

Road Safety Factsheet

February 2020

Left Hand Drive Large Goods Vehicles

The number of left-hand drive HGV's (LHD HGV's) using the UK's roads has increased significantly over the last decade or so. During the recession period of 2008 to 2009, there was a drop in the total number of goods vehicles travelling to Great Britain, with the majority of this fall being accounted for by fewer foreign vehicles. However, the number of vehicles has begun to increase again since 2013¹.

A survey conducted by the Department for Transport (DfT) revealed that in 2009, foreign registered HGVs were estimated to have made almost 1.5 million trips, covering almost 1 billion kilometres, in the UK². Generally, the drivers of these foreign registered HGVs were familiar with driving in the UK, visiting the country 52 times a year on average. About 7% of the drivers visited the UK over 120 times a year. Nearly all the drivers were male, mostly aged between 25 and 54 years. The average length of stay in the UK was just under two days (45 hours) with the average round trip being 649 kilometres.

A small proportion of foreign registered HGVs are driven by UK drivers. Of the 1.5 million trips by foreign vehicles in 2009, 79,000 were by drivers with UK nationality, 52,000 by drivers resident in the UK, and 6,000 by UK operators.

Almost all (91%) of foreign registered HGVs are articulated vehicles.

European Union Driver Licence Regulations

Drivers who hold a valid HGV driving licence from an EU member state are eligible to drive in the UK for the term of their licence, just as drivers with a UK HGV licence can drive in other EU countries.

If a driver becomes resident in the UK, they must register their details with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) within 12 months of becoming resident. Their HGV driving licence is valid until they reach 45 years of age or for five years after becoming a resident, whichever is longer, after which they must exchange it for a GB one.

If the licence holder is over 45 years, but under 65 years, the licence is valid until the 66th birthday or for five years after becoming a resident whichever is the shortest period.

If the HGV licence holder is aged 65 years or above the licence is valid for one year.

Road Casualties and Left Hand Drive HGVs³

In 2018, 257 people were killed, 1,001 seriously injured and 4,732 slightly injured in road accidents involving HGVs that were reported to the police in Britain. Of these, 6 people were killed, 31 seriously injured and 206 slightly injured in road accidents involving foreign registered left hand drive HGVs.

Therefore, 2.3% of deaths in accidents with HGVs involve foreign registered left hand drive HGVS, as do 3.1% of serious injuries and 4.4% of slight injuries.

A 2009 study⁴ of road accidents involving left hand drive HGVs found that most of these accidents occur on the main arterial routes (motorways, A roads and trunk roads) and while this is true for all HGV accidents, it is even more so for left hand drive ones.

Most of the LHD HGV collisions in this study involved the HGV overtaking or changing lanes. Left-hand drive HGVs are 3.4 times more likely to be involved in these types of crashes than right-hand drive HGVs.

The study also found that left-hand drive HGV drivers were more likely to be at least partially at fault for the accidents in which they were involved, and the contributory factor most often assigned to them by the investigating police officers was 'failed to look properly'. This was often associated with their vehicle's blind spot, which was a factor in 76% of their accidents in this study.

This study also found that the foreign drivers found driving in Britain more difficult due to the unfamiliar road layout and road user behaviour.

Another study of HGV accidents found that one third of HGVs involved in sideswipe collisions were foreign registered left-hand drive HGVs, even though only 2% of HGV journeys involved left-hand drive vehicles⁵.

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Offences

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) issues Vehicle Prohibition Notices to the driver of any HGV that fails to comply with the laws about vehicle roadworthiness or driver hours. Depending on the offence the Prohibition Notice requires the vehicle to be taken off the road immediately and kept off the road until the problem has been fixed, or requires it to be fixed within 10 days otherwise the vehicle must be taken off the road.

Foreign registered HGVs tend to have much higher prohibition rates than UK registered HGVS for a range of offences.

UK and Non UK Vehicle Prohibition Comparison⁶

Offence	UK HGV Rate	Foreign HGV Rate*
Driver's Hours	9%	8% - 35%
Roadworthiness	32%	32% - 62%
Trailer Roadworthiness	38%	28% - 64%
Overloading	21%	5% - 39%

Safety issues

Driver's Field of Vision

One of the main safety issues is blind spots. Both right-hand and left-hand drive HGVs have driver blind spots, which are significantly larger on the passenger side of the vehicle. Therefore, on British roads, because we drive on the left, the driver of a left-hand drive HGV will have more difficulty in checking for other road users when pulling out to overtake. This is most pronounced when the vehicle has other road users coming up its far side or when turning right.

The danger of blind spots is illustrated by the study of left-hand drive HGV accidents⁴ that found that most LHD HGV collisions involve the HGV overtaking or changing lanes and that left-hand drive HGVs are 3.4 times more likely to be involved in these types of crashes than right-hand drive HGVs.

The requirements for driver's vision in HGVs have been improved in recent years. [The Road Vehicles \(Construction and Use\) \(Amendment\) \(No. 4\) Regulations 2005](#)⁷ implemented EU Directives 2003/97/EC and 2005/27/EC that required new goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes and certain goods vehicles between 3.5 and 7.5 tonnes, registered from 26 January 2007, to be fitted with Class V mirrors. These mirrors reduce the size of blind spots giving HGV drivers a better view of the road. The [Road Vehicles \(Construction and Use\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2009](#)⁸ implemented EU Directive 2007/38/EC that required such mirrors to be retrofitted to all existing goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes by 31 March 2009. A Guide to the law and the type of mirrors can be found in an FTA guide on ['Retrofitting of Mirrors to HGVs'](#)⁹.

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Improvements in camera technology can help to negate the dangers of left-hand drive HGVs on British roads. Small cameras can be fitted to the HGV's mirrors to provide a more complete picture of the road. Sensors, similar to those on cars for reversing, could also be installed along the side of HGVs to inform drivers when a vehicle, pedestrian or cyclist is alongside of them. A system of this nature will not only make drivers more aware of their environment but could also encourage better observation. Once hearing the warning drivers will hopefully look in their mirrors to assess the situation.

However, these measures will only work if the driver uses them regularly and effectively.

Familiarity with Driving in Britain

Driver inexperience is not just limited to awareness but also to traffic law. Every country has its own traffic laws, so drivers must constantly adapt their behaviour to suit each country. The difficulties faced can be more pronounced in Britain: overseas drivers may not be aware of the speed limits that apply to HGVs, for example, on motorways, the speed limit for HGVs weighing over 7.5 tonnes is 60 mph, on dual carriageways 50 mph on single carriageway roads in England and Wales (40 in Scotland) and 30 in built up areas.

The nuances of road behaviour may also differ; Give Way rules and expected behaviour offer examples of where HGV drivers could become confused resulting in drivers moving at incorrect times or in a manner that alarms other road users.

Overseas drivers may also become confused by Britain's imperial system. This could lead to confusion over converting speed limits and distances into kilometres. A lack of knowledge of UK driving law, practices and measurements can confuse and frustrate the driver possibly leading to rash actions and a drop in concentration.

Vehicle Standards

The varying degrees of testing and examination throughout Europe may also cause problems on UK roads. Each member state has its own testing standards; some may not be as stringent as UK tests, thus allowing an individual unqualified by UK standards to drive legally on the road network.

The issue extends beyond the drivers to the actual vehicle themselves. Not all countries have maintenance standards as stringent as those operating in Britain. As a result, HGVs that would be deemed unsafe by British standards may be able to use the British transport network.

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Enforcement

There are also enforcement issues with left-hand drive HGVs, which have made it more difficult for British enforcement authorities to apply sanctions to foreign drivers. The main difficulty is identifying the offending drivers and applying penalties to them once they have left Britain and returned to the own country.

The introduction of Fixed Penalty Deposits in May 2009, which gave the DVSA in England and Wales the power to require drivers who are not able to confirm a satisfactory address within the UK to pay the penalty 'on the spot', has improved this situation. This means that those drivers cannot accept a penalty notice but then return to their country and never pay the fine. Foreign based drivers who fail to pay the penalty at the roadside are prohibited and their vehicle is immobilised. They can challenge the penalty in court, and if found not guilty, the money is refunded to them. Full details of the fixed penalty deposit scheme are contained in '[A Guide to Fixed Penalty Notices and Financial Deposit Notices](#)'¹⁰, which can be downloaded from the government website

However, it remains difficult for British authorities to pursue foreign drivers once they have left the country. EC Directive 2015/413 aims to make cross-border enforcement of motoring offences easier by facilitating the exchange of registered vehicle keeper data between Member States, in order to help identify offenders. However, originally, the UK along with Ireland and Denmark opted out of this directive, with Mike Penning stating that although the British Government is "*broadly supportive of the objectives behind this measure, the UK did not opt in to the Directive because, on balance, it did not appear to be in the UK's interests to do so at this stage.*"

As of 7th May 2017, the UK joined the new system, as the two-year opt out clause expired, meaning all EU governments were given access to vehicle ownership records held by other EU countries. However, in the UK, the driver, not the owner of the vehicle is prosecuted. The Department for Transport says that this means British police would not use the directive to fine foreign drivers who commit offences in the UK¹¹. While the UK is still a member of the EU, the Department for Transport is obliged to bring in rules on cross border enforcement. Once the UK has left the EU, Parliament will have the power to amend the law¹².

Conclusion

The number of left-hand drive HGVs using Britain's roads has increased significantly in recent years, and cover around 1 billion kilometres on our roads.

Research indicates accidents involving left hand drive HGVs mainly occur on the main arterial routes (motorways, A roads and trunk roads) and most involve the HGV overtaking or changing lanes. Left-hand drive HGVs are 3.4 times more likely to be involved in these types of crashes than right-hand drive HGVs. One third of HGVs involved in sideswipe collisions are foreign registered left-hand drive HGVs, even though these vehicles only account for 2% of HGV journeys in Britain. The drivers of left-hand drive HGVs are more likely to be at least partially at fault for the accidents in which they are involved, most commonly because they 'failed to look properly'.

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Foreign registered HGVs tend to have much higher prohibition rates than UK registered HGVs for a range of offences.

Not surprisingly, foreign drivers find driving in Britain more difficult due to the unfamiliar road layout and road user behaviour.

Improvements to the safety of all HGVs, and especially foreign registered HGVs, have been made in recent years. Most notably, vehicle construction laws have been changed to require better mirrors that reduce the driver's blind spot, to be fitted, and schemes to supply free Fresnel lenses to drivers as they enter this country have also helped.

Measures to improve the enforcement of road safety laws, such as those relating to driver's hours and vehicle roadworthiness, have been introduced, especially the fixed penalty deposit scheme. However, more could be done, and in particular the further development of cross border enforcement.

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