



Teaching Teen Driving

Two cool options for parents of teen drivers.

Teens take to the track to practice driving skills learned at Bondurant School's Advanced Teenage Driving course.

By Kristin Bustamante

It's no secret that teens are more likely than experienced drivers to be involved in traffic accidents. In fact, the National Safety Council (www.NSC.org) reports that traffic crashes are the leading cause of teen fatalities, accounting for 44 percent of teen deaths in the U.S. in 2006. The NSC categorizes this alarming trend as a national crisis; concerned parents of teen drivers, or soon-to-be drivers, are equally alarmed. Fortunately, Arizona parents have resources across the Valley and on the Internet to help them teach their children to drive responsibly, no matter their age.

Set an Example

When it comes to teaching teens to drive, many parents quiver at the thought, or avoid it all together. "The majority of parents fall into two different categories," says Charlie Sobczak, community advocate for the Driving MBA driving school in Scottsdale. "The first group is all about convenience and wants to quickly get their child a driver's license so they no longer have to drive them around. The second group is characterized by a tremendous amount of trust in their teen. Because their teen is a good kid with good grades, parents don't think anything would happen to him or her."

However, it's important for all Arizona parents to take an active role in teaching their children to be safe drivers, through example and through the many resources available to them. Consider the following statistics:

- Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (NHTSA, 2003).
- Young drivers ages 16 to 19 have a crash rate per mile driven

four times higher than older drivers (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 2003).

- In 2005, 10,321 16- to 24-year-olds died on the road in the U.S. (Joint OECD/ECMT Transport Research Centre, 2006).
- A larger percentage of fatal crashes involving teenage drivers are single-vehicle crashes compared to those involving other drivers (such as when a vehicle leaves the road and overturns or hits a roadside object) (NHTSA).
- In general, fewer teens wear their safety belts compared to other drivers (NHTSA).
- More teen fatal crashes occur when passengers, usually other teenagers, are in the car than do crashes involving other drivers (NHTSA).

"Parents are the key to lowering the risk for their child," says Sobczak. "From the time a parent faces their child forward in their car seat, they are training a child in the behavior of driving. When they turn 16 and tell them not to do something, they've already trained them to do whatever it is they are or are not going to do."

Ken Thom, president and general manager of Bondurant School of High Performance Driving, agrees. "The problem is that, as parents, we drive and talk on the cell phone, don't sit properly, and then expect teens to get in the car and do everything right. If we start when kids are young, we can train them to do the right things by doing the right things ourselves."

But there are two exciting programs that are sure to stop teens' protests about driver's education.

Evaluate Schools

After setting the right example, it's time for parents to evaluate the professional resources available. Many schools in Arizona still offer driver's education courses to sophomores who are of legal driving age. However, these classes often prove to be an insufficient source of instruction due to the structure of the classes. A mass group of teens is given textbooks and sometimes the opportunity to hop aboard a simulator (usually a metal box device with a wheel and pedal that resembles a carnival ride). A few engage in behind-the-wheel training with a certified instructor, but this practice is going by the wayside due to the cost of maintaining such a program.

"On-road schools that have been in existence for 40 or 50 years are still teaching the same methods to every student in exactly the same way," cautions Sobczak. "Parents should call around and speak to each school. Be sure to ask about their crash rate risk in teen drivers." Driving MBAs crash rate risk is less than 12 percent in the first year of driving.



Driving MBA fortifies students through a unique simulation experience.

High Tech

Driving MBA offers students a very unique simulation experience to teach them how to handle the dangers of the road. The simulator is one-of-a-kind, as is the experience that teens gain. "We use high-tech simulation similar to what airline pilots and police officers receive. We do this in a safe, risk-free environment. Parents would rather their child have a collision here than on the road." The simulator experience is unmatched, as it offers the opportunity to explore dangerous situations that can't be duplicated in a real vehicle at a typical behind-the-wheel course. An instructor facilitates the simulation experience in a one-on-one setting. In some instances, Level 1 students are paired for a 2:1 student instructor ratio, but all advanced levels are a 1:1 ratio.

Parents can also learn how to be better teachers through Driving MBAs parent class. "Parents need to get involved with their kid's driving and we have developed a class to facilitate that," says Sobczak. "I have personally sat in on this class many times and always learn something new." The class teaches parents how to be better coaches and instructors and how to spend quality time doing planned drives. Sobczak advocates a variety of planned drives and feels that allowing teens to drive just in town, on grocery errands, is inadequate. Planned drives at highway speeds or through difficult terrains allow teens exposure to a wider range of driving experiences behind the wheel. More information about Driving MBA is available at www.drivingmba.com.

High Performance

"Teens tend to listen more to a stranger than to their parents," explains Thom. This is no surprise to any parent of teenagers! One way to break through this barrier is to enlist the help of a professional racecar driver. This is the experience teens will receive at Bondurant School's Advanced Teenage Driving course (available in one-, two- or three-day increments). "Because this is a road racing school, all our instructors have multiple years of racing experience. When drivers are on the highway, the techniques they use are the same techniques used when racing."

Thom goes on to explain that the school's course is not a substitute for basic driver's education, but rather a necessary supplement to teach teens important vehicle-handling skills. "When teens reach driving age, there are many good driving schools from which parents can choose. In addition, an advanced driving program teaches them braking and accident avoidance—things that they need to know to be on the road."

The Bondurant course includes vision techniques like looking ahead, vehicle movement, skid control, braking maneuvers and an accident avoidance simulator. Students are required to have a valid driver's license and six months driving experience. Parents must be present upon check-in. "Most of the day is spent in the car, behind the wheel, in order to practice and build muscle memory. This way, when an emergency situation arises, and it will, teens automatically react in the correct way." More information is available online at www.bondurant.com. AZP

Technology Helps Track Teen Driving

For the technology-savvy parent, there are a number of devices that can be used to keep tabs on a teen's driving habits when parents are not in the car.

The **RS-1000 Teen Black Box** from **Road Safety** tells parents how and when teens are driving on a second-by-second basis. The memory card of the device can be removed and inserted into the family computer to display reports and graphs. The device can monitor speed, time and aggressive driving habits. www.roadsafet.com.

You may have seen commercial vehicles with a **How's My Driving? Sticker**. Now, the same concept is available for private use at www.howmydriving.com/drive4life.nsf. A sticker is placed on the back of the teen's vehicle and if a fellow commuter phones in a complaint, parents are immediately notified via phone or e-mail.

The **MobileTEEN GPS** provides real-time tracking of teen drivers and is available at www.mobileteengps.com. It provides information related to speed; current vehicle location; unapproved location warnings; if a vehicle is moving or stolen; and the ability to locate the vehicle.