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Teenagers sharpen their driving skills

*By Denise Goolsby
The Indio Sun*

Local teens, sitting behind the wheels of racing-red Mustangs, screeched, squealed and burned rubber in the parking lot at the Riverside County Fairgrounds last week during Driving Skills For Life, a driver safety program presented by the Ford Motor Co. and the Governors Highway Safety Association.

The course is designed to supplement the basic, and often minimal, driving instruction students receive prior to getting their licenses.

The driving skills course - administered by professional driving instructors, many with professional racing backgrounds - focuses on four key driving skills that Ford Motor Co. and safety experts believe are significant in preventing crashes, injuries and fatalities. They are hazard recognition, vehicle handling, space management and speed management

Kelsie McGee, 16, said her mom heard about the program and urged her to attend.

Kelsie said she felt more confident after practicing what to do in case a vehicle went into a skid.

"I was really scared at first," she said. "I've always been afraid of doing something like that. Now I know what to do."

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers across the U.S., according to the California Department of Motor Vehicles.

"Inexperience mixed with speed and distractions," said instructor Travis Washay, explaining why teens are more likely to be involved in crashes than the general population.

About 200 young drivers attended one of the four sessions presented during the two-day event.

Some parents came to watch their teens in action.

Paul and Dena Kosturos, of Indian Wells, accompanied sons Anthony, 18, and George, 16, to the first session of the program

"You hear about teen accidents and it just rips families apart," Paul Kosturos said.

"They've been good drivers so far," said Dena Kosturos.

Still, the couple wants to make sure the boys, who attend Palm Desert High School, know what to do when the unexpected happens.

That's why they decided to enroll the teens in the program.

"We want to prepare them for any type of situations they might face," Paul Kosturos said.

It won't be long before the Kosturos' daughter Tiffany, 15, gets her driver's license.

"We'll have three teenagers on the road," he said. "That's kind of scary."



Participants in the Driving Skills for Life program practice vehicle handling techniques June 25 at the Riverside County Fairgrounds. (Photos by Denise Goolsby The Indio Sun)



Youngsters in the Driving Skills for Life program exit a Mustang.
DRIVING SKILLS FOR LIFE

For information about the program, call 888 987-8765 or visit www.drivingskillsforlife.com.