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WOMEN IN  
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**Stepping into the driver's seat**  
**MY JOURNEY INTO THE**  
**WORLD OF HGV DRIVING**  
**A Reflective Diary by Michelle Porter**



# Where It All Began

One summer evening in 2025 I was scrolling through Facebook when an advert inviting women to consider becoming a HGV driver caught my attention. A spark of genuine curiosity lingered longer than expected. The advert was by Grafters Recruit Ltd titled "Women in Logistics." The hook was an invitation to attend an upcoming open day, hearing from other female HGV drivers, driver trainers, employers, get information on pay, hours and expectations, and uniquely to test drive a HGV!

At first, I simply read it with interest. Then I read it again, and the fact that it was aimed at women, made it feel accessible in a way I hadn't expected. I knew I had to attend.

That's when I emailed my interest to Grafters. The reply came back quickly, friendly, informative, encouraging. I was sent details about the day, what to expect, and where to go. And just like that, excitement arrived closely followed by a few nerves.



## Step Into the Driver's Seat Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September

Ever thought about driving a HGV? Looking for a new career? At our women's open day, you can find out exactly how to get behind the wheel.



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WOMEN IN  
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## We drive progress. So she can drive a HGV.

Partly funded training. Flexible hours. High earnings. Guaranteed jobs. We're driving change and supporting more women into HGV careers.

# The Open Day That Changed Everything

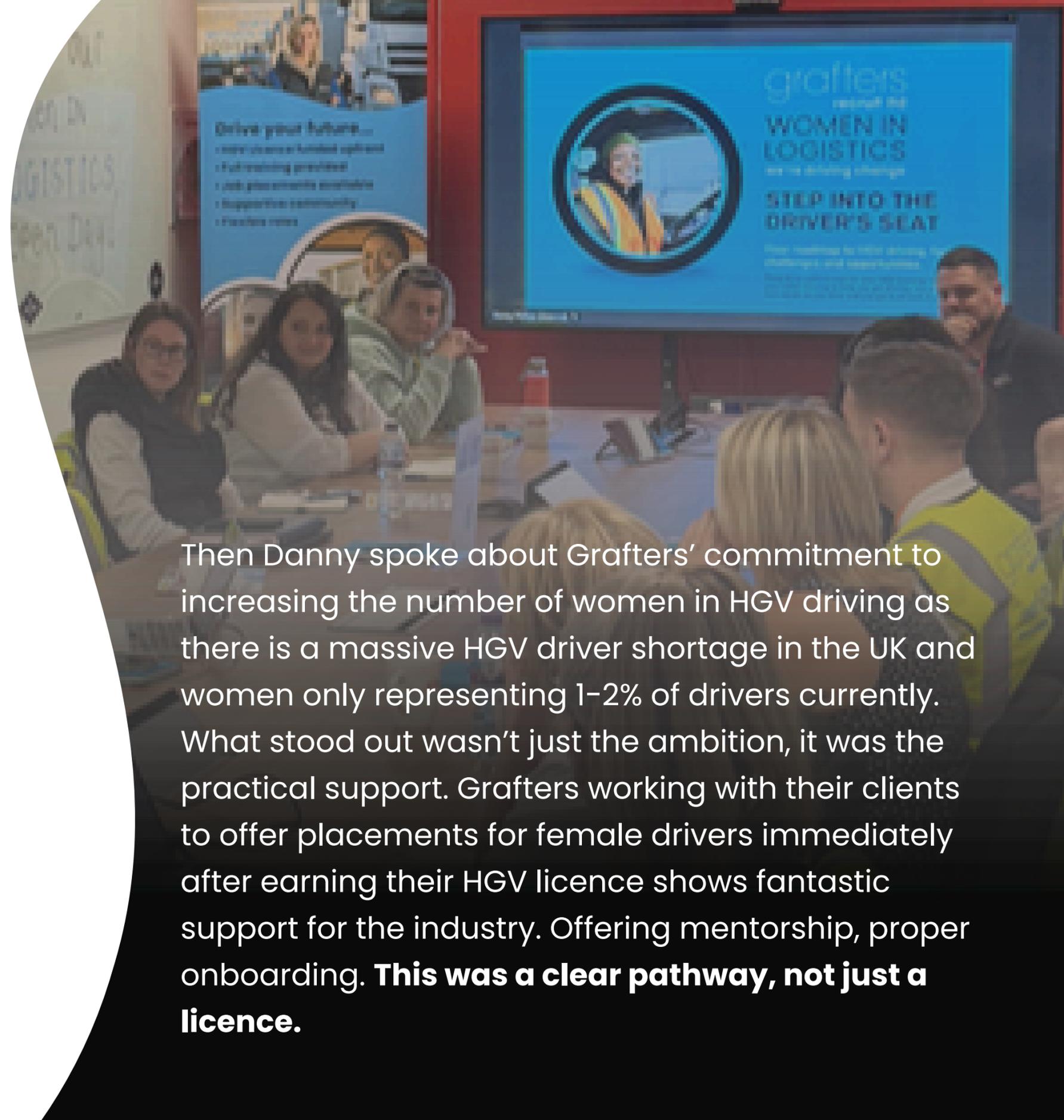
I arrived at the pladis distribution site in Ashby-de-la-Zouch with an open mind and some questions. I wanted to observe everything, the environment, the people, the atmosphere and quietly ask myself: could I see myself here?

I needn't have worried.

From the moment I arrived, I felt welcomed. I was greeted by Scott Harrison the Head of Transport who escorted me through the professional offices and into the meeting room. There, I met Danny Phillips, Company Director of Grafters, and Paige Castles Commercial Director and the lovely office team. There were also other women like me, from different walks of life all thinking the same question: Is this a realistic career for me?

The introductions set the tone. This wasn't salesy or superficial. It was honest, grounded, and encouraging.

One of the most powerful moments of the day was hearing from Pippa, a HGV driver with many years of large goods vehicle experience. Listening to her speak about her career was genuinely inspiring. Her passion for the work, her pride in the profession, and her experiences including working with major clients like M&S and Sainsbury's was amazing to hear.



Then Danny spoke about Grafters' commitment to increasing the number of women in HGV driving as there is a massive HGV driver shortage in the UK and women only representing 1-2% of drivers currently. What stood out wasn't just the ambition, it was the practical support. Grafters working with their clients to offer placements for female drivers immediately after earning their HGV licence shows fantastic support for the industry. Offering mentorship, proper onboarding. **This was a clear pathway, not just a licence.**

## That was a real “wow” moment

We also heard from Shaun and Tom, driver trainers at pladis. Between them, they had decades of experience. They talked us through what a typical day looks like: arriving at the transport desk, collecting paperwork, understanding your route, and crucially, carrying out daily walk-around vehicle checks. They explained the working time directive, breaks, tachographs, not as restrictions, but as systems designed to protect drivers and everyone else on the road.

**And then came the best bit. Driving the lorries!**



# The first time in the cab



We viewed the lorries from ground level first, learning a little bit about them before stepping inside. Then we split into groups and took turns driving around the yard, no trailers attached but a great experience.



I went first and climbed into the electric Mercedes cab accompanied by driver trainer Tom, along with some of the other women. Driving around the yard, sometimes in narrow sections, the size felt quite manageable, with plenty of mirrors to check positioning. The ride was also comfortable. Any fears began to melt into excitement.

After one lap, I swapped seats with the next woman, and continued to enjoy the camaraderie atmosphere within the group. Next, I drove a MAN diesel truck with Shaun. This one sounded like a lorry but equally as manoeuvrable as the previous one Shaun was reassuring, and quietly confident that I'd fit in just fine at pladis. He even let me reverse the lorry back into its parking position twice!

We returned to the meeting room for a buffet lunch, generously provided by Grafters and continued discussions about training, funding, and job opportunities. The message was clear: this wasn't just encouragement it was investment with great rewards for HGV drivers.



As we left, each of us was handed a heavy box of biscuits and crackers as a token of appreciation from pladis. It was a small gesture, but symbolic. We had been welcomed properly.

**That open day didn't just inform me.  
It changed my direction.**

My reflection from that day was simple: this felt real, professional, and genuinely supportive. Flexible working patterns, multiple rota options, strong salaries (some drivers earning up to £60k), and a willingness to work with people rather than around them made this an incredibly enticing career option especially for women.

# Saying Yes and Stepping In

After the open day, things moved quickly. I emailed Danny to say that I wanted to proceed with training. Danny asked for my car driving licence number and asked my permission to send these on to the HGV training provider, J Coates.

Soon after sending the details, I received a welcome email from J Coates and an explanation of the next step. To choose a preferred date for the HGV driver medical appointment, and to complete the DVLA D2 and D4 forms for a provisional large goods vehicle licence. I felt supported rather than overwhelmed.

## The Medical

The HGV medical was a reminder that this profession carries responsibility. I attended my appointment in Nottingham with the DVLA forms collected from the post office in the previous days.

The appointment itself was straightforward, an eyesight test reading letters becoming smaller on the chart, answered health questions, and a short discussion with the doctor. It lasted around ten minutes.

Once I posted the D2 and D4 forms along with my driving licence back to the DVLA, it felt like another commitment made. The new driving licence with provisional entitlements added was posted back to me, a fairly short wait of 7 days but can take longer.

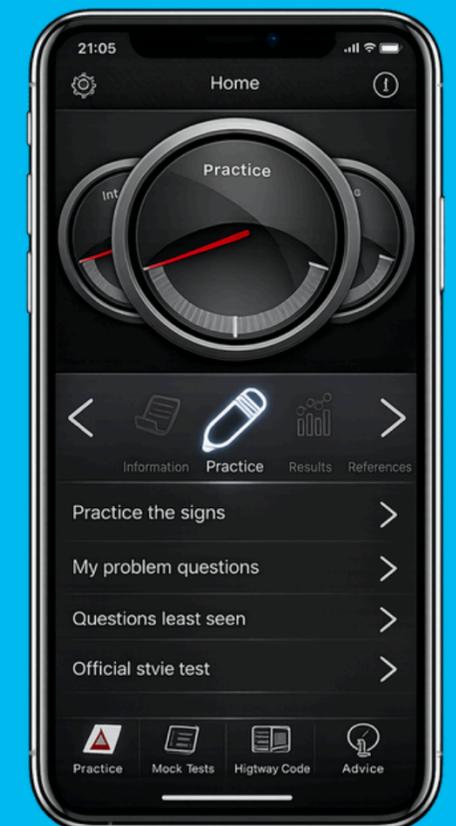
Before any lorry driving lessons happened, the learning began.

## Learning the Language of Lorries

One of the biggest surprises was how much theory there is. Learning to become an HGV driver isn't just about steering a big vehicle, it's about understanding how it works, how the industry is regulated, and how to operate both machine and within the rules, safely.

My training provider J Coates gave me access to learning material called Driving Test Anytime. The app was great and easy to navigate. It allowed me to work through topics in manageable chunks, practise theory questions, hazard perception clips and track improvements in knowledge.

I started with the Highway Code, the rules of the road, and to learn road signs more in depth. Then I moved onto HGV specific information.



# Learning the Language of Lorries

The real challenge wasn't the rules of the road, it was learning the anatomy and physiology of lorries. Words like king pin, fifth wheel, air lines, service brake, retarder brakes, axle weights initially felt a bit abstract. Without a physical lorry in front of you to walk around, visualising these components takes time, patience and repetition however, I really enjoyed learning the technical side of things. I never appreciated how much of a vocation that lorry driving is!

What helped most was blending learning methods, reading on the app, watching videos, and mock theory tests. The videos showing daily walk-round checks, tachograph use and procedures helped turn words into something tangible. Gradually, retention improved. Accuracy increased. Confidence developed in leaps.



## Three Tests, One Day

1. **HGV Theory Test**
2. **Hazard Perception Test**
3. **Driver CPC Part 2 Case Studies Test**

The tests I needed to pass in order to get on the road driving the HGVs were: a Theory Test of 100 questions, you need to score 85 correct answers to pass. Also, there is a Hazard Perception Test where you respond to hazards in 19 video clips. The number of points available is 100 and you must achieve 67 points to pass.

Another Theory Test to do is known as the Driver CPC part 2 Case Studies. This is about the realities of being a lorry driver and the situations you may encounter when working. There are 7 case studies to do on test day, and you are asked between 5-10 multiple choice questions on each case study. There are 50 points available with a pass mark of 40.

When J Coates arranged the theory test, hazard perception and case studies test for me on one day, early December 2025 I naturally felt nervous, but I was ready to go for it. As a result of all the revising, I was so happy to pass all three test types on the day!

Alternatively, you can do the tests individually if you would rather spread them over a few days etc.

# Practical Test

Mid-January 2026 marked the start of practical training. I packed my bag carefully: high-vis vest, gloves, provisional driving licence, and a packed lunch, feeling like a student on their first day. There were two off-road trainings to accomplish:

- 1) Reversing,
- 2) Uncoupling and Recoupling the trailer.

The training session lasted around 6 hours with a trainer and there were three of us students learning together.

The reversing training consisted of a reverse manoeuvre to essentially park the HGV in a bay. There are yellow boundary lines to avoid crossing and cones marking the bay area. The training was around 4 hours of taking it in turns with other students.

During the manoeuvre you can take two shunts, which is to drive forwards in order to get your cab and trailer in alignment, to then reverse back into the bay.

Sounds simple but it is tricky in some ways. You have to learn that as you steer one way, the trailer moves in the opposite direction!



Following the training, you have 30 minutes to do both the reverse and uncoupling/recoupling procedures with an assessor. This was my first real hurdle. I failed the reverse manoeuvre which ended the test. That moment stung.

But here's what I want anyone reading this to know: failing once does not define you.

I retook the test the following week with one-to-one training with a trainer. Hours of practice, patient instruction, and me getting to grips with opposite steering was what I needed. This time, I passed along with the coupling and uncoupling procedures.

I was so thrilled.

**Resilience was learned here, not taught.**

# Module 4: practical demonstration

In the same week I attended the module 4 traininand test. This involved the practicalities of being a lorry driver in these five areas; theory of loading the vehicle safely and legally, preventing illegal immigrants travelling in the vehicle, assess emergency situations, reducing physical risks to yourself and others and finally the daily walk around vehicle checks.

The trainer was great with all students who were there, the pace of learning was good, and we had plenty of time to work in pairs and test each other's knowledge on the questions that the assessor was likely to ask us at the test.

Also, very enjoyably we got to practice using ratchet straps, chains and tensioners, and adjustable loading bar, which are used for securing different types of loads.

The test was a total of 30 minutes with the assessor regarding the five key topics. There were 100 points available, with a minimum score of 80 to pass. A very enjoyable day and I was delighted to pass.

Now onto the most exciting element, on the road training!

Five areas covered in Module 4 training and assessment:

- Loading the vehicle safely and legally
- Preventing illegal immigrants travelling in the vehicle
- Assessing emergency situations
- Reducing physical risks to yourself and others
- Daily walk-around vehicle checks



# On the Road: Monday to Friday with driving test on Friday afternoon.

Over the five days I experienced all of the usual traffic conditions that you can expect, also I felt more comfortable with getting the HGV around roundabouts and road junctions of different widths of room available! Confidence grew hour by hour, day by day.

On Friday, after a warm-up drive of around 80 minutes with Simon, we arrived at the test centre with a few minutes to spare until test time! The moment was finally here after months of revision and practical elements. This was the final step to accomplish in getting that HGV driving licence!

The examiner joined me on time, he asked me some 'Show Me, Tell Me' questions which was six questions regarding safety of the vehicle. Once these were done in the first couple of minutes, I then proceeded to drive the examiner around Leicester. The drive seemed to flow for just over an hour.

Part of the test featured an independent drive for 10 minutes being asked to follow road signs for specific places, such as A6 Loughborough, then Beaumont Leys and City Centre. After this the examiner would direct me for each junction and finally to arrive back safely at the test centre ready to learn the result.



Driving around Leicester's ring roads, villages, and city centre brought everything together. My instructor Simon from J Coates was outstanding, he was calm, clear, and professional. He taught me how to drive consistently well and with his directional instructions, it helped me understand how Friday's examiner would act and direct me.



## Passed...

When the examiner said, "I'm pleased to say you've passed" I felt pride, relief, and disbelief all at once.

My examiner offered to send my provisional driving licence back to the DVLA straight away and he gave me a pass certificate. I can expect to receive my new full driving licence back in the post in three weeks.

Soon to be working as a lorry driver in my new career is very exciting and having the support from Grafters Recruit is reassuring. I look forward to this next chapter in the journey of being a HGV driver!

## Final Reflections

From September to January, I learned more than I expected about lorries, about responsibility, and about myself. Yes, it's a commitment and it is challenging. But if you enjoy learning theory, practical skills, and driving, then a career in HGV driving is absolutely worth pursuing.



**If you've been inspired by Michelle's journey and would like to find out more about training, opportunities, or taking your own first steps into HGV driving, we'd love to hear from you, drop us an email:**

**[womeninlogistics@graftersrecruit.co.uk](mailto:womeninlogistics@graftersrecruit.co.uk)**

We're looking for women who are:

- Ready for a change and prepared to put the work in.
- Serious about a long-term career, not just "giving it a try".
- Open to learning, training, and growing in a new environment.
- If that sounds like you, we'd love to hear from you.

**[www.graftersrecruit.co.uk](http://www.graftersrecruit.co.uk)**

