

FRIDAY MOTORING PRESS

Truth of the code we ought to obey

MANY a learner driver has spent long hours studying that best-selling motorists' bible, the Highway Code, to remember the rules of the road.

Yet contrary to popular belief the Highway Code, which is 60 years old on Sunday, is still only a guide to road users and pedestrians — it has never had the force of law.

The original code stated in its foreword: "It is hoped that the code of conduct now issued may come to be universally respected and obeyed."

Failure to observe any provision was not "of itself" an offence, but provisions could be quoted under Section 45 of the 1930 Road Traffic Act.

This principle was confirmed by a High Court judge in 1936 during the hearing of an action for damages when Mr Justice Hilbery was told that a motorcyclist had "contravened or failed to observe the Highway Code by overtaking a lorry at crossroads".

"I thought," commented the judge, "the Highway Code was drawn up for our guidance, not for our peril."

Experts agree that the legal situation is still confusing to the layman. But one point is clear — even if the code cannot be used in what is known as a legal pleading, it can be introduced as evidence.

Persuasive

Attempts to give the code a higher legal status have been consistently resisted by governments over the years.

In 1954 Mr Boyd-Carpenter, the Minister of Transport, told MPs: "It is better to commend the code to the public on the basis of what one might call its persuasive authority rather than to seek to make it a matter of penal sanctions."

Critics of the Highway Code have often argued that it tends to lag behind advances in motoring technology. But changes, when introduced, have not always been welcomed.

One Labour MP complained in 1954 that twinkling traffic indicators were distracting and bewildering and should be prohibited.

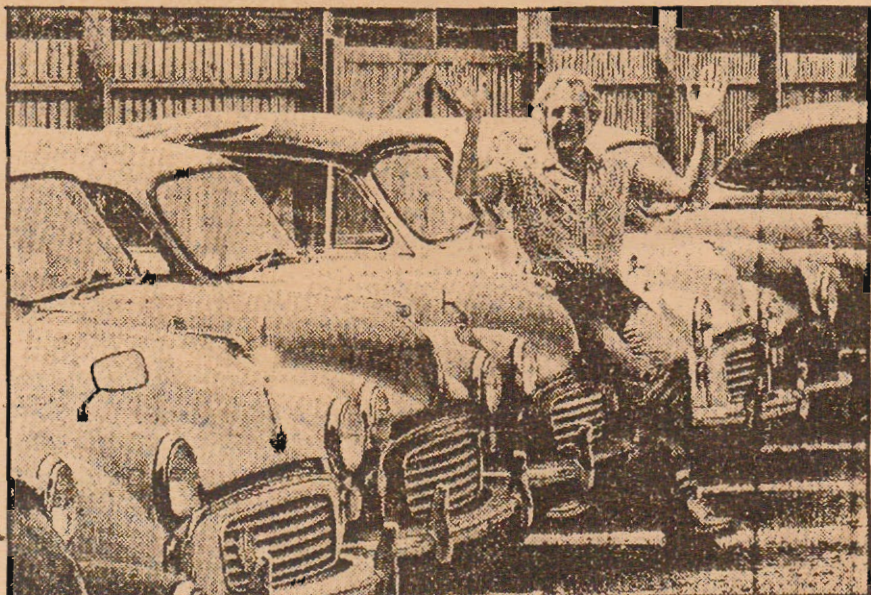
Until 1970 there was no legal requirement for a vehicle to have indicators and the code still devoted a whole page to drivers' hand signals.

The 60th anniversary of the Highway Code is being marked by a new 76-page re-print.

The current edition, which was completely revised in 1987, may be the last all-British Highway Code if Brussels has its way.

A report outlining proposals for a Euro-code harmonising motoring rules throughout the Continent has been compiled for the European Transport Commissioner, and could be law soon after 1992.

ROBERT JAY



Charles Ware: Going East to put Minor production back on the road

Now Moggy is a star of the East

IMAGINE the scene. Happy Sri Lankans sitting under coconut trees building Morris Minors. Happy because, at £2 a day, they will be earning almost double the average wage. They will also be learning a craft, since each car will be hand-built.

If this sounds like a dream, then don't express any doubt to the man who is determined to turn it into reality.

For Charles Ware is convinced that within four or five years the first Sri Lankan-built Morris Minor will be — well, not exactly rolling off the production line, but it will exist.

It was 15 years ago that Mr Ware launched the Bath-based Morris Minor Centre to restore old Moggies, the last of which was built in 1971.

Investing

Mr Ware speaks gently but persuasively of his plans, the first stage of which get under way next week when production of body panels begins in the village of Batadua, near the port of Galle in the Southern Province.

There is 30 per cent unemployment in Sri Lanka, but manual skills are exceptional; people who can "tinker" in the sense of repairing and fixing are highly regarded.

This is just as well since more than 90 per cent of the output from Batadua will be hand made.



by **ANTHONY LEWIS**

RAC REGIONAL MOTORING WRITER OF THE YEAR

"Essentially we are investing in people, not automation," Mr Ware told me.

He paints an idyllic picture of workers in an open-sided shed built of coconut tree trunks panel-beating, welding and using manually-operated hydraulic presses.

The first components from Sri Lanka should arrive here by mid summer.

It is estimated that there are some 80,000 Minors on the roads in the UK and still some 150,000 in Asia, where they are popular as taxis.

Parts are getting harder to find, which is one of the motives behind this venture.

It started in 1983 when Mr Ware, aged 55, was approached by a former

Sri Lankan diplomat Dhanapala Samarakera.

Now the new Durable Car Company of Sri Lanka will cost about £100,000 to set up — a fraction of the price it would cost in Europe.

"The commercial advantage to us is that we don't have to invest vast sums of money in advanced machine tools," said Mr Ware.

"A large pool of intelligent people is available to design, form, jig and finish well-made products that can be sold around the world at competitive prices."

Developments from then on will be self-financing, culminating in the new car.

Pedigree

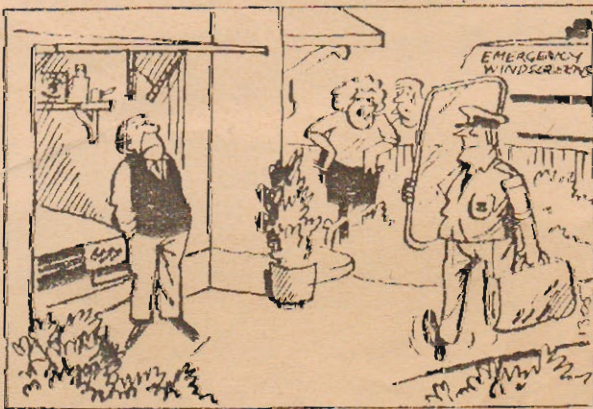
It will look very similar to the old one, but have a modern engine complete with exhaust catalyst and rubber bumpers to meet modern safety requirements.

Already the Moggies that are rebuilt in Bath have lost their pedigree. They use five-speed gearboxes from the Toyota Corolla that are reconditioned in Singapore.

The engines are the old Series A, but have new heads to allow them to run on unleaded petrol.

Seats are from the Metro and the rear axle is from the Marina, as are the front disc brakes.

motorgrin by AWB



"Guess who dropped a tin of paint"