

My 'Real World' Driving Experience

By JACK KUHLENSCHMIDT
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Did you know that one in three teens will get into an accident in their first year of driving? That is the reason my parents sent me to Danny McKeever's Fast Lane Defensive Driving Academy at the Pomona Fairplex in late July. Although they know that I had learned "driving basics," they felt that I needed more "real world" driving experience.

I know, traffic school doesn't really seem like an exciting way to spend your entire Saturday, but I kid you not, THIS traffic school was actually FUN! The class is taught by experienced race-car drivers, two of whom also used to be policemen. They have flipped their cars over before, and have crashed many times. These people know driving better than everybody else, and they also love teaching others how to drive safely.

In the Defensive Driving class, we learned the importance of inventions like ABS brakes and what to do in real-life situations, such as when a child runs into the street or a car unexpectedly veers in front of you. We learned how easy it is to rear-end somebody if you are tailgating. We learned how to take control of your car when skidding on dry streets as well as wet streets (not to mention that the skidding process itself is pretty fun). Most importantly, though, we learned all about our own car and how it handles in the course of the day and in different challenging and unexpected situations.

My car is relatively new, so I didn't know important things about it like how the weight transfers in a skid or whether or not I had ABS brakes or even how long it takes to brake to a stop if I'm going 40 miles an hour.

When my parents learned to drive, they were actually taught driving as a subject in high school. They told me they were showed gruesome movies that graphically depicted the consequences of traffic accidents. It was meant to scare them. Not so today. Most teenagers have to rely on local driving schools that really only teach you how to pass the driving test rather than real-world defensive driving skills.

After the first hour of the Academy, I felt more prepared to hit the road than any of those other classes made me feel. It is an all-day class, starting at 9 a.m. and finishing around 4:30, but the time goes by fast.

People say that all teenagers believe they are invincible. But this driving course not only opened my eyes to how easy it would be to get into a serious and possibly fatal accident, but it completely changed my driving style.

For instance, did you know that it is actually dangerous to drive with your hands at "10 and 2"? If you were to get into an accident with your hands at this traditional position, the airbags would deploy and possibly knock your hands into your body. The Academy actually recommends having your hands at "9 and 3" or even "8 and 4". Not only are these positions more comfortable, they are much safer in the event your airbag goes off.

As a second example, I am now much more focused on the traffic up ahead and all around me instead of just being focused on the car immediately in front of me.

I highly recommend you take a class like this. Search for "defensive driving classes" on the Internet (or contact the Fast Lane Driving School at 888-948-4888, where the cost is \$395, with occasional discounts offered). It really gives teenage drivers the tools that they need to save their own or someone else's lives.

(The author, son of Betty-Jo Tilley and Richard Kuhlenschmidt, is a junior at Harvard-Westlake and has been driving since December. He wrote his first article for the Post at age 12.)