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# Teen-Agers Can Be Good Drivers!

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*They have a poor safety record, true—  
but proper driver training plus the support and confidence of parents could turn the tide*

**G**ET THE KIDS off the road—they cause all the accidents!"

How many times have you heard that? Frequently, I am sure. Teen-agers are prime scapegoats for our ills on the highway.

Unfortunately, there is considerable justice to the charge. On the basis of proportionate population, young drivers are responsible for a greater share of traffic accidents than their elders.

But before you despair, consider this fact: teen-agers not only have the potential for top-flight driving, they can actually fulfill this potential with adequate driver-education courses. Research has demonstrated that teen drivers who received formal driver-education courses in their high schools have fewer accidents and violations. Yet just more than half the nation's high schools provide the needed courses.

The recommended program in schools involves five key points:

Discussion and review of driving problems; demonstration of correct driving practices; secondary discussion requiring the student to explain each step of the demonstration; second demonstration with the student participating; and practice sessions consisting of on-the-road, behind-the-wheel experience.

Such driver-education courses cost about \$35-\$45 per pupil. But with their proved benefits, it is hard to understand why they are not available to every student in the nation.

An automobile is, after all, an expensive, highly complicated piece of machinery. Does it make any sense, then, to let a youngster—even though he has reached legal licensing age—operate this piece of machinery without a thorough grounding in the art of driving? Industry would never permit an untrained worker to operate a comparable piece of heavy machinery!

There is nothing inherently wrong with the youthful driver. Physically, he is the ideal person to handle an auto. Many theorizers have attributed teen-age accidents to the stress of adolescence. But the National Safety Council's director of research, Dr. Murray Blumenthal, says there is no clear-cut evidence to support the traditional belief that adolescence is a time of vast emotional turmoil.

He develops the idea that inexperience and inadequate education are primarily responsible for the disproportionately high number of accidents among young people. This concept is further supported by research in industry that attributes a substantial amount of accident repetition to lack of experience, not "stress."

While this discussion of the teen-ager's potential does not erase the fact that he has been, and is still, performing under par as a driver, it does point a way toward making him a better driver.

**A**S A PARENT, much of the job falls on you. First, every effort should be made to provide him with a driver-education course. If none exists in your community, you and other parents can work to bring one into the high-school curriculum. Your local or regional citizen-safety organization can be of great help.

But the job does not stop there. Once your teen is enrolled in an approved course, you should assist him to achieve success. Help him in his practice sessions in the family car. Attempt to instill confidence rather than add to his fears. Patience is the order of the day. Refrain from talking as much as possible; if explanations are in order, have him pull over to the curb. You may be able to talk and drive, but the youth must concentrate on the main job.

Give your teen as much experience as possible: on shopping trips and vacations, during

bad weather conditions, and in the many other situations that cannot be duplicated in driver-education courses. Above all, don't cram the teen-ager's head with do's and don'ts. Let him reason and rely on what he has learned from his teacher and the course. Your job should be supplemental, not a substitute.

You should, however, make mental note of your youngster's abilities and deficiencies behind the wheel. Does he stay in the right lane? Does he maintain a proper distance from the car ahead—one car length for every 10 miles of speed?

These and other basic safety rules should be observed and discussed with him. When you see that he carefully follows these rules of the road, you can begin to relax. Soon after completion of his course, your teen-ager will be ready for a license and his first "solo" drive—a safe one.

Issuance of a youngster's first license is a big event in his life, and much should be made of it. Knowing that he is ready—an educated and reasonably skilled driver—should help relieve your anxieties about his getting a license. And if you indicate your pleasure and trust, it will go a long way toward making your teen-ager one of the best drivers on the road.

Teen-agers can truly set a good example on our highways, but it takes the meaningful combination of driver education in the schools plus the support and confidence of parents.

## How to Earn the Key to Dad's Car

*Teen-agers! A helpful new booklet containing safety tips, driving hints, and pointers on driver attitude has been prepared by the Lincoln-Mercury Division of Ford Motor Company. For your free copy of "How to Earn the Key to Dad's Car," write to Teen Driving, Dept. A, 3000 Schaefer Road, Dearborn, Mich.*