

A point worth driving home

Nothing hurts a motorist more than to take his driving licence away. Even the shock of the heaviest fine is soon shrugged off, although it may temporarily hurt his pocket. And the likelihood of imprisonment for an offence is so remote that few would ever think of it.

But when a person is denied the legal right to drive the message gets across loud and clear: Be more careful next time.

The Transport Advisory Committee is again considering a points demerit scheme that would automatically suspend a persistent offender's licence if he commits a certain number of traffic violations within a certain period of time. The TAC made a similar proposal two years ago but unfortunately was turned down by the Executive Council.

At present a motorist automatically loses his licence, usually for six months, if he is convicted of speeding three times within three years. There is no doubt that this has a deterrent effect when a motorist records a couple of convictions in a relatively short time and he has to be careful for up to 2½ years before he is "safe" again.

But although speeding is responsible for 37 per cent of our accidents, there are numerous other offences, due to carelessness or outright selfishness, which contribute to the heavy toll on our roads. And with accident figures reaching new records last year, obviously a stronger deterrent than those that already exist is needed.

A points demerit scheme is tailor-made, provided it is not too vicious. And the visible violations like speeding, jumping or ignoring red lights, and lane jumping should be high scorers.

One of the previous objections to the scheme is that it can be open to abuse. There will always be the temptation for a motorist who is only a point or two from disqualification to offer a bribe if his latest offence is ignored.

Certainly considerable thought should be given before allowing traffic wardens to award points. This is not to say that police are incorruptible — the courts almost daily give the lie to this. But at least they are subjected to a much more thorough screening system.

It has been suggested that the allocation of points should replace the issuing of tickets payable by fines. However, this could mean that those caught only once would not have to pay any penalty. Particularly in the case of speeding this would be ridiculous.

The object of the exercise is to discourage motorists from breaking the laws. A fine and the fear of building on those points if apprehended again will have the effect of a double deterrent.

We have been soft for too long. People die or are maimed for life on the roads daily. Previous efforts to put a brake on this have been completely unsuccessful. The statistics prove this.

So it is to be hoped that the Executive Council gets the point this time. There may be problems enforcing the scheme. But it is effective in Britain and other countries. So there is no reason why it should not work here.