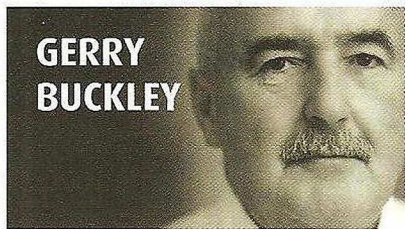


Even in today's climate of computerised cars and high-tech gadgetry everything can be gained from remembering the very basics of driving, writes Gerry Buckley



GERRY BUCKLEY

Car technology is over a century old and has progressed, delivering us refinement we now expect without question. But the basic concepts of human psychology and moving machinery remain unchanged, despite gadgetry, ergonomics and artificial intelligence. Very few drivers now consider the basics when they get behind the wheel of their modern car, be it a Ford or a Mercedes. This boils down to one very important area – car seating position – that the driver has to select from a range of adjustments.

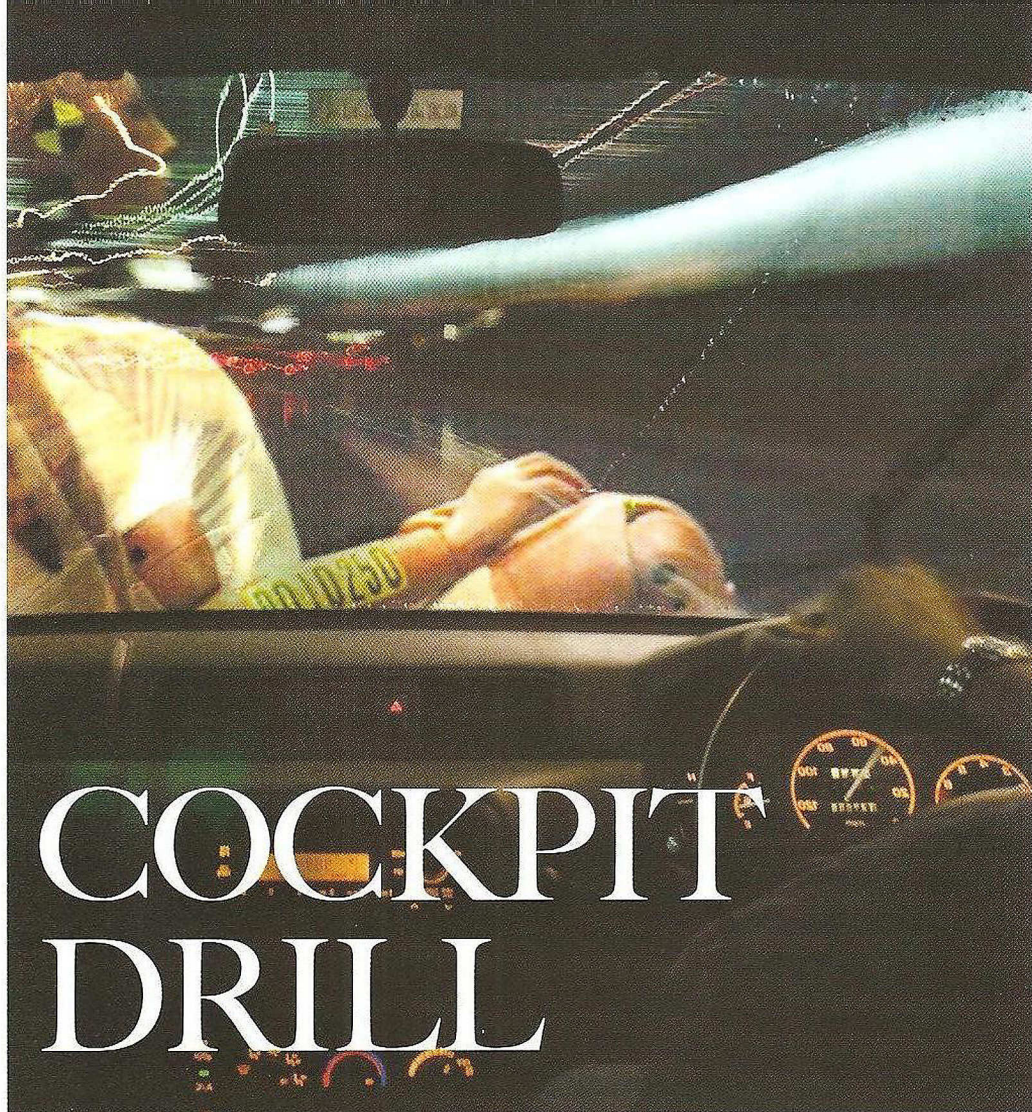
Manufacturers have spent countless hours of painstaking research and investment into developing optimum seating positions to make that journey more comfortable and safe for the motorist. But as drivers we have much still to do to keep up with the advances of today's technology.

The first exercise to perform when sitting behind the wheel of a car is a 'cockpit drill' similar to that carried out by an airline pilot. This should be carried out to make the driver aware of every instrument and control on the vehicle.

The most important exercise is to attain a proper seating position. You should allow time to adjust your seat to a safe and comfortable position and ensure you are familiar with all controls of the vehicle.

In carrying out this function, the following points need to be observed. Both legs should reach the pedals comfortably without the need to stretch. A slight bend on the knees is required. Both hands should be placed on the steering wheel between the 'quarter to three' or the 'ten to two' position, with elbows slightly bent. Both hands and legs should not be straight as this leaves you susceptible to driving fatigue.

Driving fatigue is caused by vibrations from the



COCKPIT DRILL

The first exercise to perform when sitting behind the wheel of a car is a 'cockpit drill' similar to that carried out by an airline pilot...

it will be of little use.

As with the drill commonly heard from the pilot to cabin staff on an aircraft, you must ensure all doors are fully closed before moving off. Road vehicles need the same check - only aided by modern

road wheels travelling up through the bodywork of the vehicle – the steering column and foot pedals being absorbed by the driver's body. Over time this causes fatigue, leading to a lack of concentration and tiredness in the driver. So if you have a slight bend on both your hands and legs – this will act as a 'shock absorber' diminishing the vibrations to the body.

Adjust both interior and exterior mirrors so that they both afford you the best possible rear view. Fit and adjust your seat belt and always make sure that your passengers do likewise. For seatbelts to be effective, they must be adjusted properly with as little slack as possible. Head restraints – commonly called headrests – adjusted properly are very important in guarding against whiplash, especially as a result of rear impact collision. They should be adjusted so that the centre cushion of the restraint comes into contact with the centre of the bony area at the back of the head, otherwise

technology that often provides a warning. Make sure that any passengers have closed their doors because the driver is responsible for the safety of passengers. A door not properly shut may open as you drive along, causing a distraction at the very least and possibly serious harm to other road users.

Make sure the hand brake is on and the gearstick is in neutral before starting the engine. These are the basics commonly taught to everyone learning to drive, though easily discarded by the experienced driver. They are called basics for good reason, and good practice to repeat them every time you drive a vehicle, especially in vehicles driven by another driver. ■

Gerry Buckley is a retired Garda Driving Instructor from the Garda College, Templemore and qualified as a Class 1 Police Driving Instructor at the Scottish Police College.