



Behind the wheel:  
Scott Sanders navigates  
his mother's Ford Taurus  
during Special Skills  
Driver Training

# Road

Things to know before  
your teen starts driving

**Scott Sanders, 18,** of Colorado Springs, dreams of one day driving a '68 Ford Mustang. But today he's happy to have the '92 Taurus his mom loaned him for driving lessons.

"Another good run!" Scott says proudly after skillfully navigating his car between a dozen orange cones.

## Graduated licensing

Most states have graduated driver licensing (GDL) programs, which phase in driving privileges and give teens driving experience under lower-risk conditions. However, programs differ in the number and length of their stages, required hours of supervised driving and driver restrictions such as driving with teen passengers and at night. For information on your state's program, visit: [http://www.hwysafety.org/safety/9.5Facts/state\\_laws/grad\\_licensing.htm](http://www.hwysafety.org/safety/9.5Facts/state_laws/grad_licensing.htm).

When Scott told his parents he was ready to learn to drive, they were ready, too. After going through the learning-to-drive experience with two older children, USAA members Scott C. and Donna Sanders knew how to help Scott become a responsible driver.

"We wanted Scott to realize that driving is a privilege and not a right. So we placed the same restrictions on him that we did with his older brother and sister," says Donna Sanders. These restrictions require Scott to maintain at least a 3.0 grade point average, insist that his passengers also wear safety belts, and not allow any alcohol — or smoking — in the car. "Most importantly, we told Scott he would get his license when we decided he was ready," she adds.

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They also signed up Scott for a special skills driver training program at MasterDrive, founded in 1985 by Ronn Langford after losing his teen-age daughter in a car crash. Recently, this program gave Scott and 27 other eager teens the chance to learn some defensive driving skills before hitting the open road. This included personalized in-car training and practicing car-control techniques on the school's private driving area. This gave Scott the opportunity to get as much practical experience as possible in as short a time as possible, under low-risk conditions.

"I got a lot of personal instruction from the adults in the car with me," says Scott. "But it was a fun experience too, because I hadn't done any real driving before then."

### Giving new drivers needed experience

Practical experience is key for a new driver. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the crash risk for teen-age drivers is the highest of any age group, and is worst among 16-year-olds.

"When you look at the crash statistics on young drivers, the 16-year-olds really stand out," says Allan Williams, Ph.D., chief scientist for the IIHS. "That's because they are all beginners." Williams adds that a combination of inexperience and risk-taking leads to many of these crashes.



## How to help your new teen driver

Actively help your child learn to drive. ■■■■

Limit passengers while your teen is driving. ■■■■

Be a positive role model when you drive. ■■■■

Restrict night driving. ■■■■

Reinforce safety belt use. ■■■■

Choose safety over style when choosing your teen's vehicle. ■■■■

Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

### Driver's education is not enough

Williams says studies show basic driver's education does little to produce drivers who are less likely to be in crashes. "The problem is that there's not a lot of time to teach much more than basic driving," he notes.

According to Williams, driver's ed is a good basic starter, but new drivers need to get a lot of supervised practice with parents under controlled road conditions.

USAA member Grant Dewey, general manager of the MasterDrive for Southern Colorado, agrees. "Parents should look less for programs that teach basic driving skills and more for programs that seek to make them more skillful and competent drivers," he says.

"I'm glad I waited until 18 to start driving," says Scott. "If not, it probably would have been harder for me. Now I feel like I can prove to my parents that I know how to drive and will be able to ace the driving test when I take it."

Although Scott still wants the Mustang, right now he's got both eyes on the road — and a good grip on how to get where he's going. ■



## Help from USAA

USAA created the K.E.Y.S.<sup>®</sup> (Keeping Every Youth Safe) program to help parents support their child's safe driving practices. This free program provides age-appropriate educational materials for beginning and teenage drivers and their parents. Materials are sent to your child around his or her birthday each year for up to four years:

### Age 15

"Behind the Wheel" — a guide for helping your teen get more driving experience

### Age 16

"Parent & Teen Safe Driving Agreement" — helps foster family discussion about setting the expectations for safe driving

### Age 17

"On the Road" — a CD-ROM featuring real stories from young drivers. Also available on VHS

### Age 18

"Cost of Driving" — a brochure to help young drivers understand the cost of insurance and other driving expenses

For more information on the K.E.Y.S. program, call (800) 531-8100, ext. 87777.