

Sw. 28th June 2011

BIG CONSPIRACY' SAYS MAN WHO JUST CAN'T PASS

DRIVING MIS CRAYN



PRECAUTION: But Geraldine didn't need her hard hat



SKILLFUL: Ray tackles a tight spot

HE'S been branded Ireland's worst driver after failing his driving test 10 times.

So when Ray Heffernan invited us to go for a spin, we were all set for a Top Scare.

The 61-year-old separated dad of two took the Department of Transport to court for the seventh time last week, to challenge the results of his most recent driving test.

But he lost after the judge heard he drove over a roundabout and clocked up five potentially dangerous faults, 19 serious faults and two minor faults during the test in Cork last month. Driving tester Kevin Condren said Mr Heffernan asked: "So where is this mini roundabout?" - after driving right over it.

The tester said he "felt in danger" at least five times, as Mr Heffernan drove through stop signs and failed to signal or respond to instructions.

So I made sure to wear my hard hat when Ray offered to let me test him on his driving skills in Cork yesterday. And after half an hour I could see why Ray and the driving testers are bumper-to-bumper.

Because, while he is as skillful as a stunt-driver when it comes to difficult manoeuvres, he's awful when it comes

Our girl is driven around bend by serial test failure but gets back in one piece

By GERALDINE COMISKEY

got into his Nissan Almera near his house in Mayfield in Cork City. "The test was wrong".

He added: "It was a lady tester the last time and she told me she feared for her life in my car. I'm a safe driver. You won't need the hard hat."

As we set off from his home in Mayfield, I was comforted by the fact that Ray was on driving on familiar streets.

Snagging

He slowed down to look at a card-board box right in the centre of the road, then drove right over it!

"There was nowhere else to go - and I didn't even touch it," he said, after I heard the box snagging on the axle and crunching under the back wheels. Teetotaller Ray had no excuse for

light, seemed to be looking at it, then went right through it.

When I pointed it out, he blamed me for distracting him! "I was talking to you," he explained. In fairness, there was nothing in front of him and the car behind was a bit too close.

After that, it was all smooth cruising as I gave him the test-drive from hell.

And he ran rings around the parked cars and trolley bags in a packed Dunnes Stores car park in Ballyvolane, without the aid of a parking sensor.

But I really took my hat off to Ray when he tackled the notoriously tight car park at the back of the Maldron Hotel which has received road-rage reviews on Trip Advisor.

The entrance, which is just wide enough for an average family car, was really tight, with a car parked on one side and a delivery truck with the ramp down on the other. Ray drove slowly in, then looked

44 years and I had just one accident, in 2008 - and it wasn't my fault."

The retired plasterer admits he drives less than 10,000 miles a year.

"I'd do about 100 miles a week, just to the shops - Lidl and Aldi and Dunnes. But I drove a lot in England. I've driven in fog and on ice.

"My first car was a Ford Prefect - I've driven all kinds of cars. Ray first took the test in 2004 - and was shocked when he failed.

He vented his road rage on former Minister for Transport Martin Cullen, sending him 300 letters and bombarding him with calls.

He claims there's a "conspiracy" against him.

"Even if I did my test in another part of Ireland they'd fail me," he said.

After his seventh fail in 2008, he booked a test in England. "I had it all arranged to do it in Leeds, but there was flooding in England.

Rally

But Ray is already infamous in the UK - Hockley Driving School has put his story on their website as an example of what NOT to do on your driving test.

Still, I thought Ray was cool behind the wheel.

And so did our snapper Billy McGill - a former rally driver. I was impressed at the fact Ray ignored his mobile phone ringer and