

# Driver licence classes

## How do I know which class of driver licence I need?

Driver licence classes cover cars, motorcycles and heavy vehicles, and are based on the type of vehicle and the weight of the vehicle.

Vehicles can be rigid (eg a truck) or a combination (eg a truck and trailer).

The class of driver licence required will depend on the gross laden weight (GLW) for rigid vehicles and the gross combined weight (GCW) for combination vehicles.

Read the vehicle weight definitions at the end of this factsheet.

The GLW or GCW generally refers to the weight specified by the manufacturer. This is the weight you should use to determine what class of driver licence you need.

## How do I find out the weight?

All vehicles over 3500kg are required to have a certificate of loading, which is usually displayed on the vehicle's front windscreen. The certificate of loading will state the gross vehicle mass (GVM) or gross combined mass (GCM) of the vehicle.

In most cases the GVM (on the certificate of loading) will be the same as the vehicle's GLW and the GCM will be the same as the vehicle's GCW.

Make sure you don't use the vehicle's unladen weight, tare weight, or the weight on the road user charges (RUC) distance licence.

## What does each class cover?

### Class 1 - car licence

A holder of a Class 1 learner or restricted licence can drive:

- a vehicle that has a GLW of not more than 4500kg (this includes tractors, but does not include motorcycles)
- a combination vehicle that has a GCW of not more than 4500kg (this includes a tractor towing a trailer)
- a moped or all-terrain vehicle
- a motorhome or tradesperson's vehicle with a GLW of not more than 6000kg and an on-road weight not exceeding 4500kg.

A holder of a Class 1 restricted licence can also drive:

- an agricultural tractor that has a GLW of not more than 18,000kg, or a combination vehicle (consisting of an agricultural tractor and agricultural trailer) that has a GCW of not more than 25,000kg, if driven at a speed not exceeding 40km/h.

A holder of a Class 1 full licence can drive:

- a vehicle that has a GLW of not more than 6000kg (this includes tractors, but does not include motorcycles)
- a combination vehicle that has a GCW of not more than 6000kg (this includes a tractor towing a trailer)
- a moped or all-terrain vehicle
- any motorhome or tradesperson's vehicle with a GLW of not more than 6000kg
- a combination vehicle of not more than 6000kg which is not a tractor/trailer or agricultural tractor/agricultural trailer
- a forklift with a GLW of not more than 18,000kg
- a special-type vehicle that runs on rollers or self-laying tracks and has a GLW of not more than 18,000kg
- a special-type vehicle that runs on wheels and has a GLW of not more than 6000kg
- a special type vehicle that runs on wheels and has a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg, if driven at a speed not exceeding -
  - 40km/h, in the case of a special-type vehicle that is an agricultural motor vehicle, or
  - 30km/h, in the case of any other special type vehicle
- a tractor with a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg, if driven at a speed not exceeding -
  - 40km/h, in the case of an agricultural tractor
  - 30km/h, in the case of any other tractor
- a combination vehicle with a GCW of not more than 25,000kg, if driven at a speed not exceeding -
  - 40km/h, in the case of an agricultural tractor towing an agricultural trailer
  - 30km/h, in the case of any other tractor towing a trailer, if it is being used in non-agricultural land management operations
- an agricultural tractor with a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg, if the driver holds a special-type vehicle endorsement
- a combination vehicle (consisting of an agricultural tractor and agricultural trailer) with a GCW of not more than 25,000kg, if the driver holds a special-type vehicle endorsement.

### Class 2 - medium rigid vehicle

Class 2 is the medium rigid vehicle licence. A holder of a Class 2 learner or full licence can drive:

- a rigid vehicle with a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg

- a combination vehicle (that is not a tractor/trailer combination) with a GCW of 12,000kg or less
- a combination vehicle consisting of a rigid vehicle (that is not a tractor) with a GLW of not more than 18,000kg towing a light trailer
- a rigid vehicle with a GLW of more than 18,000kg that has no more than two axles
- a tractor with a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg if driven at speed exceeding 30km/h
- any vehicle covered in Class 1.

The holder of a full Class 2 can also drive:

- a special type vehicle that is an agricultural motor vehicle that runs on wheels with a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg, if driven at a speed not exceeding 40km/h (with or without a W endorsement).

For further information about special type vehicles see the endorsements section below.

### Class 3 - medium combination

Class 3 is the medium combination vehicle licence. A holder of a Class 3 learner or full licence can drive:

- a combination vehicle with a GCW of more than 12,000kg but not more than 25,000kg
- any vehicle covered in classes 1 and 2.

### Class 4 - heavy rigid

Class 4 is the heavy rigid vehicle licence. A holder of a Class 4 learner or full licence can drive:

- a rigid vehicle (including any tractor) with a GLW of more than 18,000kg
- a combination vehicle consisting of a rigid vehicle with a GLW of more than 18,000kg towing a light trailer
- vehicles covered in classes 1 and 2, but not Class 3.

### Class 5 - heavy combination

Class 5 is the heavy combination vehicle licence. A holder of a Class 5 learner or full licence can drive:

- a combination vehicle with a GCW of more than 25,000kg
- vehicles covered by classes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

### Class 6 - Motorcycle licence

Class 6 is the motorcycle licence. It includes any motorcycle, moped or all-terrain vehicle.

## Other requirements

### Trailers and articulated vehicles

Holders of Class 2 and Class 4 licences are permitted to tow light trailers (GLW of not more than 3500kg) behind rigid vehicles of those classes. Don't count the weight of the trailer in any gross combined weight calculations.

An articulated special-type vehicle can be driven on a Class 2 or Class 4 licence, depending on its weight. This is because its handling characteristics are determined by it being a special-type vehicle, not because it's articulated.

## Tractors, agricultural tractors and agricultural motor vehicles

If you want to drive a tractor which is not an agricultural tractor, you need to hold the right class of licence for the weight of the tractor. You don't need a W or any other special-type endorsement. (Examples of non-agricultural tractors can be found at airports and wharves.)

The type of licence you will need to have to drive an agricultural tractor or agricultural motor vehicle will differ depending on the weight of the vehicle and the speed at which it is being driven. See the Endorsements section for more information.

If you have a valid overseas agricultural motor vehicle licence (eg a UK tractor licence) you may be able to drive some of the same agricultural vehicles as the holder of a Class 1 New Zealand licence. Call our contact centre on 0800 822 422 for further information.

## Traction engines

A person steering (or directing) a traction engine must hold a New Zealand Class 1 full licence and one of the following:

- a New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) unit standard 11157 or an equivalent unit standard, or
- a qualification issued or certificate of competency granted under the Boilers, Lifts and Cranes Act 1950 that:
  - was current immediately before 16 January 2006 and has not been revoked or suspended, and
  - allowed the holder to steer a traction engine, or
- an equivalent foreign qualification recognised in writing by the NZ Transport Agency.

A person driving (firing or operating) a traction engine's pressure equipment and managing the engine's steam pressure levels must hold a New Zealand Class 1 full licence and one of the following:

- an NZQA unit standard 21754, 21755, or an equivalent unit standard, or
- a qualification issued or certificate of competency granted under the Boilers, Lifts and Cranes Act 1950 that:
  - was current immediately before 16 January 2006 and has not been revoked or suspended, and
  - allowed the holder to fire or operate a traction engine's pressure equipment, or
- an equivalent foreign qualification recognised in writing by the Transport Agency.

## Endorsements

In addition to holding the correct class of licence for the weight of the vehicle you are operating, you will need an appropriate current endorsement to operate some kinds of vehicles or services.

A passenger (P) endorsement is required to transport fare-paying passengers (eg bus and taxi drivers). See Factsheet 42, *P endorsements for carrying passengers* for more information.

A vehicle recovery (V) endorsement is required to operate a tow truck. See Factsheet 46, *V endorsements for vehicle recovery services* for more information.

A driving instructor (I) endorsement is required to earn money teaching people to drive. See Factsheet 5, *I endorsements: how to become a driving instructor* for more information.

A testing officer (O) endorsement is required to conduct driving tests. See Factsheet 48, *O endorsements: how to become a testing officer* for more information.

A dangerous goods (D) endorsement is required to transport dangerous or hazardous goods (eg explosives). See Factsheet 37, *D endorsements for carrying dangerous goods* for more information.

A forklift (F), roller (R) or tracks (T) endorsement is required to operate a forklift or special-type vehicle that runs on rollers or tracks.

- A Class 1 licence in conjunction with an F/R/T endorsement will permit you to operate the appropriate vehicle with a GLW of not more than 18,000kg.
- A Class 2 licence in conjunction with an F/R/T endorsement will permit you to operate the appropriate vehicle with a GLW exceeding 18,000kg.

See Factsheet 10, *F endorsements for driving forklifts* and Factsheet 40, *R, T and W endorsements for special-type vehicles* for more information.

If you have a Class 1 full licence and an F or R or T or W endorsement you can also drive an agricultural tractor of not more than 18,000kg or an agricultural tractor/agricultural trailer combination of not more than 25,000kg.

A wheels (W) endorsement is required to operate special-type vehicles that run on wheels.

- A Class 1 full licence in conjunction with a W endorsement will permit you to operate special-type wheeled vehicles:
  - with a GLW not more than 6000kg
  - with a GLW more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg if driven at speed not exceeding 30km/h
  - an agricultural motor vehicle with a GLW of more than 6000kg but not more than 18,000kg if driven at a speed not exceeding 40km/h.
- A Class 2 full licence in conjunction with a W endorsement will permit you to operate special-type wheeled vehicles:
  - with a GLW of not more than 18,000kg if driven at a speed exceeding 30 km/h
  - with a GLW of more than 18,000kg if driven at speed not exceeding 30km/h.

**Note:** You do not need a W endorsement to drive a special-type vehicle that is an agricultural motor vehicle that runs on wheels with a GLW of more than 6000 kg but not more than 18,000 kg, at a speed not exceeding 40 km/h.

- A Class 4 full licence in conjunction with a W endorsement will permit you to operate special-type wheeled vehicles exceeding 18,000kg.

See Factsheet 40, *R, T and W endorsements for special-type vehicles* for more information.

## Vehicle weight definitions

**Gross weight** means the weight of a rigid or combination vehicle, together with any load it is carrying (including equipment and accessories).

**Gross laden weight** (GLW) is the greatest of the following:

- any weight specified (following the latest modification, if applicable) as a vehicle's gross laden weight by the vehicle's manufacturer
- any weight specified as the gross laden weight of a particular vehicle (or a vehicle of its kind) by the Transport Agency
- the weight of a vehicle together with any load it is carrying, including any equipment and accessories.

**Gross combined weight** (GCW) is the sum of the gross laden weights of the vehicles that make up a combination vehicle.

**Tare weight** means the weight of the vehicle without any load.

**On-road weight** means the total weight of the vehicle and load at any particular time.

**Mass** means the quantity of material contained in or on that vehicle which, when subjected to acceleration due to gravity, will exert downwards on a level surface a force that can be measured as the weight of the vehicle.

**Gross vehicle mass** (GVM) is the greater of:

- the mass specified as the gross vehicle mass of a particular vehicle, by the vehicle's manufacturer
- the mass specified as the gross vehicle mass of a particular vehicle (or a vehicle of its kind) by the Transport Agency.

**Light trailer** means a trailer with a GLW which does not exceed 3500kg.

## Where you can find out more

- Email us: [info@nzta.govt.nz](mailto:info@nzta.govt.nz).
- Call our contact centre: 0800 822 422.
- Write to us: NZ Transport Agency, Palmerston North, Private Bag 11777, Palmerston North 4442.

The information in this factsheet is a general guide only. It is not the source of the law and should not be used in place of authoritative legal documents. Some factsheets are updated frequently and print versions can quickly become out of date. If the currency of the information you are reading is important, check the factsheet index on our website ([www.nzta.govt.nz/factsheets](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/factsheets)) or call us on 0800 822 422.

### Contact details

- Call our contact centre: 0800 822 422.
- Visit our website: [www.nzta.govt.nz](http://www.nzta.govt.nz).
- Email us: [info@nzta.govt.nz](mailto:info@nzta.govt.nz).
- Write to us: NZ Transport Agency, Private Bag 11777, Palmerston North 4442.

Vehicle type	Weight and/or speed restriction	Licence class
Light motor vehicle/light motor vehicle with light trailer	• Not more than 4500kg	1L/1R
	• Not more than 6000kg	1F
Motorhome /self-propelled caravan / tradesperson's vehicle	• GLW of not more than 6000kg and an on-road weight of not more than 4500kg	1L/1R
	• GLW of not more than 6000kg and an on-road weight of not more than 6000kg	1F
Non-agricultural tractor	• Not more than 4500kg	1L/1R
	• Not more than 6000kg	1F
	• Not more than 18,000kg and driven at a speed not exceeding 30km/h	
	• Not more than 18,000kg and driven at a speed exceeding 30km/h	2L/2F
Non-agricultural tractor/trailer combination	• Not more than 4500kg	1L/1R
	• Not more than 6000kg	1F
	• Not more than 25,000kg, being used in non-agricultural land management operations and driven at a speed not exceeding 30km/h	
Agricultural tractor	• Not more than 18,000kg and driven at a speed not exceeding 40km/h	1R or 1F*
Agricultural tractor with agricultural trailer	• Not more than 25,000kg and driven at a speed not exceeding 40km/h	1R or 1F*
Agricultural motor vehicle which runs on wheels (and is not a tractor)	• Not more than 18,000kg and driven at a speed not exceeding 40km/h <b>Note:</b> a W endorsement is not required with a 2F	1F & W or 2F
Rigid vehicle (truck) or rigid vehicle with light trailer	• Vehicle weight not more than 18,000kg (excluding the weight of any light trailer)	2L/2F
	• Vehicle weight of more than 18,000kg (excluding the weight of any light trailer)	4L/4F
Rigid vehicle with no more than two axles	• More than 18,000kg	2F
Combination vehicle	• Not more than 4500kg	1L/1R
	• Not more than 6000kg	1F
	• Not more than 12,000kg	2L/2F
	• Not more than 25,000kg	3L/3F
	• More than 25,000kg	5L/5F
Forklift	• Not more than 18,000kg	1F**
	• More than 18,000kg	2F**
Special vehicle which runs on tracks or rollers	• Not more than 18,000kg	1F**
	• More than 18,000kg	2F**
Special vehicle which runs on wheels	• Not more than 6000kg	1F**
	• Not more than 18,000kg if driven at a speed exceeding 30km/h	2F**
	• More than 18,000kg if driven at a speed not exceeding 30km/h	2F**
Moped or ATV		1L/6L
LAMS approved motorcycle		6L/6R
Any motorcycle		6F

\*If you hold a 1F and an F or R or T or W endorsement you can exceed 40km/h

\*\*Appropriate endorsement must also be held T (tracks) or R (rollers)