

Driving Is a Privilege Not a Right

By Cordula Hodgins

Throughout the United States, more teens die in car crashes than from any other cause. In 2009, the annual statistical review from the Arizona Department of Transportation recorded 110,538 male and female drivers between 16 and 18 years old in Arizona for the calendar year 2008. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that within this age group, 75 teen drivers died and 5,121 teen drivers were injured in automobile accidents (AZDOT "Arizona Vehicle Crash Facts 2008" 40). In comparison, the crash statistics from 2006 recorded 101 fatal car accidents and 6,625 injured teen drivers (AZDOT "Arizona Vehicle Crash Facts" 37). Even though the numbers of teens involved in car crashes has shown a downward trend in recent years, the results still indicate a higher crash rate compared with any other age group. These statistics confirm the importance of demanding a more thorough driver education to this group of young drivers. The current Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) System needs to be enhanced by the Arizona State government in order to ensure that novice teen drivers develop more adequate driving skills which can enable more responsible driving behavior (AZDOT "teen driving").

Instituted in June 2008, the Arizona requirements by the Department of Transportation for novice teen drivers to obtain an automobile driver license are still not sufficient. In addition, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) report notes the majority of novice teen drivers do not have adequate practical experience to handle the complex task of driving when they are first licensed (Goodwin 10). The current GDL System is only able to provide a small amount of driving practice – not even enough for novice drivers to become

minimally competent, much less proficient (Goodwin report 500-10). A significant amount of driver training, in a variety of circumstances, is necessary before proficiency can be developed (CSYD). Any novice teen driver should be required by law to pass an enhanced graduated driver education program which includes simulated driving practice, on-road instruction with a licensed driving teacher and new driver car control training. They will receive a more rounded and more adequate driving education, which is essential to handle the complex task of driving a motor vehicle and developing responsible driving behavior.

Currently, simulated driving practice, on-road driving instruction and accident avoidance training are offered by some driving schools in Arizona but they are not mandatory. In contrast, German novice teen drivers must be eighteen years old to register with a driving school to complete a mandatory in-class and on-road training with a licensed driving teacher. Novice teen drivers need to attend 22 hours of theory classes with a licensed driving teacher. Twelve hours of special training including night, freeway and country drives are required, but the full amount of additional driving hours depends on the teen driver's skills and 20 to 30 hours are usually the norm. Depending on the teen driver's skills the training can take six months and more, and therefore the price for a driver's license can easily cost \$ 2000 and over (Rentschler). According to Wilhelm Triplett, researcher and author for the CQ press, it does not come as a surprise that German teen drivers have lower fatality rates than in the United States (Triplett 5). Of course, it will become more costly and novice drivers will have to invest more time to obtain the driver's license, however, parents and legislators must rethink the value of novice teen drivers' lives over the value of money and time spent. A more thorough driver education can result in more responsible driving behavior and lower car crash rates. Eric Skrum is the communication executive for the National Motorists Association and disputes that existing driver education curriculums do not adequately emphasize behind-the-wheel practice and the few hours of

mandatory driving training now are not going to be enough to develop adequate driving skills which can enable more responsible driving behavior (Triplett 6). In addition, the Transportation Research Board, a large group of scientists, over 6,500 engineers, and other transportation research workers, reports that it will require extensively more aggressive effort than simply adding more chapters to the current GDL program. There are some promising improvements that can be arranged in the driving education in order to create safe and proficient drivers without exposing them and others to great risk (Goodwin 12).

Simulated driving practice is an important component that is missing in the current Arizona GDL system and should be mandatory. According to research by Dr. Marcel Uhr, simulated driving training, for example, is widely acknowledged and helps novice teen drivers to develop better judgment and increase reaction during dangerous road maneuvers, hazard recognition, vehicle handling, and space and speed management (Uhr 2). The novice driver can experience situations and practice driving skills without getting themselves or others in danger. It also significantly improves their performance on basic key skills, such as parking, changing lanes or entering the freeway. According to Dr. Uhr, these advantages make driving simulators very effective and safe training environments, and should be added to the driving training curriculum. These findings are supported by Professor Donald Fisher and his research team, who did studies on teen novice drivers' driving behaviors and created a simulated program that helps novice teen drivers develop adequate driving skills, but also let them experience situations that could turn into a hazard, for example talking and texting on the cell phone while operating a motor vehicle (Drews 6). Professor Fisher is confirming that those teen participants trained on their simulated driving program recognized hazards as good as experienced drivers (Fisher1-2). Enhancing simulated driving practice by law can result in more responsible driving behavior as the novice teen drivers will receive progressive training, working through lessons that build on

each other and repeating a desired action that improves performance on key driving skills and develops more responsible driving behavior (Uhr 2).

Another beneficial component that needs to be added to the current Arizona GDL law is on-road driving instruction with a licensed driving teacher. Unfortunately, this alternative is only optional and not required by Arizona law (AZDOT "Teen Driving"). The current requirements by the Arizona Department of Transportation only ask for a Supervised Driving Practice Certificate signed by the drivers training student's parents or guardians as a proof that the novice driver has practiced 30 hours of supervised driving and is proficient enough to pass the driving test and exchange the instruction permit with a drivers license (AZDOT "Form 96-0223"). After the novice driver practices various driving skills on the simulator, the driver then can transfer his skills during on-road practice. Driver training students get the opportunity to drive in appropriate sized cars which are easier to handle, unlike vehicles such as hummers or oversized pick-up trucks. The driving school vehicles have dual brakes, which allow the driving instructor to intervene if the student drivers panic or make a wrong decision while driving. Unlike most parents or assigned drivers, licensed driving teachers have the educational background, are familiar with the current traffic laws and regulations (NHTSA 14), and therefore have more expertise to teach the students adequate and responsible driving behavior. Furthermore, the driving instructors are better able to judge if a novice driver is prepared to reach another level or has developed a responsible driving behavior that allows him or her to acquire a driver's license. Even parents or guardians who are experienced drivers can be bad teachers and unknowingly transfer bad driving habits over to the novice driver, such as changing lanes without using the indicator or driving through red traffic light (Gerdes 94-7). An on-road instruction with a licensed driving teacher complements very well with the simulated driving training and should be adopted by the Arizona GDL system. These measurements can provide

the novice teen drivers with more rounded and adequate driver education that has long term effects on their driving behavior.

Together with simulated driving practice and on-road instruction with a licensed driving teacher, new driver car control training is another valuable component but not required by law. David Thornhill Thompson, automotive journalist, amateur racing competitor, founder of the New Driver Car Control clinic, and editor of the book *"New Driver Car Control: from Kamikaze to Competent ; an Exercise Program to Help Parents Make the New Driver a Safer Driver,"* alerts parents that traditional driver education is not sufficient (Thompson 11). He notes that novice teen drivers have been taught to take off, but they have not been taught how to land. Parents are responsible for their children and need to take control and that includes driver training. Thompson believes the curriculum New Driver Car Control clinic will motivate parents and their teen drivers to go well beyond the mainly limited requirements of current state laws to build up safe driving as a life skill (Thompson 11). The clinics are generally divided into two parts and require novice drivers to have a valid Learner's Permit. They must be accompanied by a parent or guardian (minimum 30 years old) for both the two hour classroom session and the five hour behind-the wheel portion, as latter is required by the Arizona law. The parent or guardian will join the teen drivers during practice and act as a coach to assist the novice driver stay focused on the intention of the exercises (Thompson 14). During the clinic, teen participants must maneuver through skids, handle evasive lane changes and learn how to use their brakes effectively. The novice drivers learn to be in control of their vehicle especially in panic situations, for example avoiding wildlife or a tire blow out. The quick-response exercises will graduate from slow speed to higher speed which expand their awareness and understanding of the real life they face. The clinic will end with a collision preventing maneuver test to find out how well the participants have comprehended the techniques (Thompson 36-49). According to

Thompson, the instinctive belief and thinking that exercise will improve performance is not applied to new drivers and informs that each repetition refines the intuitive sequences that manage the motor skills and subconscious problem solving (Thompson 14). New Driver Car Control clinics provide teen drivers with safe driving skills that expand their awareness of the real world and must be added to the current Arizona GDL curriculum.

In conclusion, the numbers of teens involved in car crashes every year confirm the importance of demanding a more thorough driver education for novice teen driver. The crash statistics also alert parents and legislators to rethink the value of novice teen drivers' lives over the value of money and time spent to obtain a driver's license. The Arizona requirements for novice teen drivers to get a driver's license are not sufficient. The government needs to add simulated driving practice, on-road driving instructions with a licensed driving teacher and new driver car control training to the current GDL System. Furthermore, the law must require the enhanced system in order to ensure that every novice teen driver develops more adequate driving skills which can enable more responsible driving behavior. These actions could result in further reduction of car crashes, injuries and fatalities among novice teen driver.

Works Cited

- Arizona Government. Department of Transportation. Motor Vehicle Division.
 "Arizona Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2008." *azdot.gov*. June 2009. Web. 31 Mar. 2010.
 <<http://www.azdot.gov/mvd/statistics/crash/PDF/08crashfacts.pdf>>
- Arizona Government. Department of Transportation. Motor Vehicle Division.
 "Arizona Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2006." *azdot.gov*. 2006. Web. 31 Mar. 2010.
 <<http://www.azdot.gov/mvd/Statistics/crash/PDF/06crashfacts.pdf>>
- Arizona Government. Department of Transportation. Motor Vehicle Division. "Teen
 Driving." *azdot.gov*. July 2008. Web. 31 Mar. 2010.
 <<http://www.azdot.gov/mvd/driver/gdl/gdl.asp>>
- Arizona Department of Transportation. Motor Vehicle Division. "Form Number PDF96-
 0223." *azdot.gov*. June 2008. Web. 30 Mar. 2010.
 <[http://mvd.azdot.gov/mvd/formsandpub/
 viewPDF.asp?lngProductKey=1417&lngFormInfoKey=1417](http://mvd.azdot.gov/mvd/formsandpub/viewPDF.asp?lngProductKey=1417&lngFormInfoKey=1417)>
- CSYD (Center for the Study of Young Drivers). "Why Are Young Drivers at A Higher Risk ?"
Highway Safety Research Center. University of North Carolina. Web. 3 Apr. 2010.
 <http://www.csyd.unc.edu/issues/why_higher_risk.html>
- Drews, Frank, Monisha Pasupathi and David Strayer. "Passenger and Cell Phone Conversations
 in Simulated Driving." *University of Utah*. 2008. Web. 3 April. 2010.
 <http://www.psych.utah.edu/AppliedCognitionLab/JEP_A_2008.pdf>
- Fisher, Donald. Prof. "Free, Downloadable Training Program Helps Teen Drivers Anticipate

and Avoid Crashes." University of Massachusetts. Jan. 2008. Web. 3 April. 2010.

<http://www.ecs.umass.edu/public/media_coverage/sciencedaily_teendrivers.pdf>

Gerdes, Louise I. *Teen Driving*. Detroit: Greenhaven, 2008. Print.

Goodwin Arthur and Robert Foss and D.Mayhew, et al. "Guidance for Implementation of the AASHTO Strategic Highway Safety Plan: Volume 19: A Guide for Reducing Young Driver Crashes." 2007. *NCHRP Report 500*. Vol 9. Web. 3 April. 2010.

< http://www.csyd.unc.edu/about/published_research.html>

NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration). U.S. Department of Transportation. "Teen Drivers –Driver Education- Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards." *NHTSA* . no.d. Web. 01 Apr. 2010.

<[http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Traffic Injury Control/TeenDriver/files/TeenDriverETAS-1.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Traffic%20Injury%20Control/TeenDriver/files/TeenDriverETAS-1.pdf)>

Rentschler, Bernhard. German driving instructor. *Fun Drive*. 2007. Web. 10 April. 2010.

<<http://www.fahrschule-fun-drive.de/node/4>>

Thompson, David Thornhill. "New Driver Car Control: from Kamikaze to Competent; an Exercise Program to Help Parents Make the New Driver a Safer Driver." Melbourne Beach, FL: Auto Testers, 2008. Print.

Triplett, William. "Teen Driving." *CQ Researcher* 15.1 (2005): 1-24. *CQ Researcher*. Web. 16 Apr. 2010.

<<http://ezproxy.scottsdalecc.edu:260/cqresearcher/getpdf.php?file=cqr20050107C.pdf>>

Uhr, Marcel. "Transfer of Training in an Advanced Driving Simulator: Comparison between Real World Environment and Simulation in a Maneuvering Driving Task." *UIOWA.edu*. Aug. 2003. Web. 12 April. 2010.

<http://www.nadssc.uiowa.edu/dscna07/dscna_cd2003/papers>.

