



**Northern Territory Government**

Department of Planning and Infrastructure

**Road Transport Division**

# Vehicle On Road Test (VORT) Interpretations Manual

5 September 2005





## Interpretations Manual VORT

This manual is to be used in conjunction with the current VORT Operator's Manual, and provides up to the minute interpretation of variables that may be encountered during VORT tests in the Northern Territory, ie, this manual describes the interpretation on which MVR Licence Testing Officers base their routine decisions.

The manual is a live document that will be superseded from time to time. Advice as to currency of this edition may be obtained by calling the Driver Licensing Operations Coordinator at MVR Goyder Rd on telephone 8999 3108 during office hours.

The manual serves as a guide only, and cannot possibly describe every situation that may be encountered in the course of a Licence Testing Officer's working day. Every attempt has been made however to include all situations considered potentially controversial as they arise.

You will note that the words *reasonable*, *appropriate* etc appear throughout the text of the VORT Operator's manual. In all cases, these undefined terms are included to allow some necessary discretion in the application of road rules as stated in the *Australian Road Rules* and *Northern Territory Traffic Regulations*.

VORT standards are based on:

- **Legal requirements**, some of which may be tempered by conditions prevailing at the time of the test.
- **The System of Car Control**, which is explained in *The Learner Driver's Guide*, available in the *Northern Territory Traffic Code Book*.
- **Best practice** – Which is applied wherever practicable. Best practice-based standards have been formulated through long experience gained by licence testing staff and driver trainers here and in other jurisdictions, and generally seek to address the need to minimise risk-taking behaviour for entry level drivers whilst maintaining driving efficiencies.

Sound behaviours learned at pre-entry level are the basis upon which experienced drivers should be built, so all of the elements described are of vital importance.

All major headings from the VORT Operator's Manual have been included with a view to encouraging comment leading to appropriate entries wherever necessary.

# Interpretations

## Mirror

- Which Mirror?** In all standard cars, use of the central mirror will be assessed. Use of wing mirrors is encouraged, but not mandatory. In Panel Vans and Utes where central rear vision is seriously reduced, appropriate wing mirrors may be used instead of the central mirror, ie., for manoeuvres to the left, the left wing mirror must be used, for manoeuvres to the right, the right wing mirror must be used.
- When should mirrors be checked?** In all cases except the *Moving Off Uphill* manoeuvre, mirror checks must take place before commencement of the manoeuvre. Mirror checks occurring at the same time as a manoeuvre commences will attract NO scores. Remember, the objective is to ensure that it is safe to commence the manoeuvre, not check to see if the mirror is still there!
- How many mirror checks?** Most VORT routes include 16-20 routine mirror checks.

## Signal

- Rules** There are a few basic time and distance rules governing the use of turn signals, but your LTO will not measure times or distances with great accuracy to make assessments. The aim is to train drivers to understand and operate in a *practical* way rather than obsessing about times and distances to pass the test. Rules of thumb in common use by LTO's include:
- 2 seconds = approx 3 flashes of the indicators
  - 5 seconds = approx 6-7 flashes
  - 30 metres – an estimation (by the LTO) of the distance, tempered by any other circumstances at the time.
- Cancellation of indicators** Indicators are not to be cancelled until the manoeuvre in question is essentially completed, eg, for a lane-change, LTO's expect that the vehicle will be entirely within the new lane before the indicators are manually cancelled.
- Automatic cancellation of indicators** If the indicators self-cancel prior to the completion of a manoeuvre, LTO's will use discretion in determining whether the driver could reasonably be expected to deal with the situation or not. For example, in heavy traffic where the entire attention may be taken in observing and judging a safe gap to complete a turn, failure to notice that the indicators have stopped would not be unreasonable so a YES score will likely be awarded. By contrast, a driver waiting at the lights for a green arrow would be awarded a NO if he failed to notice that the indicators have stopped.

## Approach

### **Excessive “lurch”**

(Forward pitch)

Excessive lurch cannot be measured and expressed precisely in other than complex technical terms. It is not viable therefore to rely on other than the LTO's judgement, however, a rule of thumb frequently applied is whether or not the wheels of the car approach lockup. Another may be whether or not the forces exerted are sufficient to activate inertia-reel seatbelt locking mechanisms.

### **Engine retardation**

Clearly, this means the use of engine compression to slow the car. Progressively downchanging during slowing is acceptable, but only the release of the clutch does not result in car slowing/engine revs increasing. Progressive downchanging, although accepted, is not encouraged, largely because it may take attention away from the traffic situation, but also because it causes undue wear and tear on car components.

### **Coasting**

Any situation where a manual vehicle is travelling with engine not connected to driving wheels, whether by selection of neutral or by depressing the clutch. In this application, no coasting should be permitted until the car is almost stationary, whether downchanging has occurred or not. Automatics must remain in Drive, or other forward gear.

## Position

**Repositions** Wherever a stop line occurs too far back from the intersection for clear visibility, the driver is expected to reposition the car forward (after the complete stop before the line) until a clear view is obtained. A second stop is not required if the traffic doesn't warrant it. Failure to obtain a clear view before proceeding is an indication that the driver has no perception of the risks involved in pulling out blind.

**Traffic lights** Clearly, the car must be stopped before the line if the signal is red. When it turns to green, provided traffic is not banked up with the potential for the intersection to be blocked when the lights change, it is expected that the driver will enter the intersection with a view to completing a right turn when oncoming traffic has cleared or a left turn when pedestrian traffic has cleared. In some cases, this may see the car waiting until the lights turn red, breaking the oncoming traffic or pedestrian stream. This is acceptable provided the turn is then completed safely and efficiently.

**Turning** For single lane two-way streets, when turning right, approach should be just to the left of the centre line to allow room for following traffic to overtake on the left. When turning left, approach should be as near to the left kerb line as possible to allow room for following traffic to overtake on the right. Where turn lanes exist, these must be used.

For one way streets, when turning right, approach should be as near to the right kerb as possible to allow room for following traffic to overtake on the left. When turning left, approach should be as near to the left kerb line as possible to allow room for following traffic to overtake on the right. Where turn lanes exist, these must be used.

When turning right through a median strip or traffic island, every attempt must be made to take advantage of the cover provided by the island. Drivers who allow the car to sit out in the traffic flow when an opportunity to minimise the potential for rear end collisions have little perception of the dangers involved.

## Turn

**Selection of lane** Except where specific turn lanes are identified, drivers are expected to take the nearest available lane when completing turns. Should a different lane be required, appropriate lane changes should then be completed. It may, in some situations be necessary for drivers to “manage” following traffic using a combination of observation, judgement and signalling skills in order to accomplish this.

## Observation

**Lack of forward observation** Usually experienced on approach to intersections – regardless of whether an unobstructed view is available or not. Driver arrives at intersection then begins to look around and decide whether to proceed or stop rather than making observations and an initial decision prior to arrival.

## Judgement

**Safe gap** At entry level, it is acknowledged that drivers may opt to use larger gaps in traffic than more experienced drivers, however, this does not mean that very long waits should be tolerated. LTO discretion is used here, bearing in mind that an entry-level (not experienced) driver is being assessed. Any selection of a small gap that causes fear for the LTO is unacceptable.

## Safety Margins

**Acceptable safety margin** Safety margins are generally a measure of the gap between the sides of the test car and anything else. As acceptable margins vary greatly depending on circumstances, where the LTO feels discomfort/fear, a NO score will be awarded. This may also apply where an extremely short following distance occurs unreasonably for a brief time.

## Progress

**Reasonable progress** It is usually quite clear when a candidate is not confident enough to drive up to an appropriate speed for conditions. LTO's will award a no if the driver fails to approach the limit when appropriate for most of each test section. A driver who persists in driving well under the limit to the extent that other drivers begin taking unreasonable action to overtake may attract an immediate fail (Item 3, or in some circumstances, Item 6).

## Special

### **Unusual or unexpected**

Special points are seldom awarded, as on-road situations that cannot be expected do not often arise. Special points are not awarded where the driver takes routine evasive action as a result of common occurrences, eg., another driver fails to give way, however would certainly be considered where the driver sensibly deals with something like a truck's load spilt across the roadway.

## Car Control

### **Steering**

Two hands on the wheel at all times (except when using other controls) ten to two or quarter to three position preferred. Minimal crossovers, and no hands gripping the wheel from inside.

### **Dry Steering**

Any turning of the steering wheel whilst the car is stationary. This will attract a NO score if the wheel is turned more than approx ¼ turn whilst the wheels are not moving - either forwards or backwards.

### **Clutch**

No “dumping” the clutch (must be smooth), unduly slipping the clutch (but ok at extremely low speeds), and no driving with foot on clutch (may be ok in tight situations where a quick stop from low speed may be required).

### **Accelerator**

No jerks – smooth application and back-off.

### **Gears**

The driver should be in the appropriate gear at any given moment or recognise the wrong gear and correct the problem promptly, and must operate the gear stick correctly within the H pattern, or the automatic selector using push button release etc.

### **Handbrake**

The handbrake will not be applied unless the car is stationary, and when appropriate, must be fully released. Whenever a prolonged stop can be reasonably anticipated, the handbrake should be applied, eg at red traffic lights.

Failure to fully release the handbrake will be tolerated for a short time – maybe 50 – 100 metres to give the driver the opportunity to correct the situation, however will attract an immediate fail (Item 3) if no correction occurs. Point 5 in Immediate Fail Item 3 applies, as there are potentially dangerous consequences eg, overheating of rear brakes leading to brake fade, or fire.

## U-Turn

- Signals** Whenever a U-turn is to be commenced from the left kerbside, the student should begin by signalling the intention to pull in to the left. Having pulled in, the intention to turn to the right should be signalled for a minimum of 5 seconds before leaving the kerbside. As the turn nears completion, if the position of the car requires a 'rejoining' of the traffic stream, the intention should be signalled (if already in the traffic stream this is not necessary).
- Observation** As for any manoeuvre where the car is to be moved into adjacent "vacant space" eg, lane changing and pulling out from the kerb, in addition to routine mirror checks, the LTO will be looking for shoulder checks. Examples include; at the commencement of the U-turn and if rejoining the traffic stream once turned around.
- Positions the vehicle** For most U-turns the appropriate position for commencement will be at the left kerbside. For U-turns through a median strip, every attempt must be made to position the car within the bounds of the median strip, thus reducing the likelihood of being hit from the rear. If this is not possible, the car should be positioned as near to the right kerb as possible to minimise the target available to vehicles approaching from behind. Where a candidate fails to take advantage of opportunities to minimise the risk of a rear end collision in this way, an immediate fail (Item 3) may be considered.
- Without reversing** Reversing may be permitted in situations where the turning circle of the car clearly cannot accommodate a U-turn at the best location on the designated section of roadway. This will be extremely rare as most test routes provide opportunities to 'buy' extra road width by using T junctions to the right. Where the driver selects such a location, solid lines in the terminating road may be crossed provided the driver has clearly attempted to get the car around in as small an arc as possible.
- Dry Steering** See "Car Control"

## Moving Off Uphill

- Fails to move off at first attempt** An attempt to move off is considered to begin at the moment the release of the handbrake begins.

## Angle Parking Exercise

### Exiting

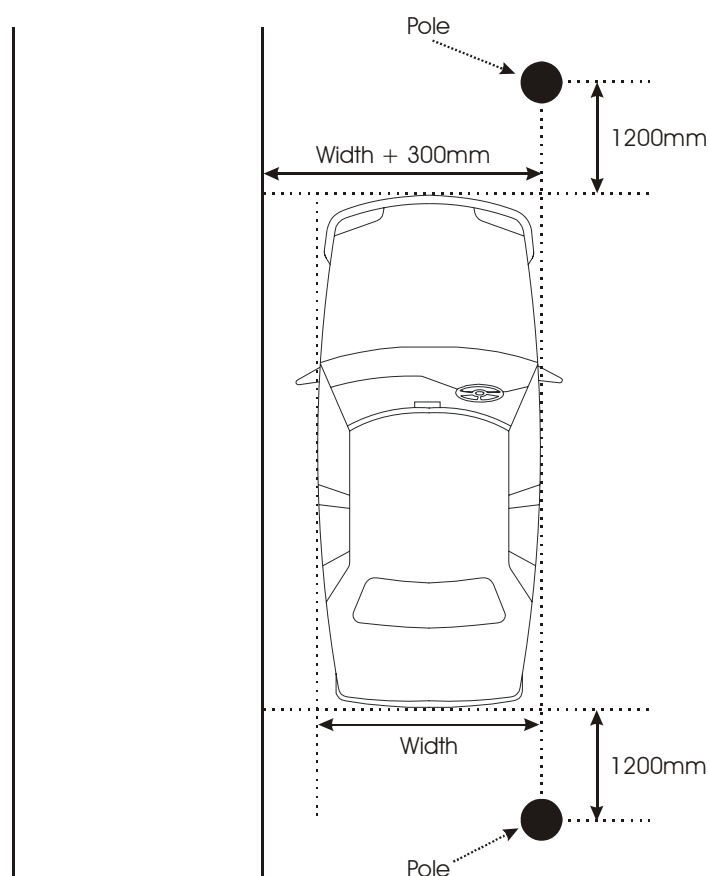
- One attempt** Flexibility is permitted where unexpected traffic movement compels the driver to move back into the parking bay.
- Steering wheel** After reversing when clear of the parking bay, the front wheels are expected to be facing the intended direction of travel. To enable the car to move off in the new direction of travel, the steering wheel must not be turned more than 1.5 full turns.
- Before moving off** After reversing out of the parking bay, if the car is in the traffic stream, no signal is required to move off. If the car must join the traffic stream to move off, normal moving off procedures apply. Although it is considered good practice to signal while reversing out of the parking bay, this is not assessed, as the self-cancelling action of some indicators may place unreasonable demands on entry level drivers.
- Rear Parking Assist (Proximity) Device** Where a vehicle being used for a test is fitted with a Rear Parking Assistance (Proximity) Device, the applicant must still perform all the necessary observations physically and not rely on any device/s to ascertain proximity to any objects. Whilst Rear proximity Devices will be tolerated, their accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Therefore they will not be permitted to form any part of the LTO's assessment of driver performance.

### Entering

- Position appropriately within the parking bay** Car should be essentially central and perpendicular to the kerb. Considerable discretion will be exercised, particularly where cars parked awkwardly in adjacent bays compel less than perfect positioning. The front of the car should not overhang the kerb, and the rear should not protrude beyond the parking bay sidelines. No part of the car may impinge on adjacent parking bays.
- Dry Steering** See "Car Control"

## Reverse Parking Exercise

- 2 poles or 3** VORT demands that only two poles be used, however, it was agreed several years ago that a third (left rear) may be added by the instructor. Under no circumstances will the LTO set up or pack down a third pole, or allow the instructor to set up or pack down the official poles. In this way, responsibility for any non-standard condition rests solely with the instructor.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt** A second attempt will only be offered if the first attempt fails to position the car appropriately. Touching a pole or the kerb, or driving between the poles immediately ends the manoeuvre.
- Touching the kerb** This is a difficult one to define, however, in general terms, where the tyre lightly brushes the kerb, but further travel would not result in the wheel mounting the kerb or scraping more heavily, LTO's will allow the attempt.
- Dry Steering** See "Car Control"
- Rear Parking Assist (Proximity) Device** Where a vehicle being used for a test is fitted with a Rear Parking Assistance (Proximity) Device, the applicant must still perform all the necessary observations physically and not rely on any device/s to ascertain proximity to any objects. Whilst Rear proximity Devices will be tolerated, their accuracy cannot be guaranteed – particularly when detecting single poles set off to one side of the vehicle. Therefore they will not be permitted to form any part of the LTO's assessment of driver performance.
- Pole setup** For class C, poles will be 1200 mm in length.



## Unavoidable Illegal Manoeuvre

**Unavoidable** This means a situation where no viable alternative is available, eg, a vehicle parked beside double lines may leave no option but to cross the double lines. A slow moving vehicle beside double lines compels patience however, not an illegal manoeuvre.

## Not-Applicable

For most performance checks, N/A means that the check is not applicable because the LTO has not managed to make a sound observation. N/A performance checks are not therefore used to determine the final score. On a standard test route, up to around 33% of performance checks may be N/A (perhaps due to serious road works diverting the drive off-route) before a final score cannot be determined.

## Immediate Fail Item 1 - Disobeys Traffic Lights, Signs, Road Markings

**Yellow lights** Perhaps the most widely disputed immediate fail item, the yellow traffic light, can only be assessed by the LTO on its merits at the time. The LTO will in all cases consider the role of other traffic at the time in exercising discretion on this point.

**Fails to proceed when safe at a green light** This applies whenever the driver fails to recognise that it's ok to proceed, whether the green light appears to have been seen or not. An immediate fail will be awarded if the lights change from green without any appropriate action from the driver, or if the LTO or instructor in any way intervenes.

Consideration will be given to the state of the intersection – choked up or awaiting a clear path through pedestrian traffic etc.

**Stop signs** In all cases, the car must come to a complete stop – ie, the wheels must stop moving. Where more than one car is waiting at a stop sign, the test car must stop in turn before the line to ensure that the driver has the best possible opportunity to obtain a clear view before deciding to proceed.

**Unbroken lines** There are many variants of the unbroken line, some of which must not be crossed, and some that may. In general, crossing:

- any unbroken white line in combination with another line at the centre of the road (see U turn for an exception);
- any unbroken line separating two lanes travelling in the same direction; and
- any unbroken Bicycle Lane marker;

may result in an immediate fail being awarded.

**Directional arrows** This applies to the last arrow painted on the roadway before the intersection is entered.

**Signs** Examples – Keep Left, No Overtaking etc.

**Bicycle lanes** See Unbroken Lines Examples

## **Immediate Fail Item 2 - Fails to Give Way**

**Change speed or direction significantly**

If the other driver is compelled to take evasive action. Where the other driver chooses to change lanes for convenience rather than to avoid a collision, the LTO may exercise discretion. It is not unreasonable in some circumstances for traffic to be slowed a little by entering traffic.

## **Immediate Fail Item 3 - Drives Without Due Care, Attention or Consideration for other Road Users, or In a Manner Dangerous**

**Examples**

If a dangerous situation arises as a result of student driving too slowly for the prevailing traffic conditions for a prolonged period causing traffic to bank up and other drivers to become frustrated.

Student allows car to mount the kerb at any time (including Reverse Parking exercise) during the test.

Student brakes using left foot. Even a single application of the brakes with the left foot indicates that the student has not yet learned to use the right foot at all times. Use of the left foot destabilises seating position, increases the likelihood that brake lights will be on when they shouldn't be, allows brake and accelerator to be used at the same time, and has potential for overheating of brakes, risking fading and fire.

## **Immediate Fail Item 4 - Speed Limits**

**Parallax error**

LTOs will always make due allowance for parallax error when determining speed. For this reason, LTOs are not permitted to attempt to quote exact speeds, and will use phrases such as "you were travelling in excess of 60 kilometres per hour" instead. This is not a sign that the LTO has no idea what speed the driver is doing.

**Speed warning devices and cruise controls**

The use of speed warning devices and cruise controls is not permitted during a VORT

## **Immediate Fail Item 5 - LTO Intervenes**

**Prompting**

Prompting by an instructor in any form is regarded as an intervention. Where an LTO suspects discrete prompting is occurring, the instructor will be cautioned once before an immediate fail is awarded. Where the LTO has no doubt, the immediate fail will be awarded without a warning.

## **Immediate Fail Item 6 - Fails to Comply with any Reasonable Direction From an LTO**

**Examples** Student repeatedly refuses or is unable to follow routine directions given by the LTO, or refuses to attempt compulsory manoeuvre etc.

### **Method of Scoring**

**Transparency** For all valid VORT tests a percentage score may be calculated, however this will not be routinely done. In the event that a bona fide dispute involves the calculation of a percentage, the investigating officer may fall back on this facility if necessary.

### **Ready Reckoner**

**Transparency** Whilst based on percentage scores, the VORT ready reckoner has been converted to provide a pass/fail indication only. This has been done to reflect the significant outcome of the VORT, and reduces any likelihood that LTO's and/or instructors will enter into speculation surrounding the validity or otherwise of borderline results.

### **Other**