



# Inexperience and distraction

Ford program tackles the top causes of teen car crashes *By Jennifer Johnson*

Ford Driving Skills for Life (Ford DSFL) takes on the number one killer of teenagers in the US: vehicle crashes. The award-winning program delivered its message directly to teens, parents and communities through hands-on driving instruction during a recent Ford Driving Skills for Life National Tour.

The Ford Driving Skills for Life program, developed by the Ford Motor Company Fund and Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), addresses the main causes of car crashes involving teenagers: inexperience and distraction.

Designed by a panel of safety experts, Ford DSFL focuses on building the skills of young drivers in several key areas: hazard recognition, vehicle handling, space management and speed management. Students learn by a variety of driving meth-

ods, from professional instructors who deliver key skill sets that boost young drivers' confidence and knowledge.

Auto accidents remain the number one killer of teens in the United States today. According to data from the Arizona Governor's Office of Highway Safety, 75 Arizona teen drivers were killed in car crashes in 2012.

More than 1,200 teens and parents in both Phoenix and Tucson received hands-on teen driver training in November for free, courtesy of the Ford DSFL program.

One part of the hands-on course involved teens learning firsthand the dangerous effects of distractions in the car, like texting while driving or carrying too many passengers. Teens also learned how to steer a car safely out of a slide in specially equipped Mustangs.

Jaydah Ivey, 16, who attended a course at the Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park in Phoenix, said that it taught her that it's not smart to text and drive. "At this station they were trying to get me to text and drive at the same time but I didn't even try, it was too hard," Ivey said. "Lots of the other teens ran over tons of cones while trying to text a coherent message."

Those cones are meant to serve as a visual representation of a potential hazard the teens might encounter while texting on the road in a real-life driving situation.

A recent report from the GHSA shows that teen driver fatalities are on the rise among 16- and 17-year-old drivers nationwide. Also, analysis of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) traffic data shows that in 2011 there were approximately 2,300 traffic fatalities among those ages 15 to 19.

"The exercises put students in real-world driving scenarios in a controlled

Students from Perry High school in Gilbert attended Ford's award-winning Driving Skills for Life program at Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park. Lane Veach, 18, of Chandler took his turn behind the wheel of a Ford Mustang to experience firsthand the DSFL vehicle handling course (photo at left).

(At right, top to bottom) It's two thumbs up from Alexis Barton, 16, of Chandler, after driving with Ford Driving Skills for Life instructors Brian Olatunji, left, and Juan Babun. • Tanner Serrano, 17, of Chandler is learning control in the face of distractions at Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park. • Mom Veronica and son Antonio Hernandez, 18, of Chandler exude newfound confidence after sessions with instructor Austin Robinson and others. • Tanner Hedgers, 16, of Chandler applies his new skills on the course. • Photos by Sam VarnHagen / Ford Motor Company.

environment, so they are equipped with knowledge that could save their life down the road," said Randy Bleicher, lead instructor for Driving Skills for Life. "One of the main things we want kids to get out of this program is decision-making skills. If you make the right decisions while driving, there is no longer a need to worry."

Research conducted for the Ford DSFL program also shows that teens tend to follow in their parents' footsteps when it comes to driving habits. Parents can help address the problem simply by setting a good example behind the wheel. These good habits include everything from buckling up and not speeding, to teaching their children how to scan for potential hazards while driving.

"With the age of the cell phone, loud stereos, and packing kids into cars, it is imperative that we teach our children both the dangers of these things when we're driving, but more importantly, how to react if an emergency comes up," said Colleen Crowninshield, whose son and daughter attended the training at the Tucson Public Safety Academy. "Both of my teenagers thought this was the best learning experience with driving they have ever had. They walked away feeling stronger and more confident in their driving skills."

Ford DSFL is the most comprehensive teen safe driving program in the United States and has trained more than 550,000 new drivers around the globe through online and hands-on professional driver instruction.

For online curriculum or to sign up to be on the information list and be the first notified of future sessions in Arizona, visit [www.DrivingSkillsforLife.com](http://www.DrivingSkillsforLife.com). ■

