

For foreigners, U. S. driving is exotic lesson

By TERESA BANAS

Learning to drive can be dangerous. The car jerks too suddenly and a light touch of the gas pedal could send you flying—until you get the hang of it.

But imagine learning to drive in a foreign country. The steering wheel is on the opposite side of the car and street signs are also unfamiliar.

One local driving instructor says newly immigrated people encounter several problems when learning to drive in America.

Jim Sargent, of Sargent's School of Driving, in Bedford, says learning to steer a car is an initial problem faced by many of the foreigners he teaches.

"These people never steered anything in their lives," he says. "Our kids grew up with big wheels, then moved on to 10-speeds (bicycles) and then to the family car."

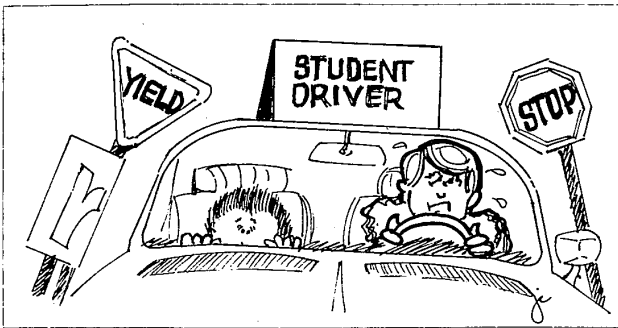
Brinjinder Mann, 35, came to Livonia from India two years ago. She recently decided to learn to drive because she needed to get to work every morning.

MRS. MANN SAYS American traffic differs from traffic in such cities as Bangkok, a city in northern India that is near her home village.

"There are 'so many cars' here," she says. Indian traffic is mostly trucks and tractors, with few private cars.

She says she is more willing to learn to drive in America where cars with automatic transmissions are available. The cars in India generally have manual transmissions. Only the very rich can afford automatics, she says.

About American drivers, she says, "Very rough. They drive too fast and don't care when changing lanes and



Learning to drive in a foreign country can sometimes be confusing, especially for recent immigrants who are thrust into American traffic for the first time.

giving signals. I was scared of that type of driver."

Another difference between street driving in America and India is street and directional markings. "Here all the roads are marked with signs, signals," she says. "Over there there's nothing like that, only in big cities."

She says one of her biggest problems in learning to drive was attempting a left-hand turn.

SARGENT SAYS their greatest fear is that one day they will revert back to habits formed in their original countries. Because steering wheels and

lanes are reversed in America, they're afraid one day they'll take a left and drive into oncoming traffic, he says.

However, exposure to driving here quickly cures the problem, he adds reassuringly.

Nrupama Jadia had never driven a vehicle before she came to the states. In her home country of India, she relied on other transportation such as the railway system and buses.

"In India, you can get buses right off the street," she says. "Very frequently."

She says she had no real problem

learning to drive when she took Sargent's lessons a year ago, except communicating with the instructor. She says she had to get used to his style of speaking.

Sargent says he uses a few key words when teaching recent immigrants who have not mastered the language. The most important word, which he uses often is "clear," to describe the traffic flow.

He also says driving is more organized in this country because of well marked roads. She says pedestrians in America are less apt to spurt out into

traffic because of street signs and lights.

Mrs. Jadia's husband and her two brothers-in-law all took driving lessons when they came to this country.

"YOU BECOME handicapped if you don't drive," Bevendra Jadia says. "Like being in a jail."

Plans are now underway to convert all street signs around the world to an international language or code. Using symbols instead of words is one way to avert the confusion of driving in foreign countries.

For example, a sign that illustrates a slippery wet road with a car sliding off the pavement is now seen in several countries.

Sargent says many immigrants arrive in this country with an international driving permit but still need lessons to train them to drive in American traffic and road conditions.

"A lot of them fail (road tests) and need to practice," he says.

Audrey Woodard, a staff assistant for the secretary of state office, says the department has no jurisdiction over drivers who have such a permit.

This permit allows one to drive in this country for three years before the person has to obtain a Michigan driver's license.

She says the Geneva Treaty established a policy of reciprocity between signing countries that makes such permits valid. She says they are issued through AAA auto insurance companies in these countries. The fee is \$3.

MRS. WOODARD says immigrants can get a Michigan license if they have a valid license from their homeland or pass the state's written, visual and road tests. If the performance is unsatisfactory, they recommend driving lessons.

A valid license is one that has not expired, she says. However, the means for getting one is different in many countries.

In some African countries driver's licenses last a lifetime, she says. In other countries, a license can cost as much as \$1,000. She says it's very difficult to obtain one in Pakistan.

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CORRECTION:

The Political Ads for the Oakland Community College Board of Trustees Election for Rogers and Rittler appearing in the June 8th paper did not properly represent the sponsors of the Ad. The Ads should have indicated that they were paid for by the COMMUNITY COLLEGE COORDINATING COUNCIL — PAC, 3513 Elizabeth Lake Road, Pontiac.

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