



DO YOU HAVE THE CORRECT DRIVER'S LICENSE?

Carol Maxwell & Ed Gurdjian
RV Techstop.com

The RV industry and its trade organizations, RVIA and RVDA, have been very successful in popularizing the RV lifestyle. As a result, there are many more RVs on the road and many of the drivers of these RVs have never driven any vehicle larger than a pick-up truck or mini-van.

When we bought our first motorhome, which was 29' long and 96" wide, we asked about any special driving techniques or licensing. We were told, "It takes a little more distance to stop and watch out for the back end swinging out when you go around a corner. After a few thousand miles it will be just like driving a car." When we bought our 40', 102" wide bus, we were told, "After a few thousand miles it will be just like driving your old RV." With all due respect, driving a 29' motor home is not like driving a car and driving a 40', 102" wide bus is not like driving a 29', 96" wide RV. This is especially true if one drives roads other than interstates. We wonder if those who say driving these various vehicles is all the same have some neuro-perception problems or if they are just in some stage of denial!

Depending upon the type of vehicle you plan to drive, some states require a specific driver's license. We first became aware of this in 1995 while driving in Texas. We heard that operating a vehicle over 26,001 pounds required a special license. When we arrived home, we contacted our Department of Motor Vehicles and, to our surprise, found that Pennsylvania had the same requirement. We then discussed this issue with several of our peers in the RV industry. Their consensus was that even though these laws might be "on the books", they were not being enforced so there was really no need to get the license. They pointed out that we had driven

our bus over 100,000 miles with a Class C license. At the time we had a friend who was a Pennsylvania State Trooper, so we asked him his opinion. Our friend responded, "There is nothing that demands I issue a citation for an infraction of any law. I do not have to issue a citation for speeding-that does not mean that I won't. So, even though a Trooper might not issue a citation for improper licensing on one

Every RV owner/driver should assume the responsibility of becoming familiar with the laws of his/her home state.

occasion does not mean that it will always be that way." Being aware that ignorance of the law is not an adequate defense, we were concerned about liability exposure from not being properly licensed. After carefully considering all the information, we felt compelled to comply with the law. Although Ed does most of the driving we believed that both of us needed to be licensed. Carol does some driving and might have to take over in an emergency.

While we were preparing for our licensing exams, we learned about the Driver's License Compact (DLC) which was created to maximize law enforcement efforts nationwide. The DLC is intended to assure uniform and predictable treatment of drivers by treating offenses committed in other states as though the offense had been committed in the home state. Serious offenses (manslaughter or negligent

homicide resulting from the operation of a motor vehicle, DUI, or use of a motor vehicle during the commission of any felony) committed in a member state are reported to the motorist's home state and convictions are processed according to the provisions of the vehicle code of the home state. As an example, if you hold a Pennsylvania driver's license and are convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol in Arizona, your driving privilege would be suspended for a minimum of one year in Pennsylvania.

Member states are committed to the "one driver license" and "one driver record" concept. The "one driver license" requires the surrender of an out-of-state driver license when applying for a new state license. The "one driver record" concept requires a complete driving record be maintained in the home state to determine driving eligibility not only in the home state, but also as a non-resident driver in other jurisdictions. Usually, minor traffic violations such as speeding or running a red light or stop sign are reported to the home state but points are not assessed to the home state driving record. However, not responding to an out-of-state citation could result in an indefinite suspension of driving privileges.

At first, we thought the DLC would also standardize licensing requirements, but this is not so. Each state is different. Owners should not depend on RV member organizations or RV sales personnel for accurate information regarding licensure. We have received misinformation from both of these groups about license requirements. Every RV owner/driver should assume the responsibility of becoming familiar with the laws of his/her home state.

Licensing regulations vary among states, but some are similar to our

home state of Pennsylvania. An excerpt from the Pennsylvania Driver's Manual is copied below:

Class of Licenses

Class A: Required to operate any combination of vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of 26,001 pounds or more, where the gross vehicle weight rating of the vehicle(s) being towed is/are in excess of 10,000 pounds. Example: Recreational vehicle when the towing vehicle is rated at 11,000 pounds and the vehicle towed is rated at 15,500 pounds (total combination weight of 26,500 pounds)

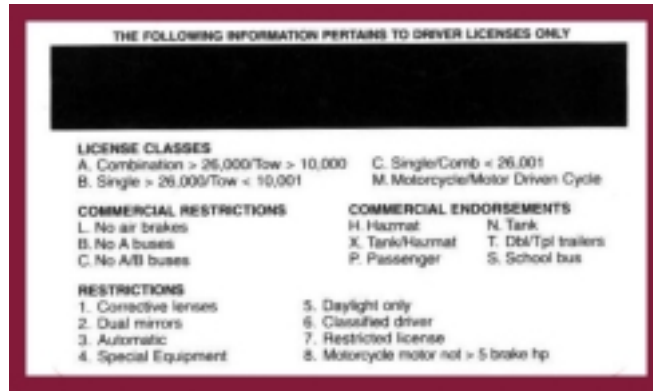
Class B: Required to operate any single vehicle rated in excess of 26,000 pounds. Example: Motor homes rated at 26,001 pounds or more.

Class C: A Class C driver's license will be issued to persons 16 years of age or older who have demonstrated their qualifications to operate any vehicles, except those requiring a Class M qualification, and who do not meet the definitions of Class A or Class B.

Class M: A class M Driver's license will be issued to those persons 16 years of age or older who have demonstrated their ability to operate a motorcycle or motor-driven cycle.

Commercial Class A, B, or C: Drivers who need a commercial driver's license should obtain the Commercial Driver License Manual, which contains detailed information necessary to prepare for the tests.

Pennsylvania regulations clearly state that a Class A or B license is required to operate recreational vehicles that have a GVWR over 26,001 pounds. This is a non-commercial license, but additional testing criteria must be met before the license is issued. To change from a Class C to a Class B or A license, Pennsylvania requires a three-part exam. One must pass the Knowledge Test, which measures knowledge of traffic signs, driving laws, and safe driving practices. This is usually a brief oral exam. The second part is an off-road Skills Test which includes a pre-trip vehicle inspection, testing air brakes (if applicable), and maneuvers in a parking lot. The third part is a Road Test in the vehicle you intend to drive. For instance, if you are applying for a Class A license, you will perform the road



**Back of PA driver's license
Note description of classes**

test with the towed vehicle attached. No medical examination is required. There is a \$5.00 learner permit fee and the four year renewal fee is \$24.00. The renewal fee is the same for a Class A, B, or C license.

After driving an RV, we became better automobile drivers. As RV drivers, we have left extra space between us and the vehicle ahead only to have a four-wheeler pull into that space. Those four-wheelers may not be bad or discourteous drivers, they simply do not appreciate the increased stopping distance required for a large vehicle. Driving an RV has also made us more sympathetic toward truck drivers, but truck drivers may not always be sympathetic to RV drivers. They may not appreciate that some RVs cannot handle curves as easily as a truck because of certain ride characteristics of various chassis and the great amount of unsecured cargo onboard the RV. With the repeal of the 55-MPH national speed limit, truck drivers also complain about RVs going too slow. They are not aware that most of our tow equipment was designed for 55-MPH and that auto manufacturers may impose maximum speed limits when the vehicle is towed.

When truck drivers question the driving skills of RV owners, they are not always wrong. We recall an incident where our coach was broken down at the side of I 40 in Oklahoma. We placed our three red reflective triangles properly, but since we had to work on the street side of the coach, one of us stood at the back of the coach and directed motorists to move

to the left lane. The drivers who were resistant and threatened our safety the most were our fellow RVers. We are sure these drivers were not deliberately putting us in harm's way, but only unaware of that particular safe driving practice.

Safe driving practices are covered extensively in the CDL manual. When we were preparing to obtain our Class B licenses, we used both the Class C and CDL manuals because Pennsylvania has no manual specifically for the non-commercial license classifications. We did not know what questions they might ask, so we had to study all the information. The Commercial Driver's Manual contains excellent information not only about safe driving practices, but also how to check air and hydraulic brakes, how to check a suspension, how to perform a pre-trip inspection, and more. It appears that most, if not all, states do not require a special license to operate a vehicle under 26,000 pounds. Some states do not require additional licensing for vehicles over 26,001 pounds. However, even if additional licensing is not needed, we encourage every RV owner to read the CDL manual to be better informed.

We believe it is in the best interest of the RV industry and owners alike to support whatever efforts are needed for the RV driver to obtain the skills and knowledge to operate their homes on wheels with the greatest proficiency possible. No matter how many miles you have driven since you received your first driver's license, you may still learn something new. We certainly did and we became better drivers!

