

Driver training and licence acquisition in Germany

For more than 100 years driving licences have been issued in Germany. In Germany there are 2 terms, "Fahrerlaubnis" (driving licence, the permission to drive) and "Führerschein" (the document and official proof of ownership of the driving licence). However, the conditions to obtain a driving licence have changed in the last 100 years.

Back in the days of upcoming motorisation, a candidate did not have to do much more than driving the engine a little back and forth in the yard of the police headquarters in order to obtain the licence. Also, there weren't hardly any traffic rules. The first traffic light on the European continent was installed in 1924 at the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. The first traffic signs with symbols instead of full text followed a little later.

With rising prosperity and the resulting increase in cars, the requirements of the driving test increased and a need of a previous professional driver training arose.

In 1976 a mandatory Driving Training Regulation specified the content and scope of theoretical and practical training at a driving school for the first time. However, until 1986 there was no obligation to attend a driving training at a driving school. Applicants for a driving licence could learn how to drive with the help of their "unprofessional" friends or relatives, according to the so-called lay instruction.

According to the German Federal Highway Research Institute (BASt) about 53 million of the 82 million people in Germany own a German driving licence (2004). This figure is estimated because there are no statistics on the licence ownership. In particular the termination of a driving licence with death is usually not communicated to the authorities.

1. Driving Licence Categories

Before 1999, in Germany driving licences have been issued for the classes 1 to 5. Those licences from the years before 1999 are still valid today, just as all licences issued in the GDR. However, all those old driving licences can be exchanged against EU driving licences, thereby the renewed licences keep their previous conditions („Besitzstandswahrung“, "grandfathering").

Since 1999 the EU vehicle categories A-E are also valid in Germany. In addition, since 1999, there are the German categories L (small industrial trucks and smaller agricultural and forestry tractors) and T (larger industrial trucks, and larger agricultural and forestry tractors).

There is also a special driving licence in Germany for the transport of passengers in taxis, rental cars and ambulances as well as a test for moped bike (up to 25 km / h). The Moped test certificate does not apply as a driving licence.

Through the national implementation of the 3rd EC Directive on driving licences at the 19th January 2013, new driving licence categories A2 and AM have been introduced. Category AM thereby replaces the previous categories M and S.

In Germany licences of categories A, AM, A1, A2, B, BE, L and T are issued without time limitation, that means, they are valid for a lifetime. Once in a while there are discussions about the introduction of regular medical examinations for holders of licences of categories A, A1 and B, but up to now without any results.

At the same time, the so-called "level licence" has been introduced for the licences of the motorbike categories. Those who initially acquired the licence in a less strong category get easier access to the next higher category licence. In any case, the practical test is required, which means the licence for category A is no longer acquired automatically after 2 years of owning a driving licence of category A2.

2. Requirements for obtaining a German licence

Residence in Germany

To obtain a German driving licence the applicant needs to have a permanent address in Germany.

Prior holder of a driving licence

Licence applicants for categories C, C1, D or D1 (trucks and buses) have to hold a previous driving licence category B (cars). In fact, they are allowed to take both exams at the same day.

Minimum age

The minimum age for obtaining a driving licence for categories A, B, C is 18 years, whereas within the program "Accompanied Driving at 17" (see below) it is also possible to get a driving licence at the age of 17. For category D (buses) there is a minimum age of 24 years, with exceptions of 18 or 20 years for professional drivers and similar services. Categories A1, AM, L and T require a minimum age of 16 and for moped (up to 25 km / h) is 15 years.

Minimum age for the issuing of driving licences

| Minimum age | Category |
|-------------|---|
| 24 years | A (direct access) |
| 20 years | D and DE (only within a professional job training, otherwise 24 years) |
| 18 years | A2, B, BE, C1, C1E, as well as C, CE, D1, D1E (only within a professional job training, otherwise 21 years) |
| 17 years | B within the program "Accompanied Driving at 17" |
| 16 years | A1, AM, L and T |
| 15 years | for other vehicles |

Quelle: <http://www.bmvbs.de/SharedDocs/DE/Artikel/LA/voraussetzungen-fuer-die-fahrerlaubnis-und-geltungsdauer.html?linkToOverview=js>

Eye test and medical examination

For the acquisition of a driving licence for categories A, A2, A1, AM, B, BE, L and T, candidates have to pass an eye test at an optician or an eye specialist. Only when there are irregularities or problems with the health, then the candidate may have to pass a medical test as well.

For applicants for a driving licence for categories C, C1, CE, C1E, D, D1, DE or D1E both tests are required, a comprehensive eye test and a medical examination. Licence holders older than 50 years have to repeat these tests every 5 years.

Training in life support, first aid training

According to § 19 (training in life support, first aid training) of the "Verordnung über die Zulassung von Personen zum Straßenverkehr" (German Regulation for the Admission for Persons to Road Traffic) applicants for a driving licence for categories A, A2, A1, AM, B, BE, L or T have to attend a training course "instruction in life support".

Applicant for a licence for categories C, C1, CE, C1E, D, D1, DE or D1E need to attend a comprehensive first aid training. The training should provide "...thorough knowledge and practical skills in first aid," and therefore encompasses a little more than the "instruction in life support" providing only basic "...initial treatment of injuries caused by road traffic."

3. Driver training

In Germany, candidates for a driving licence have to go to a driving school. A lay instruction is banned. According to German law applicants for licences have to attend 14 lessons of theory classes for category B, and 16 lessons of theory classes for categories A, A2 and A1. Further, applicants need to complete at least 12 practical lessons of "special training rides" ("Sonderfahrten"). In Germany, lay instruction is illegal, so these lessons have to be taken at a professional driving school. These compulsory theory and practical lessons are required before applying for theory or practical tests.

Theory lessons

If applying for a driving licence category B it is required to attend 14 theory classes which consist of 12 lessons "basic" and 2 hours of "class-specific" content (each of 90 minutes in the so-called 'Paternoster' process, i. e. , after joining the driving school the candidates enter the cycle classes).

In fact, the content of the 12-hour basic material does not have to be different, i.e. a candidate could theoretically hear 3 times the same lesson. Important for certification only is the participation. However, the candidate has to attend the two lessons "class-specific" content. When extending the licence of the category AM to category B applicants have to participate only in 6 hours of theory lessons.

Practical teaching

Each driving student has to take part in 12 "special training rides" including 5 cross-country rides, 4 motorway rides ("Autobahn") and 3 rides at dawn or night time. In addition, the students usually need some more previous lessons, called basic training. Those "special training rides" have to be taken at the end of the training, when the education is almost complete.

Before, during and after the lessons, the instructor also gives feedback and advice including an assessment of the current training level. Additionally, the instructor teaches the student how the vehicle works and how to avoid or correct technical errors.

Driving schools and driving instructors

There are about 13,000 driving schools throughout Germany; in 2012 a total of 48,000 people on possessed a valid driving instruction licence, meaning they are active as driving instructors (KBA). Since 1976, requirement for participation in an instructor-training is a "Hauptschulabschluss" (a German secondary school exam) and an official apprenticeship. The training itself has been extended in 1999.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 new driving instructor licences for the licence classes A, BE, CE and DE are issued each year (KBA).

After a 5-month training at a driving instructor training facility, a practical driving test and a final educational testing, which includes a lesson in theoretical and practical instruction, a driving

instructor licence will be issued, which is initially limited to two years. During this time, the instructor is only allowed to teach under the supervision of a training instructor.

The training to become a driving instructor for category BE lasts about 10 months. Every four years, the instructor has to attend a three-day training to keep his or her driving instruction licence.

4. Driving test

The theory test just like the practical examination is held at Test Centers. Test Centers are part of technical inspection companies ("Technische Prüfstellen") which are monitoring organisations officially assigned to conduct driving test as well as periodic vehicle inspections. In Germany these organizations are TÜV and DEKRA.

The theory test needs to be passed before the practical test and expires after one year, unless in the meantime the practical test was also passed.

Theory test

In Germany, the theory test is held on the PC. The candidate has to answer 30 randomly chosen questions out of a pool of questions. These are 30 questions about basic and special knowledge with different levels of complexity and one or more possible answers (multiple choice).

All questions have different fault points. For classes A, A2, A1 AM and B, 10 penalty points are allowed to pass the test. If the candidate has more fault point, the test is failed. One of the advantages of the test on a PC is that the candidate will get a record of his or her results immediately after the end of the test. With this record they can see instantly the fields in which they have answered questions incorrectly. A re-examination is possible after a period of 14 days.

Practical test

Depending on licence category the practical driving test lasts between 30 and 75 minutes.

| Category | Duration of the test | Driving time |
|----------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| A | 60 Minutes | 25 Minutes |
| | 40 Minutes (access from A2) | 25 Minutes |
| A2 | 60 Minutes (direct access) | 25 Minutes |
| | 40 Minutes (access from A1) | 25 Minutes |
| A1 | 45 Minutes | 25 Minutes |
| B | 45 Minutes | 25 Minutes |
| BE | 45 Minutes | 25 Minutes |
| C | 75 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| CE | 75 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| C1 | 75 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| C1E | 75 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| D | 75 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| DE | 70 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| D1 | 75 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| D1E | 70 Minutes | 45 Minutes |
| AM | 45 Minutes | 25 Minutes |
| T | 60 Minutes | 30 Minutes |

The applicant can apply for a practical driving test only if:

- the applicant has taken all required "special training rides"
- the driving instructor is satisfied with the training level of the applicant
- the applicant has passed the theory test
- the applicant has reached (or will reach within one month) the minimum age according to the applied category

The persons taking part in a practical driving test are the candidate, the driving instructor and an officially assigned expert from TÜV and DEKRA ("amtlich anerkannter Sachverständiger") as the examiner. At the beginning of the test, the candidate has to demonstrate that he or she knows the car, e.g. by measuring the oil level (security check). Within the travel time the behavior on the road and the handling of the vehicle will be assessed by the examiner by giving instructions for special maneuvers, such as parking. In 2011, 908,000 practical tests for categories B, BE, BF 17, and BEF 17 have been passed, with a pass rate of about 70 %.

Examiner training

In Germany, there are about 2,500 examiners, of which about 98% are men. Only persons, who are older than 24 years and own a degree in mechanical engineering or electrical engineering, can become examiners. The training for examiners will take at least 6 months.

Driving on trial ("trial period", in German "Probezeit") for novice drivers

If a candidate passed the theory and practical tests successfully, he or she gets a driver licence that is valid for the whole life.

However, within the first 2 years, the driving licence allows driving "on trial", which means that within this 2 years "trial period" the driver has to prove his or her abilities and must not commit any violations while driving. If, however, the novice driver commits a simple violation, then the trial period of 2 years will start new. If the novice driver commits a heavy violation, the licence is revoked.

During the trial period and for drivers under age 21 there is a total ban on alcohol. Thereafter, and for all older drivers, the limit value increases to 0.5 ‰.

Driving licence with 17 "Führerschein mit 17/Begleitetes Fahren mit 17" (FS 17)

Since 2011, those novice drivers taking part in the "accompanied driving with 17" are allowed to obtain their driving licence already at the age of 17. As long as they are not yet 18 years old and therefore an adult before the law, the young drivers have to be accompanied by an adult chaperone when driving a car.

The background is that young drivers (aged 18-24) are taking by far the highest risks of accidents on the roads. Since a certain driving routine only comes by driving thousands of kilometers, the novice driver is given the chance to make his or her experiences under the monitoring of the chaperone, and thus learn how to handle dangerous situations and become a safer driver.

Requirement for an accompanying person is the minimum age of 30 years, possession of a valid driving licence for more than 5 years and no major traffic violations in recent years.

5. Outlook

Driving licences (the documents) issued after 19th January 2013 will be limited to a maximum duration of 15 years and will have to be replaced afterwards. However, this exchange is not depending on any medical examination or knowledge refreshment. After 2033, also all previously issued permanent licences will have to be exchanged for the first time.

6. Summary

In Germany, the lay training is illegal. Driving students need to attend certain theory lessons and special training rides at a driving school. The driving test takes place at Test Centers that are part of monitoring organizations officially assigned to conduct driving test. After successfully passing the theory and practical test, the candidate receives his or her licence immediately, and in the categories A, A1 and B for life. However, once in a while there are discussions about the introduction of regular medical examinations for holders of licences of categories A, A2, A1, AM, B, BE, L and T but so far without any results.

The innovation "accompanied driving with 17" could make a significant contribution to the reduction of road accidents. Years of model testing have shown the success of "accompanied driving", which has expanded to German national law.

Through the implementation of the 3rd EC Driving Licence Directive some important amendments to the current regulations have been made, e.g. the minimum age of drivers and some new driving licence categories.

Sources, Literature, Links

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