole lesson, he seemed pleased with what he had learnt and the challenge of having passengers in the back. His goals for our next lesson were to use more country roads as he said he felt least comfortable on those and we agreed that as a plan. I thanked him for taking part in my check and the examiners did the same. The pupil was asked to go to the waiting room whilst I waited for the result. In my own mind I had no idea of the mark because I consider assessing a standards check is different to taking one. I was so absorbed in what I was doing I didn't stop to consider any marks involved.

The result? I was over the moon to get full marks on the sheet, 51/51 and compliments from both examiners.

On reflection, I learnt a lot that day:

- To believe in myself more
- To take opportunities that arise at work: certainly the challenges that the ADINJC present helped me cope more on this day
- That the DVSA examiners were really helpful to my pupil and treated him on equal terms
- That time can go very quickly so make sure you watch it closely
- To see the standards check as an opportunity and not to fear it.

Here is a suggested plan:

1. Make sure your vehicle is road worthy, clean and free from clutter
2. Assess pupils needs (not yours) prior to standards check
3. Arrive at the test centre ten minutes prior to appointment time
4. Try and put the pupil at ease
5. Go into test centre waiting room a few minutes early
6. Introduce yourself to your examiner with confidence
7. Be ready to explain who your pupil is and what they have done so far
8. Introduce the pupil to the examiner
9. Ask the pupil questions about how the car will feel different with the extra weight in the back
10. Recap the previous lesson
11. Ask the pupil what they want to improve that day (2 or 3 goals at the most). Write them down to refer back to.
12. Talk to the pupil about who is responsible for safety within and outside the vehicle and how you will share the risk.
13. Practical driving to try to achieve the goals. Make it interactive and pull in and discuss events that take place.
14. Pick up any relevant areas for improvement, some on the move others whilst stationary (depending on pupils experience)
15. Get back on time.
16. Recap and reflect with the pupil on how well they did, what have they learnt, what went well, what could be improved.
17. What would they like to do on the next lesson? Set some new goals.
18. Listen to the examiners comments carefully. Write some things down if you want to.
19. Treat yourself to something nice when it is all over. I certainly did!