

## 'LEARNER-LAND' IDEA GETS INTO GEAR

Sale driving instructor James Eisen is asking local councils and businesses to make practice land available where learner drivers could take their first lessons - away from busy roads.

James, who owns the **L-test** driving school in Sale, is used to nervous first-timers who get "seriously worried about being thrust into real traffic on Day One."

But if the right space was available, to allow those important first steps in vehicle control, it would not only ease their stress and reduce the amount of learner traffic on overcrowded roads, but could also cut the time and cost of learning to drive.

"There are precedents," says James. "A driving school in Essex uses a local business park. And teenagers of 15 and 16 – below our legal driving limit – take off-road lessons at a disused aerodrome in Northamptonshire.

"I can imagine a time, in the future, when youngsters will be absolutely amazed that we used to get into a car, for the first time ever, and share the road with other traffic.

"Business parks can be ideal – some are just like miniature villages where most basic manoeuvres could be practiced without inconveniencing other road users. There is only so long that we can test the patience of local residents by taking learner drivers down side roads and through housing estates where traffic is light.

"In the past 12 years the number of cars on the road has risen from 22 million to 38 million with little increase in the road network itself. So it's getting more crowded for young learners - and this does affect their ability to learn.

"If we could provide the option of booking time, away from the stresses of a highway, it would not only significantly reduce learner traffic on the road but would boost their confidence to develop faster, pass a driving test quicker ... and slice a chunk off the cost of lessons."

At the moment it takes an average of 40-45 hours of tuition, 22 hours of private practice and around £1,000 to pass a driving test. "As a driving school, L-test can take a third off those figures," said James, "but perhaps even more if we could offer a facility like this."