

You have practiced moving the car off and parking up on the left. To understand the clutch will benefit you both in terms of controlling the car and gaining confidence in your driving abilities.

What is a clutch?

A clutch is two metal plates in the engine. When you press the clutch pedal down the plates come apart separating the engine from the drive wheels allowing you to change gear. Bringing the pedal back up re-engages the plates which in turn connect the engine to the drive wheels. As your car engine is constantly running, a clutch is needed to separate the engine from the drive wheels when you stop the car. Pressing the clutch down just before you stop does just this, otherwise the car would stall.

Why do I need to understand clutch control?

Clutch control enables you to move the car very slowly. For instance, if you come to a t-junction that is obscured by other parked vehicles, fences, hedges etc, then it becomes very difficult to see whether it is clear to move out or not. This is referred to as a closed junction. You would need to move the car into the junction very slowly to see if it is clear to proceed. This is where you would use clutch control. Clutch control would also be used in the three point turn, left reverse, parallel park and bay park manoeuvres.

Practicing clutch control

Practice this on a straight flat road. Ensure the car is running and the handbrake is applied. Press the clutch pedal all the way to the floor and select 1st gear. Set the gas and find the biting point of the clutch. If you are unsure of the biting point, this is covered in our moving the car off exercise. Ensure it is safe to move off by checking your mirrors and the blind spot.

Up till now, this is the same as moving the car off normally. What we want to do here however is keep the car very slow. Think of a very slow walking pace. When you release the handbrake, instead of slowly releasing the clutch, hold it at the bite point. When the handbrake is released, the car may start to move slowly. To avoid gaining speed, press the clutch slightly. Think in terms of the width of a pound coin for how much to press the clutch. If the car remains stationary, again around the width of a pound coin, bring the clutch up. Try to keep the car at the same slow pace by slightly pressing the clutch to slow the car and slightly lifting the clutch pedal to move the car. Keep practicing until you are confident at maintaining a consistent slow speed.

Try to keep the gas pedal steady throughout. It's tempting to press the gas if you slow down or stop, but as the clutch plates aren't fully engaged, using more gas will have little effect. At these very slow speeds, you can think of your clutch pedal as your accelerator to make you speed up and slow down.

Try it on a hill

Once you are confident in maintaining a consistent slow speed, try this same technique on a slight hill. Once you have found the bite point and release the handbrake, the car will not roll back. You will need to be more confident with the clutch on a hill as depressing the pedal too far will result in the car starting to roll back. Depending on how steep the hill is, you may need to apply a little more gas to prevent the car from juddering. If the car does roll back, remember not to press the gas hard as this can damage the clutch. Press the clutch to the floor and gently brake to a stop. Apply the handbrake and try again until you can maintain a consistent slow speed.

Once you start going downhill, you will not need the clutch at all. Depress the clutch to the floor fully and control the speed of your car using the brake.