

To the Editor of the *Mathematical Gazette*

DEAR SIR,

*"L"-plate Instructions*

We are all familiar with form D.L. 10 of the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation which gives a diagram of the distinguishing mark to be displayed on a motor vehicle whilst being driven by a person holding a Provisional Licence. Such "L"-plates can easily be bought from any motor dealer so that very few people will bother about reading the instructions on the official dimensions to be used.

Whilst throwing out a lot of other rubbish one day, I came across this circular and two remarks on it caught my eye. The first of these states:

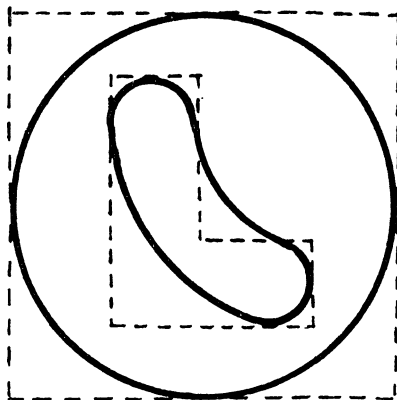
"NOTE—The diagram reproduced below is HALF ACTUAL SIZE."

Though the correct dimensions to be used are stated in the form "TO BE ? INCHES", I wondered how many people would accept the fact that the given diagram was indeed half the actual size, and what interpretation they would put on the word "size"—did it mean that the dimensions of the scale drawing were half those of the plate to be displayed, or that the area of the figure given was half that to be displayed?

A simple mensuration exercise with a reliable ruler (at room temperature) proved the first of these to be wrong. As for the second, I found that most of my non-mathematical friends took this interpretation; I wonder if they know how to solve this problem.

The second remark refers to the appearance of the plate and states:

"The corners of the white ground may be rounded off."



Let us do so by drawing a circle, centre the C.G. of the plate and diameter the width of the plate, we thus have a circular plate. Attacking the corners of the white ground round the "L" itself, we end up with the following:

Is it legal, therefore, to hang a red sausage on a white circular plate as the distinguishing mark of a Provisional Licence?

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Yours etc., T. S. BLYTH