

Road Safety in Denmark

This document

has been written following a brief email correspondence with Pernille Ehlers, Rådet for Større Færdselssikkerhed, in October 2002. It contains my personal comments regarding Road Safety in Denmark, and does not follow a formal presentation method, but rather contains a series of thoughts and suggestions that I hope will be of use. I hope that this is not perceived as an *outsider* carping at Danish methods, but rather as an attempt to highlight what I see as problems. The document consists of various sections, to wit, *Personal Information, General Comments, Some Local Examples, Other Examples, Recent Campaigns, Motorcyclists, The DKU, Basic Suggestions*.

Personal information

Before moving permanently to Denmark in 1994, we (my wife and I) had visited many times for business and pleasure since the late 70's. Over all that time I have been a pedestrian, a cyclist, a motorcyclist, a motorist (with and without trailer or caravan) and even driven small trucks here. As a result, I have had full opportunity to observe the general disregard for road safety, I am sorry to say, that exists in Denmark. Our business also took us to other European countries, so that I have had ample opportunity to observe road safety behaviour elsewhere.

As a teenager I was the Youth Council's representative on the local Road Safety Committee.

Later in England I was fully trained as a motorist and as a motorcyclist. As a motorcyclist I was for my last few years there the Training Co-ordinator of the BMF's North London motorcycle training centre, in charge of the complete training programme, and around 30 instructors, and working in conjunction with the local Road Safety officers and the DSA. I was also an Advanced riding instructor, trained by a Class 1 police rider.

To fulfil all of my duties, I was certificated by the British Driving Standards Agency (DSA <http://www.dsa.gov.uk/>) as an instructor licensed to approve any motorcyclist for their Provisional Licence (L plates).

In Denmark I was for a while a member of the OUH MCSG, but my poor Danish meant that I could not fully contribute to the Group, so I resigned from it. For the same reason I had to resign as an instructor for DMC. I am, however, able to read Danish quite well.

General comments

I have been aware of the very low standard of safety on the Danish roads for many years. In 1995 I presented a discussion document (also attached) to the MCSG which I hope was of some help in setting guidelines for their future work.

My later reading of "training manuals" and observation of training methods has led me to the conclusion that there is no genuine concept in Denmark similar to the basis of training in the UK where the term "Road Safety" applies to all classes of road users. A simple definition could be that Road Safety is the application of basic safety principles at all times when in any type of traffic situation. Not, as appears to be the case here, a general philosophy of just obeying rules and laws only when it suits the particular individual concerned and without any real or accepted understanding of why such rules and laws were written in the first place.

In my reading and observation, I have concluded that the oppressive influence of the Dansk Kørelærer-Union (<http://www.dk-u.dk/> which has, in effect, a total monopoly of training in all categories) is at least partly to blame for the lack of understanding of road safety by road users.

In addition, the widespread influence of the UK's "Highway Code" is sadly lacking in Denmark, as there is no equivalent publication here. (<http://www.highwaycode.gov.uk/>) The various training guides available are no substitute. Again, most of those are issued by the DKU.

Some local examples

Where we live (Skt Klemens in Odense S.) we are near to some typical road situations which exemplify the sort of problems which need to be overcome.

Lane discipline_____The main road Stenløsevej is an almost straight run from the E20 Junction 51, through the outskirts of Skt Klemens, and then through to Bellinge. There is a good cycle path on both sides through Skt Klemens. The speed limit throughout the Skt Klemens stretch is 80 kph. There are two crossroads in Skt Klemens on this road, and I will use that with Skt Klemensvej as an example. At that crossroads (no traffic lights) there is a tunnel under the road for pedestrian and cycle traffic to Skt Klemensskolen etc. The road markings on the main road are double white lines with give-way markings on the side roads. The following abuses of road safety (and traffic rules) can be seen at any time of the day or night:

Motor vehicle users If there are vehicles turning off the main road, then the majority of *following* vehicles will ignore the double white lines and overtake while straddling them. Even if the white lines were not there, it is anyway very unsafe to overtake at a crossroads.

Speed The great majority will also exceed the speed limit. There are frequent traffic incidents here. The same applies on the E20 itself where the general rule followed seems to be that of "go as fast as you like, but don't get caught". There is obviously no teaching by instructors that speed limits *ensure that all road users have a yardstick* by which to gauge the closing speed of other traffic.

The tunnel is ignored by many, who aim to cross the main road without using it, despite the fact that there are no sidewalks at this point, and the tunnel has been much improved. A very bad example to the school children.

The cycle paths are ignored by many cyclists who cannot be bothered to use them. (Or maybe it is not considered to be 'matcho' to use them?) This means that they are riding on what is just a narrow strip of tarmac between the outer white line, and the verges.

The Junction 51 roundabout is a good example of the ignorance of vehicle users. This roundabout is a dual lane one with twelve entry and exit lanes. The great majority of drivers or riders stay in the inside lane, even to the extent of going past all exit lanes except the last, still in that lane! In the main, anyone who uses the outside lane correctly is cut up (at speed) by other users who treat that correct usage as a challenge to avoid being "overtaken".

Some of the exit lanes (from the E20) are dual lanes, and recently one was blocked off in a misguided attempt to defeat vehicles from entering the E20 on an exit lane. This has caused traffic congestion at peak times, and leads to even worse traffic behaviour due to the perceived "delay" to traffic. The removal of the second entry lane to the roundabout positively *discourages* correct use of the dual lanes. Simple modifications to the road layout and road signs would have been sufficient to reduce the minimal risk, and to prevent any increased number of incidents on

the roundabout.

Training As there is both a driving school and a school on this main road, we often see riders undergoing training. The cycle paths on both sides of the main road from the E20 to the first crossroads are used. The driving instructor uses a car, driving slowly alongside the cycle path and the riders! The result of course is that the instructor cannot communicate effectively with the riders. There is also the perceived lack of interest as the instructor is a car driver, instead of a rider using the same path and equipment as the trainees.

Knallerts in general Due to the environs, there are a lot of knallert riders going through the village. The great majority (including PostDanmarks postmen!) do not use crash helmets. Some carry them on their handlebars, presumably in an attempt to just meet the rules, rather than out of consideration of their own safety. Their other clothing in the warmer (or even colder) times of the year beggars belief!

Cyclists in general Similarly for cyclists. It seems to be 'macho' to not wear a crash helmet. Thus the ridiculous sight is too often seen of family groups, where the parents let their children know of their contempt for their own safety by not wearing helmets themselves. The idea apparently being that the children have to have them as "it is the law", but wearing them for safety (and a good example) is not seen as a valid reason.

Motorcyclists under training, or being tested often use this main road. An instructor, or tester, using a car, always accompanies them. How on earth is a rider expected to learn, or demonstrate, good road habits with a tin wall directly behind them? What degree of confidence does the instructor or tester inspire when they do not use a motorcycle themselves, and how on earth can they see the fine detail of the trainees machine control and road observation from a car?

Traffic calming measures A few years ago road humps were installed in the road through the village that parallels the main road. They are apparently seen as a challenge to be met, rather than as a safety measure. Thus the ridiculous sight (and sound) of a vehicle leaving one bump and accelerating hard to the next, only to fiercely brake on reaching it. Matters are made worse by one end of the road NOT having the lower speed limit signed until around 300m in.

Other examples

Aggressive driving such as tailgating and undertaking. In both cases, this behaviour shows a complete lack of awareness of basic road safety. In the one case, there is no awareness of the meaning of braking distance, and in the other, deviant behaviour that does not allow other road users to be able to safely anticipate road positioning.

Speeding and speed limits It appears to be the norm that speed limits are seen as purely punitive measures to punish otherwise "safe" motor vehicle users, and obtain funds for the State in the form of fines. This is not an uncommon attitude in other countries, but is carried to the extreme here. There seems to be no understanding that speed limits are necessary for several reasons - general safety regarding vehicle and driver performance and capability, general safety with respect to prevailing conditions, and the necessity to have a known yardstick by which to judge closing speeds and thus safe manoeuvring distances.

Signalling that is, the use of flashing turn indicators, or hand signals. This is possibly the worst aspect of vehicle users behaviour insofar as it indicates a total lack of appreciation of the fact that using the roads in whatever capacity is, *by necessity*, a cooperative endeavour.

A road user on wheels has to both know what others are about to do, and inform others what it is about to do. Note the use of the words 'about to'. To signal only after actually commencing an action is completely pointless, but that appears to be the way that all such users have been taught.

The correct sequence of *Look, Signal, Check, Position, Check, Manoeuvre* has been reduced in Denmark to, *Manoeuvre, Signal!* Very much a case of "look at what I am doing"!

Additionally, most signalling appears to be the result of an automatic response to a users situation - not a considered action dictated by the prevailing conditions and forthcoming action in the control of the vehicle. Many signals are made in such a way that they literally have no value; they are made when there is no necessity whatsoever for any signal to be made. For example, having already positioned the vehicle in a filter lane where the road markings clearly show where the vehicle will be proceeding. Also, where there are NO other road users to be informed of the coming action.

Observation The problem here is most clearly seen in the behaviour of cyclists, but pedestrians also display much the same behaviour. Legally, at certain road layouts (for example traffic lights with signals specifically for cyclists and/or pedestrians) a cyclist technically has the right of way. Most cyclists use that as a reason for not looking to first see if it is safe to proceed. The complete lack of responsibility for their own safety is quite breathtaking! It is of little benefit to put a sign on their coffin (or roadside shrines) "he/she had the right of way".

Respect for laws

Or, rather, lack of respect. One specific example regarding the bi-annual vehicle test on motorcycles. It is common for dealers to offer a special service to their customers whereby a rider 'rents' an approved exhaust system to fit it in place of their unapproved one. After the test, then it goes back to the dealer ready for the next rider who wants to cheat the system.

Generally, there is no such thing as an 'accident' on the roads. An accident is something that could not have been foreseen, and that is extremely rare. 'Incident' is by far the better word.

Recent Campaigns

Over the last ten years or so I have seen various campaigns misfire which were intended to have a beneficial effect of Road Safety. I give a few examples - but please note that I may have mistranslated the meanings of the words and phrases in the slogans - if that applies to any of my examples, then please ignore those:

Daytime headlights first I must comment that I tried to get statistical information covering the before and after data. Most of what I found was hearsay; there does not seem to be real evidence in the available statistics.

Apparently the main results of the use of daytime headlights are:

1. Some of the front-end collisions have been replaced by rear end collisions due to many vehicle users failing to spot the difference between permanently-on taillights, and occasionally-on stop lights, in bright light conditions.
2. A much shorter MTBF for headlight bulbs!

Technically, the demand for dipped headlights to be on at all times is quite indefensible. Over many decades, headlight manufacturers had improved headlight design so that the light provided falls where it should, that is, on the road. The better designs (such as the Z Beam) were aimed at

ensuring that as little light as possible spilled above headlamp level. The ideal beam shape would give no light at all above that level. If that ideal is achieved, then daytime dipped headlights will not be visible at all, thus negating the supposed "benefit" of having them switched on!

More seriously, the designers have been given the clear signal that research and development is a waste of time and money. Even though, curiously enough, the lack of an E marking on the lens will result in a failure on motor vehicle tests!

A further problem is the perception of vehicle users - it goes like this "having headlights on makes me safer. Therefore if I have more lights (fog lights for example), then I will be safer still". End result, the correct use of fog lights is no longer understood, hence even more dazzle at night as they are no longer switched off for much of the time.

Speed limit reminders on various sections of (mainly) local roads. As I read them, they seem to pushing the negative idea of "what is the speed I should be doing on this bit of road", rather than the positive idea of "what is the maximum speed allowed here, assuming the conditions are conducive to go up to that speed".

There are other aspects of negative signing on both motorways and country roads:

Motorways - the recent change to 130 kph as the standard has now meant that the almost equally common application of 110 kph has had to be signed as an exception. This is both difficult to justify as any benefit on journeys, and difficult to appreciate in driving conditions. Simply, where there are no repeater signs (negative signing) the limit is 130. Where there are signs (110) the value of positive signing is negated by the fact that there appears to be no logical reason for the reduction - still a dual carriageway - frequently a straight ahead pair of lanes - no apparent change in the conditions (for example, no road works). Thus drivers and riders simply continue to use 130 kph as the speed to drive at - often perceived as the minimum for reasons given earlier.

Country roads - are limited to 80 kph except where signed. Sometimes a village will not have a full reduction to 50 kph, although sometimes the restriction will be more severe. The signing for any speed *other than 50 kph* is positive in that the actual speed limit will be fully signed at the beginning, together with repeaters. However the signing for 50 kph is only negative as it is *implied* by the village name sign, but not shown as such. A better system would be to add a 50 sign to the name sign so as to clearly show the speed limit, rather than just imply it.

Together with that there needs to be clear training to make vehicle users understand that the limit applies for the whole distance between the first and last sign - not that they should start to slow down upon reaching the first sign, and be up to full speed again by the time they reach the last sign!

"Blink" Mostly this was applied to motorways and was intended to make drivers understand the necessity to clearly signal an intention to deviate from a straight ahead course, that is, in particular when changing lanes.

Firstly, the drivers should have been trained to signal correctly in the first place (see above re intention and automatic behaviour).

Secondly, drivers should have been trained to correctly apply stopping distances - "keep your distance".

As neither of these is done, the only result of the campaign is to encourage drivers to feel that they have obeyed the "new" requirement if they give just one flash after having already deviated (most do it only when actually pulling in by the way). The other perception is that as it must be "safer" to have given the one flash, then they can cut in with only just enough space to avoid

actually hitting the other vehicle. This seems to be exemplified by the recent E20 crash of four lorries going at full speed straight into the back of another who failed to observe that the vehicles ahead were stationary - tail gating being the rule rather than the exception. The application of the correct stopping distance for the conditions would have avoided this disaster.

Lorry mirrors with respect to cyclists when turning right. Also refer to Observation above.

I see that since there has been so much emphasis on the lorries having more side view mirrors, the number of deaths of cyclists has *increased* rather than *decreased*. This seems to me to be a clear example of lack of training in that cyclists have to become responsible for their own safety. To believe that more mirrors on a lorry will automatically allow a cyclist to be less responsible for their own safety is so obviously a retrograde step, that it should never have been allowed to happen.

"Ghost" drivers Although not a safety campaign as such, a lot of unnecessary expense has been incurred to try and prevent incidents due to stupidity, poor training, and, maybe, poor signing. See *Junction 51 roundabout* above.

Motorcyclists

I have given this a separate section having regard to my own particular expertise. As I have mentioned, I have had first hand experience in MC training in Denmark as carried out by the DMC. Note that, unlike in the UK, in Denmark any training by voluntary organisations is not officially recognised; a small degree of involvement by DKU driving instructors does happen, but it is strictly on an individual level where a DKU instructor may happen to have an interest in motorcycling.

To clarify this - in the UK driver/rider training differs markedly from that in Denmark. The emphasis (in the UK) is on safety when on the road, so much more of the training plan takes place using actual vehicles on real roads and in real traffic. Somewhat less emphasis is placed on training in classrooms and closed training grounds than is the case in Denmark.

Additionally, the UK has a two-part testing programme. The first is called the Learner test (L plates) where a rider has to meet a minimum standard of vehicle control and road experience. (It is a little different for a driver.) A MC rider takes a basic test that then qualifies it to use a small MC on the road without supervision. The machine carries L-plates front and rear to indicate inexperience to other road users. When suitable additional training has been completed, then the rider takes the final theory and road test to obtain a full driving license.

For both tests the rider is accompanied and observed by an instructor (basic test) and then by an examiner (full test) who uses a motorcycle. The government control of training programmes, and the final test examiners are part of the Driving Standards Agency. The DSA works with the motorcyclists own organisations (such as the BMF and also some private training schools) to ensure that instructor standards are maintained. The DSA approves individual instructors from those two sources to carry out basic training, and to examine trainees for the basic test. In all cases (except for emergency) the training and testing is done by accompanying motorcyclists. The BMF, at least, encourages L riders to continue on courses with them for further training leading to the full test, and then advanced training for those interested.

The testing of riders by riders is of great benefit both in precise observation of riding technique and faults, as well as in confidence in the instructors themselves knowing and experiencing the same problems. For a rider to be protected by a car - a "tin wall" - close behind is not the way to encourage independent thinking and responsibility!

Within the BMF, some of the local police motorcyclists are instructors, as individuals. In my own Centre, I had two such, together with a CID officer who is a motorcyclist, and two more who came as invited lecturers on a regular basis.

As an aside, while helping out with a Young Motorcyclist of the Year competition here I asked the DKU instructor who was booked to supervise the observed-ride part of the test sequence, why he was following in a car instead of on a motorcycle. The answer I received was that he had to have a passenger to take dictated notes for marking at the end of the run! Apparently DKU instructors have never been trained to recall a complete ride for "verbal playback" at the end.

DMC courses and instructors do not have those advantages! The prime problem being that no rider is allowed on the public roads except when supervised by a DKU instructor, usually in a car. Thus DMC instructors only get trainees who have already received the (in my opinion) inadequate DKU training, and then received their full license. This is too late!

A second problem is that the DMC Bronze course and instructors follows on much the same pattern as the official training. That is, the bulk of it takes place on enclosed areas where the emphasis is on vehicle control and manoeuvring, rather than on safety on the roads. As an example of this; course participants and instructors usually meet at a clubhouse and then ride some distance to an enclosed training area. The mindset of the instructors is to regard this ride as just that - no attempt is made to observe the trainees en route and use it as a valuable addition to the instruction, and to correct riding errors that the riders bring with them.

A further example I take from four rides from clubhouse to training area - they were on a course where the meeting point was in Sønderjylland and the ride was from there and then most of the way across Als to the Danfoss carpark. Before leaving the clubhouse the lead instructor split the trainees and instructors into three groups and told everyone to ride in staggered group formation, except where it might impede other road users, and to remember to "open up the view around bends". They faithfully followed instructions - Als is mostly flat with few hedges or trees to impede the view, so by riding by rote, they all moved centre line to kerb line on every bend, despite the fact that the mainly 360 ° view could hardly be improved! For the major part of the rides they should have individually used the far more important rule for two-wheeled vehicles, "straighten the line". The exact opposite of the way they all rode - not a single instructor commented on it!

The more advanced DMC course - Gold - does take place using the observed ride technique, but the established mindset of the instructors tends more to bravura riding than safe riding.

Generally all the training concentrates on how to get out of a problem, rather than how to avoid getting into a problem in the first place! As just one example, a favourite DMC Bronze test asks the trainee rider to swerve round a simulated suddenly-opened-car-door. The correct procedure of training the rider to steer clear of potential hazards before they materialise is not considered valuable - or maybe, not so much fun? Fun without responsibility is a recipe for disaster! (For car driver trainees, the use of skidpans has the same problem. Skidpans are for training the very advanced driver to completely control a car in poor conditions - not simply for showing a driver such rudimentary skid control that it is useless in a real emergency.)

The DKU

Here I can only comment very briefly on the information I have obtained from their website, from the various publications, from observation, and from some conversations with instructors. In general, I consider it dangerous for one organisation to have any sort of monopoly of training and associated material and facilities. Certainly, in my section above, *Some Local examples*, many of

the examples of poor road behaviour I have encountered have also been seen from driving school cars where only the instructor is in the car. What does it say for the responsibility of instructors if they only drive comparatively safely when a trainee is in the car with them?

Basic suggestions There is of course no way that my limited hands-on experience of training in Denmark can qualify me to make authoritative suggestions! However, with that proviso, perhaps I can make just a few?

For riders, involve the MC organisations at an official level.

For campaigns, bias the campaign to the positive, rather than the negative.

For all training, reverse the existing priority of control first, safety second.

Greatly improve the overall training philosophy.

And one final favourite comment for this time of year – the frequent TV plugs to change tyres to “winter tyres”. In fact Denmark has no more need of special tyre treads than the UK has. It is a dangerous mindset to assume that having these tyres automatically makes a driver safer. The other amusing aspect is that Danish insurance companies offer motorcyclists a special reduction if they “winter” their machines – ridiculous!

Anthony C Batchelor
Copyright Vormark 2008