

Britain's Driving Theory Tests are becoming more challenging...

Published: October 9, 2024

Author:

Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/britains-driving-theory-tests-are-becoming-more-challenging/>



Amidst ever more difficult 'theory' tests, Britain's most and least knowledgeable new drivers are revealed in a survey from Instarmac...

They tell us:

(All words and images from road surfacing specialists **Instarmac**).

If pass rates are anything to go by, driving theory tests are hard – harder than they've ever been.

Pass rates have **dropped dramatically since 2007**, falling from an average pass rate of 65% to 45% between April and December 2023. This is based on the **latest government data**,



which we have analysed with help from the road surfacing experts at [Instarmac](#).

We've painstakingly combed through the data, which contains pass rates from every test centre in Britain, to find the country's best and worst places to take your driving theory test.

Are driving theory tests getting harder?

Short answer – yes.

The UK's driving theory tests have been consistently updated since 2007, introducing new question styles, longer hazard perception tests, removing case study questions and adding more niche multiple-choice questions in increasingly specific scenarios.

Recently, [new rules were introduced in 2020](#) that cause your driving theory pass certificate to expire if you do not pass your practical test within two years of completing your theory – further increasing test pressure for learners. Additionally, traditional case study questions have been replaced with short [video content](#).

This means the test is now 57 minutes long with a three-minute break before the hazard perception test. In total, learners can expect to answer a multiple choice section, image questions (including road signs and markings), three short video questions and a hazard perception test.

The top 10 most knowledgeable drivers by test centre:



THE **MOST** KNOWLEDGEABLE DRIVERS

- 10. Royal Tunbridge Wells – 55.3% pass rate
- 9. Gairloch – 56.8% pass rate
- 8. Brodick (Isle of Arran) – 56.8% pass rate
- 7. Penrith – 57.1% pass rate
- 6. Mid Yell – 57.1% pass rate
- 5. North Berwick – 58.0% pass rate
- 4. Craignure (Isle of Mull) – 60% pass rate

3. Ullapool – 64% pass rate

2. Diss – 64% total pass rate

1. Isles of Scilly – 69.2% pass rate

INSTARMAC®



The top 10 most knowledgeable drivers by test centre: The Isles of Scilly take the crown for the highest pass rate in the UK – smashing the average of 45% with a total average of 69.2%. This is no small feat, beating the national average by 24.2%.



The most notable shared characteristic of the top 10 is that nearly all of the locations have an incredibly small population. Bar Penrith and Royal Tunbridge Wells, which have a population of 224k and 115k respectively, the other eight locations have a combined population of 24,887 people and the top three were a collection of islands.

The top 10 least knowledgeable drivers by test centre:



WHEELS-ALIVE!

www.wheels-alive.co.uk



WHEELS-ALIVE!

www.wheels-alive.co.uk



THE **LEAST** KNOWLEDGEABLE DRIVERS

- 10. Leicester – 39.6% pass rate
- 9. Uxbridge – 39.1% pass rate
- 8. Skegness – 38.8% pass rate
- 7. Newton Stewart – 37.8% pass rate
- 6. Bradford – 37.5% pass rate
- 5. Porthmadog – 37.3% pass rate
- 4. Stranraer – 36.5% pass rate

3. Cromer – 35.7% pass rate

2. Bowmore – 34.1% pass rate

1. Mallaig – 30.8% pass rate

INSTARMAC®



In the less fortunate category of least knowledgeable drivers, Mallaig is revealed to be the worst place in the UK for passing your driving theory test. Mallaig is a port in Morar, on the west coast of the Scottish Highlands. Only 30.8% of participants pass the theory test in



Mallaig, 14.2% worse than the UK-wide average.

What does this mean for learner drivers in the UK?

There are two big takeaways between the best and worst locations – total population and geographical location.

When you compare the total population between the two lists, the 10 locations with the highest pass rates have a drastically lower combined population of 363,887. The worst areas to pass your theory test have a combined population of 997,156. This is a difference of 633,269 people. Interestingly, we can infer from this correlation that areas with fewer cars breed more knowledgeable drivers on average.

Geographically, Scotland beats England for the most test centres with the highest pass rates in the top 10. Six Scottish locations made the list, versus four in England – with Wales featuring in 0 places within the top 10.

As far as the 10 worst places to take your theory test go, England narrowly beats out Scotland. England has 5 of the least likely test centres to pass your test, Scotland has four and Wales has one.

It was recently revealed that 2022–2023 saw the **second consecutive highest year** of theory test cheaters. 1,652 incidents were reported and identified, leading to disqualification. It's likely this will disproportionately affect areas with larger populations and may have played a factor in influencing the pass rates of the 10 least likely test centres – centres which were found to have larger populations on average.

Additionally, an **estimated 3.7m learners** will be battling for a practical test in 2024. Since the lockdowns, practical driving and theory tests have seen a large backlog. In the pandemic, 400,000 theory tests were cancelled, with backlogs disproportionately affecting areas with larger populations – areas most likely to fail their theory test.



Cromer, the area with the third-worst pass rate in Britain at 35.7%, is the area most affected by long wait times for theory tests in the UK. In Cromer, learners were expected to wait for **18 weeks** for a theory test slot when the pass rate data was collected.

These longer wait times add pressure to tests, affecting performance and threatening further delays to achieving a full license if the test is failed.

How can you best prepare for your theory test?

One thing's for sure, theory test results across the board are poor. Less than half of the participants pass, so it's important that you do everything in your power to make sure you are as prepared as you possibly can be before sitting the exam.

Richard Moss, head of civils at Instarmac had this to say to hopeful participants:

"Theory tests are hard - but they are so important. More knowledgeable road users make driving a safer, more relaxing prospect for everyone involved. For those who are about to sit their test for the first time, I cannot stress how important it is to not underestimate the exam," Moss says.

"The best way to familiarise yourself with the test is by doing at least five minutes' prep every day in the runup to your test, even if it's just before bed," he continues. "You can find mock driving theory test apps on your phone's app store with official DVSA revision questions - ideal for a refresher in bed, when waiting for the bus or wherever you find yourself with five minutes spare. You can also find mock hazard perception tests on YouTube, so you know what to expect for the second half of your test.

"If you go in with this prep work beforehand, you'll be more prepared than most and I'm sure you'll leave the test centre smiling."



WHEELS-ALIVE!

www.wheels-alive.co.uk

Good luck!

Will you or someone you know be taking the driving theory test in 2024? If so, we hope you rise above the average and do your test centre proud for next year's results table!