



Testing Times

Welcome

Here we are again. The last issue was a bit upmarket with Rolls Royces being the major subject so we are going to get back to earth (for most of us, anyway) with this issue.

You have all probably heard the jingle - "Meat Pies, Kangaroos and Dah, Dah, Dah". Well, the title of the first of the major articles this time can be sung along to that tune.

LPG, Traction Control and Aussie Cars

Commodores and Falcons are available with Electronic Traction Control (ETC) and both are frequently converted to use LPG. However, sometimes all the good things in life don't mix and this can be the case with LPG and ETC.

ETC is a bit like ABS in reverse. When the ABS wheel sensors detect a drive wheel going faster than it should for the forward speed of the vehicle (i.e. wheel spinning) the ETC system tells the engine management system to reduce engine power. This is usually done by retarding the ignition timing and then selectively cutting the fuel supply to some cylinders. If this is not sufficient, as a last resort, the ABS system is requested to apply the brake on the offending wheel.



Retarding the ignition and selectively cutting the fuel supply to some cylinders is a cinch with modern computer controlled engine

management and multi-point fuel injection systems and can be smoothly and safely done. However, this is not the case with the current single port LPG systems. Consequently, the ETC system's "last resort" brake applications become the mainstay and are much more common particularly when driving in icy conditions. This can lead to excessive brake wear and other problems.



As a result, both Holden and Ford require that the operation of their ETC systems be changed when vehicles are converted to LPG. However, each takes a slightly different approach.

Ford requires that the ETC manual over-ride system be diverted through the LPG/Petrol change-over switch so that whenever LPG is selected, the ETC system is automatically turned off and the TRAC OFF light comes on irrespective of the ETC switch position.

Holden on the other hand requires that the ETC system is permanently disabled and that the TRAC OFF warning lamp remains on whenever the ignition is on irrespective of the position of the ETC switch.

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The two approaches have safety advantages and disadvantages. With one system the driver has the safety benefits of ETC at some times. However they lose the benefits when switching over to LPG and may not realise this as they have not consciously disengaged traction control. With the other system the driver never has the benefits of traction control but then again should not get caught out by its intermittent absence.



What does this all mean for LVTs? Well, traction control is an optional safety feature and there are no regulatory requirements regarding how it works or what controls and warning lights are provided.

Consequently, if someone has been annoyed by the TRAC OFF light being on permanently in a Holden and has disconnected it, or someone didn't like the intermittent availability of traction control in a Ford and has changed the wiring, this doesn't make the vehicle un-roadworthy. However, if a tester discovers this type of modification it would be wise to make a note on the inspection report and to advise the person presenting the vehicle.



Insurance Cover

While we are talking about being wise, how is your insurance cover?

Most workshops have "workmanship" insurance. This covers you if you botch up a repair job. You know, forget to put oil in the engine after a rebuild! However, it does not cover you if you provide advice that is later proved to be incorrect. The sort of cover you need for this is called professional indemnity (PI) insurance.

You might say "Why should a LVT need PI insurance?" Well, a RWC inspection may be considered as providing a professional opinion under Victorian law and if you miss

that huge crack in the suspension tower and the vehicle subsequently crashes because of it, you could be sued.

These sorts of claims can cost big dollars as they may involve all sorts of consequential damages, not just the cost of fixing the crack – and "workmanship" insurance does not cover this.

Currently there is a case running in NSW where an inspector is being held liable for failing to find a fault on a vehicle which subsequently crashed despite the fact that the test was done many months previous.



You need to be aware that while a RWC is current for 30 days from the date you issue it, this is an administrative period (for change of ownership, clearance of a Defect Notice, etc) and your accountability for the quality of the test may continue long after this administrative period has expired. If someone can prove that a fault existed at the time of your inspection and it was reasonable to expect you to have found it you may have a big problem. You should definitely consider PI insurance to protect your business.

Is Your LVT Licence At Risk?

Some time ago all Licensed Vehicle Testers were advised that to continue testing they would have to have at least one testing mechanic who had successfully completed the full Licensed Vehicle Tester (LVT) Accreditation course.

Initially, all testers were given at least 12 months to comply and a deadline of 15th June 2000 was set. This deadline was later extended to 30th June 2001. In addition to the initial advice, the application form you signed when you last renewed your licence also carried this advice.

The deadline has now passed and VicRoads' LVT supervisors are currently checking for the accreditation of testing mechanics during all audits. The LVT



Accreditation course is in high demand so don't delay – book your mechanics in now. If you do not have at least one accredited testing mechanic when you are next visited you risk a suspension of your licence until you comply.

Please note that if you are accredited to test motorcycles you must also have at least one testing mechanic who has done the motorcycle course.

There is a little more flexibility with the requirement to have attended this course as it was only recently introduced and motorcycle testers have until June 30 2002 to comply. But the same advice applies - book your mechanics in now and



beat the rush. The lack of available places on the course at some later time will not be accepted as an excuse for not having a trained testing mechanic.



Steering Wheel Condition

Precise and responsive steering is needed to avoid objects, pedestrians, cyclists and suddenly opened doors on parked cars and to safely control the vehicle in wet or slippery conditions.

Manufacturers work very hard to get just the right amount of feel, responsiveness and feedback in the steering system so that the driver knows exactly what is happening with the front wheels at all times.

The modern steering wheel also serves as part of the driver safety system in the way that it is designed to absorb energy.

Despite all the effort put in to achieving these very important requirements, there is no accounting for all tastes and some people feel that the manufacturer got it wrong and want to change things. This raises two issues.

Some fit smaller steering wheels with thinner, harder rims while others want just the opposite and fit steering wheels or covers that make the rim much thicker and softer. You have all probably seen cars with big fluffy covers that make the steering wheel look like some toilet seats – Ah! LOOxury.



The first issue is that the wheel must still meet the original design requirements. So if the new wheel does not have the same strength and padding as the original it should be rejected.

The second issue is deterioration of the rim on standard wheels. The driver's hands twisting and squeezing the rim slowly breaks down the urethane so it feels like sponge rubber and detaches from the inner steel structure. In this instance the test is the same as for aftermarket covers:

there should be no sideways looseness that can create a loss of steering motion. However being able to twist the urethane (or the cover) by flexing the wrist is not a cause for rejection.

If the urethane is breaking up and falling off it must, of course, be rejected.

Whether or not an aftermarket steering wheel cover is fitted is immaterial for a roadworthy test but if one is fitted its condition is important. The cover should be secure with no loose sections or lacing that could tangle with the driver's hands or catch on other controls.

Windscreen Testing

A couple of months ago you were advised of changes to the windscreen standards set out in Section G of VSI 26. Some testers may not have appreciated what the changes really mean and others may be confused.

The term “sandblasting” - the name given to the myriads of small chips caused by the impact of road grit over time – has been deleted and the criteria re-worded to make it clearer that testers should direct attention to the real roadworthiness issue. That is, is the windscreen damaged to the extent that the vehicle is unsafe to drive?

The aim of the change is to get your mind off sandblasting in itself as some testers were using a very strict interpretation and rejecting any cases where sandblasting could be detected. The term “sandblasted” was becoming an easy way to reject a windscreen without carrying out a well considered inspection. Essentially, the bottom line is that LVTs should use commonsense when judging windscreen damage (within the scope offered in VSI 26) and not use “sandblasting” as a reason to reject an otherwise perfectly good windscreen.

A windscreen should only be rejected if:

it is discoloured, badly scratched, fractured, or chipped within the area wiped by the windscreen wiper(s) to the extent that the driver’s vision is so impaired that the vehicle cannot be driven safely.

Therefore, a windscreen that is badly chipped should be rejected. However the chipping would need to be extensive and significantly interfere with the driver’s vision. As with all components some deterioration of a windscreen is to be expected and it is acknowledged that making an assessment can be difficult.

Generally a windscreen should not be rejected unless it is obvious that the driver’s vision would be impaired. The LVT accreditation training presented by TAFE provides a useful procedure for assessing vehicle windscreens.

Alloy Wheels

The Wheels and Tyres section of VSI 26 refers to VSI 8 which requires aluminium alloy wheels to comply with Australian Standard AS 1638 – 1974 or a similar recognised standard.

VSI 8 previously listed just some of the standards markings that were acceptable but it has just recently been amended to include a number of other markings. If the new version of VSI 8 is not yet available the following is a more complete list of acceptable markings:

AS1638	Australian Standard
DOT	Department of Transport, USA
JIS	Japanese Industry Standard
JWL	Japanese Light Alloy Wheel (Standard)
JWLT	Japanese Light Alloy Wheel Truck and Bus (Standard)
KBA	German TUV Certification
VIA	Vehicle Inspection Association, Japan

Info on the Internet

Just another reminder, all the Vehicle Standards Information (VSI) sheets and other useful information is available on the VicRoads website at

www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/road_safe

To quickly get to the vehicle section click on the [V] in the alphabet across the page.

Fees

Annual renewal of your licence is \$15.50.

A new licence, or if you change the location of your testing premises, or to add additional premises onto your licence, costs \$78.00 per site.

A book of 100 Roadworthiness Certificates now costs \$118.00 (including GST)

Note:

*All supplies can be obtained from
VicRoads’ Bookshop
Ground Floor, 60 Denmark Street
KEW VIC 3101
Phone (03) 9854 2782
Fax (03) 9854 2468*

Open weekdays between 8.30am and 4.30pm