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GREAT IRELAND RUN SPECIAL

Six points to put new drivers off the road

Motorists on two-year 'R' plate face lower drink-driving limit

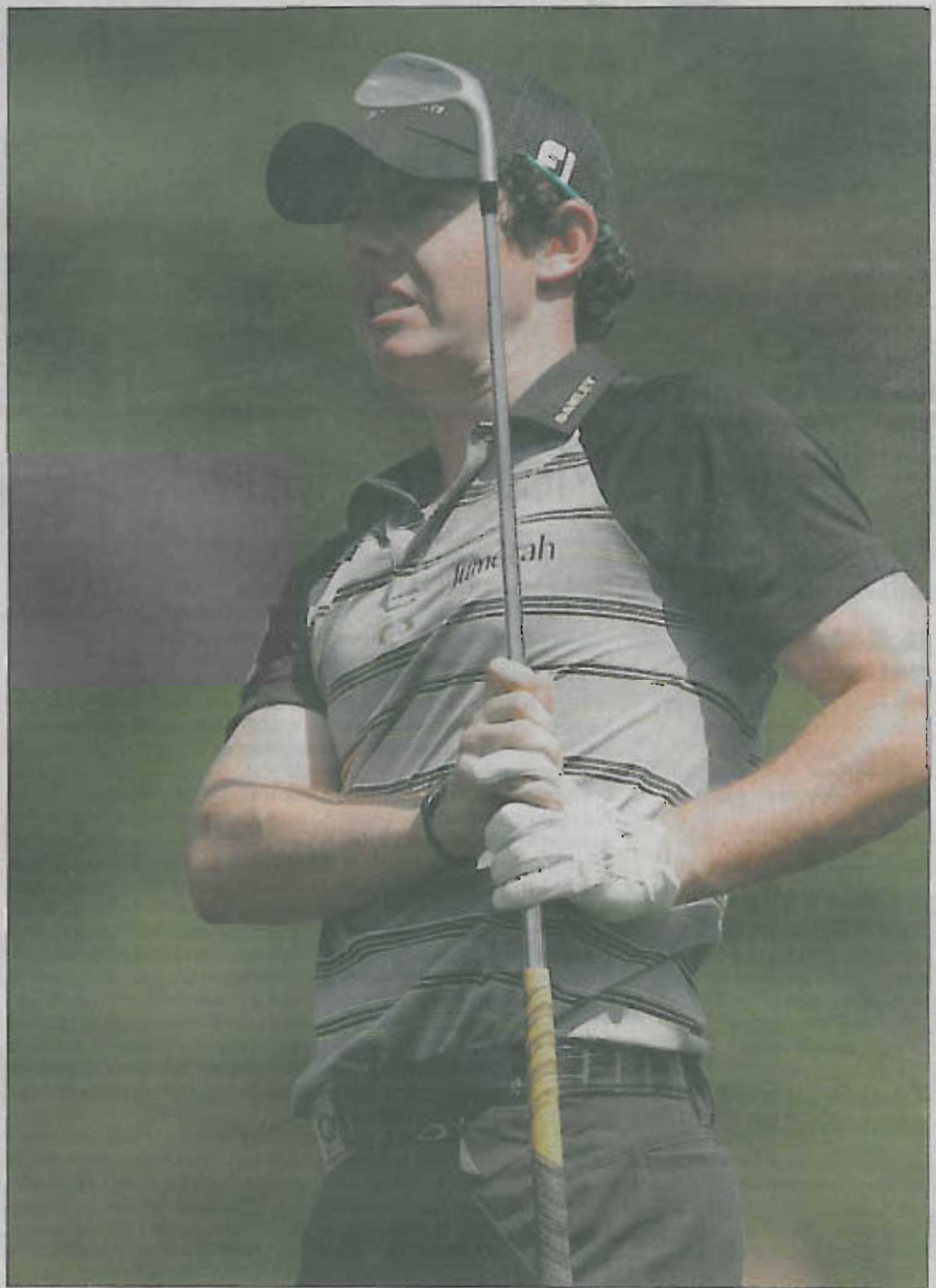
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Paul Melia
NEWLY qualified drivers will be put off the road if they clock up six penalty points in the first two years after they pass their test.
Motorists will also have to display 'R' - for 'restricted' - plates for two years after getting their licence and be subject to a lower drink-driving limit, the *Irish Independent* has learnt.
The measures will be contained in new legislation expected to be brought to Government in the coming weeks.
The new rules are designed to improve driving standards among learner drivers. Statistics show that inexperienced

drivers, particularly men aged 17 to 24, are most at risk of dying on the roads.
Transport Minister Leo Varadkar will seek cabinet approval in the coming weeks for the life-saving measures. He is also expected to announce an extension of the penalty points system soon.
"The bill is a priority for the minister and he expects it to be submitted to the Government in a matter of weeks," a source said.
The measures were proposed by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) last September as part of sweeping changes to the driver training programme designed to improve standards.
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Rory battles to hold his nerve



RORY McIlroy had the nerves of his fans in bits following a stuttering last day at the US Masters.
With Tiger Woods threatening to stage the

third-biggest last-day comeback in Masters history, McIlroy (above) clung on to a slender lead.
Having looked unassailable, he suddenly

looked vulnerable and fans willed every shot to keep him on course.

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Six penalty points will put new drivers off the road

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The 80,000 motorists who pass their test every year will:

- Have to display a 'R' (restricted) plate for two years after they pass the test.

- Be subject to a lower drink-driving limit of 20mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood, which comes into force from September.

- Be banned from driving for six months if they get six penalty points. This rule will also apply to learners and those on 'R' plates. Normally, a qualified driver receives an automatic disqualification if they accrue 12 penalty points.

The Department of Transport has also confirmed that more penalty point offences will be rolled out in the coming weeks.

Some 69 offences are provided for in law, but just 42 are in place. Among the offences yet to be made law include driving without a licence, not wearing a safety belt and using a vehicle without adequate brakes.

Deaths

"Proposals are being finalised for the rollout of more of the agreed penalty point offences," a government spokesman said.

"Regulations will be required to give effect to the additional offences and these are likely to be considered formally in the coming weeks."

Despite the number of road deaths falling year on year, Ireland has lagged behind our EU neighbours in driver training.

Until this month, anyone holding a learner permit for six months was allowed to apply to sit a test. Once they passed, they were free to drive alone.

New rules were introduced on April 4 that oblige learner drivers to undertake at least 12 one-hour lessons with a qualified driving instructor before applying to sit their test.

The RSA also confirmed plans to introduce hazard



Children in pole position for learning

GEORGIA (7), Luke (23 months) and Sophie Doyle (5) were under Kathryn Thomas's starting orders yesterday at at Imaginosity Dublin's Children Museum yesterday.

They were at the Garage Exhibition section in Imaginosity, the initiative to

promote interactive learning for children, which in this case enabled them to have their 'first driving experience'.

A specially commissioned Audi A1 was also on hand to mark the company's three-year sponsorship programme with Imaginosity.

perception testing into driver training from next year. This involves video clips being shown on a computer, and the drivers must identify the risks.

The Driver Theory Test is being updated, and will be changed later this year.

Meanwhile, a working group made up of senior officials from the RSA, Courts Service and departments of justice and transport is expected to recommend the courts be given new powers to impose restrictions on dangerous drivers

who repeatedly break the law.

Among the measures being considered include forcing repeat offenders to resit the driving test and obliging them to install an 'alcolock' device on their vehicle.

This is an electronic device

that requires a driver to take a breath test before the ignition of their vehicle can be switched on.

Other sanctions could include a ban on carrying passengers, a requirement to fit a speed limitation device on a vehicle and a curfew on driving.

Learners face court for being out alone

Paul Melia

MORE than 900 learner drivers are facing court after being caught either driving alone or without displaying 'L' plates.

Some 503 drivers have been caught driving without a qualified driver so far this year, new figures reveal. Another 426 are being prosecuted for not displaying 'L' plates.

But official garda figures show that just two have been convicted - one for each offence.

In 2010, 3,900 learner drivers were prosecuted for driving alone. Of those, 951 were convicted. The same year, 3,478 were prosecuted for not displaying 'L' plates. Of these, just 841 were convicted.

But the low rate of convictions does not mean these drivers are escaping punishment.

"If you bring someone before the courts, the charges could be added to another offence, such as speeding or dangerous driving," a garda spokesman said. "There could be five summonses, and the judge could convict on the most serious charge and take the others into consideration."

Since July 2008, learners must be accompanied by a person with a full licence for two years. If caught driving alone, fines of up to €1,000 can be imposed, and/or three months in jail. Similar penalties apply to motorists caught without 'L' plates.

We're finally catching up on rest of world

At last Ireland will have a driver training programme on a par with the best in the world.

Getting a licence will be harder and take longer, but the changes will help reduce road deaths.

Measures introduced by the Road Safety Authority since 2007 have resulted in drivers being better trained today than ever before.

They must sit a theory test before getting behind the wheel, take mandatory lessons and wait for six months before applying for the test.

And the changes coming down the track mean that motorists will be forced to remain on their best behaviour after passing the test, or face being put off the road.

By telling learners and



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newly qualified drivers they will be disqualified if they get just six penalty points, Transport Minister Leo Varadkar is, in effect, extending the training period, which can only be good for road safety.

That means no talking on

mobile phones (two points), no speeding (two points) and no tailgating (two points).

It means that even when learners pass the test, they have to keep up that good behaviour for another two years or risk losing their licence.

Lower drink-driving limits coming into force from next September also mean a zero-alcohol limit for learners. Just one pint will put them over the limit.

It's a win-win situation. Better training and no alcohol means better, safer drivers and fewer deaths.

The alternative is a return to the bad old days, where a learner driver could sit a test just weeks after getting a provisional licence and without any formal training.

Learners only had to

display good behaviour while doing the test, but once they passed, the rules of the road were often thrown out the window.

The upshot was needless deaths on the roads.

The statistics are stark - in 2002, 376 people were killed. Last year, the total was 212.

The lower death toll is undoubtedly down to a change in attitudes to drink driving, but better roads, more education, garda enforcement and improved driving standards have also helped.

There's nothing radical or off-the-wall in the measures coming down the line.

Countries including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK all impose stringent rules on learner drivers. We're just playing catch up.

New measures will include lower drink-driving limit and a hazard test

THE current system of driver training obliges motorists to pass a theory test before they can get a learner permit.

They must complete 12 one-hour lessons with a qualified instructor before applying to sit a test, and must have a sponsor - a driver who has held a full licence for at least two years - to supervise their practice lessons.

Learners must also keep a logbook setting out their progress, which is filled in by their instructor and sponsor.

From September, learner drivers will be subject to a lower drink-driving limit of just 20mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood. This compares with a 50mg

limit for fully qualified drivers.

New breath-testing machines will be rolled out to gardai from September when the law is introduced.

The Government is expected to approve changes to the penalty points system in the coming weeks, where learners who accrue six points will be put off the road for six months. This compares with 12 points for qualified drivers.

Other changes coming include an updated driver theory test, and the introduction of a hazard perception test from next year. This involves learners watching video footage and identifying risks.

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