



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

...from the
director's chair

Ontario Transport Minister takes a wrong turn

Passenger car drivers no longer need Class A licence to pull 40-ft., 24,000-lb. RV trailers

A couple of years ago I was getting fuel at the Shell station in Ignace on Hwy. 11 in northern Ontario, when I watched a pick-up truck towing a fifth-wheel trailer wipe out in the middle of town. The driver was doing about 50 km/h, I'd guess, when he began swerving from side to side. The swerving worsened, and in a flash he was flipped over and lying at right angles to the roadway.

The driver over-steered while trying to correct the swerving motion, and made a hard left turn in the middle of the road. The trailer split open like an egg and junk spilled out all over the place, closing Hwy. 11 for several hours. Poor guy. I guess that was the end of his vacation.

I recall that event here because the province of Ontario has just amended its driver licensing standards to allow passenger car drivers (Class G licences) to pull fifth-wheel trailers with a gross combination weight as high as 11,000 kgs (24,250 lbs). Previously, RVers pulling trailers weighing more than 4,600 kgs (10,000 lbs) needed a Class A licence, the same licence truck drivers have, minus the air brake endorsement.

A little research on RV manufacturer Web sites reveals that RVers with absolutely no experience or training can jump into a pick-up truck hitched to a fifth-wheel trailer up to 46 feet long, weighing as much as 18,000 lbs, and go pretty well anywhere they please – or dare.

Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's Minister of Transportation, announced the changes to regulation 340/94 on July 1, saying, "Summer is a very popular season for the RV community. This timely change will make it easier for RV operators, will promote tourism and the overall RV experience in Ontario, while keeping our roads safe."

My question is, where does the Minister get the 'keeping our roads safe' part?

There is nothing in the text of the regula-

tion, in the Ontario Gazette, or in the Regulatory Registry that indicates how this move will keep our roads safe. The only requirements are that the trailers meet Transport Canada manufacturing standards, and they not be used for commercial purposes. Noted too is that the Ontario Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association – which represents RV dealers in the province and Ontarians who operate RVs – would provide voluntary orientation and training to the operators of such vehicles. The emphasis is mine.

What irks me most is how this runs contrary to all the justification various ministers have provided in the past for not amending the same regulation for Class A licence testing requirements for drivers over age 65.

Here we're talking about changes to the licensing standards that will allow drivers with passenger car licences to tow trailers darned near as big as tractor-trailers, and the Minister is content with the offer of the RV association to provide voluntary training. All the while, Class A drivers with 30 or 40 years of experience are failing driving tests for something as simple as forgetting to turn on an AC/heater fan.

Regulations for truckers ensure things like vehicle inspections are done properly, and the proper type of equipment is used for a job; not so for the RV crowd.

There are no specific spec's for the pick-up truck to ensure it's up the task, like suspension capacity or engine power. Stupidity notwithstanding, there's nothing to stop a driver with a basic half-ton from hooking it to a 42-ft., 18,000-lb trailer.

There may be physical limits to the weight of these vehicles, but there are no requirements that the operators pay attention to load distribution or vehicle handling characteristics. Or, as that fellow in Ignace discovered, how to



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handle a long high-profile vehicle in a crosswind. Remember, their training is voluntary.

Minister Wynne also felt it worthy of mention that this change would save RV drivers \$200 in initial licence costs, and that it would help support the province's RV industry and promote tourism.

OBAC has explained to a series of transportation ministers that the Class A renewal can cost a driver upwards of \$1,000 in truck procurement fees and lost earnings for the road test, but cost and inconvenience to the commercial driver has never been an issue as far as MTO is concerned.

This is as pure and clear a double standard as you're ever likely to see in driver licensing. MTO just sent a message that saving a couple of hundred bucks and promoting the RV industry has a higher place on its agenda than road safety. And if any of these RVers are over 65, by the way, they aren't required to retest for their G licence until they're 80.

OBAC, the CTA and others have been after MTO for years to rethink the testing requirements for older, experienced Class A drivers, proposing equitable alternatives based on medical fitness to drive and driving record. As a result of our lobby efforts, a comprehensive review conducted over three years ago led bureaucrats to make recommendations that would put an end to discriminatory age-based testing.

The status of those recommendations? "Waiting for briefing time with the Minister," we're told. Makes you wanna jump into the nearest RV and take a trip to Queen's Park. With a provincial election scheduled for October, that may not be a bad idea.