

DRIVING SKILLS FOR LIFE



Ralph Seekins

The first vehicle I ever drove was my Grampa's Ford tractor on the old Seekins Homestead. My Uncle Frank gave me a quick lesson and then let me drive while he monitored sitting on the seat behind me. I was too short to reach the clutch without standing on the running boards. My Grandmother almost tongue lashed my Uncle to death when she found out what he'd done. But, before long, I was out there with the big boys pulling my load of hay bales from the field to the barn. Later, I moved up to bigger tractors and trucks of all sizes around the fields. Then, at 14, with four years of driving experience in the fields, I was allowed to transition to cars on the highways. I lived in Wyoming back then and could get a full-privilege driver's license at the ripe old age of 14.

Today I'm scared to death with my 16 year old grandkids driving. And now I've become the lecturing grandparent giving my kids an earful when I see the grandkids driving too fast or with only one hand on the wheel wearing that "I'm so cool" look on their faces. Even though my

grandkids are quick to tell me it would never happen to them, vehicle crashes are the number 1 cause of teen deaths in America. (According to the National Traffic Safety Administration, almost 6,000 teens were killed in vehicle crashes in 2008. Many, many more were seriously injured).

Several automobile manufacturers have programs that help young men and women learn good driving skills. One of those is the FORD DRIVING SKILLS FOR LIFE program. Ford has a National Tour that provides free driving exercises, web based training and materials on driving safety to high schools. The Alaska Ford Dealers are working with Ford to bring that tour to Alaska high schools at the beginning of the next school year. But, as valuable as that program is, it'll only reach a limited number of young Alaska drivers.

Knowing this, Ford also offers its interactive DRIVING SKILLS FOR LIFE website and educator packets free to any student, parent, educator or community organization. All a person needs to do is go to www.drivingskillsforlife.com and click on the "register" button. Then fill out the information and you're in.

Once you're there, you'll find a multitude of information available for students, parents and educators. For example, one thing I recommend all drivers at all ages and all levels of experience do is go through "the academy" section under the "STUDENTS"

heading and complete that interactive program. It'll lead you through five interactive modules and a learning quiz. You can take your time and step through modules on (1) Hazards: Concepts; (2) Hazards: Practices; (3) Vehicle Handling; (4) Space Management; and (5) Speed Management. Hey, no matter how experienced we are, the lessons this program offers are extremely valuable – even if it is just to remind us how we might improve our driving skills.

I know my 16 year old grandkids think they already know everything they need to in order to be competent and safe drivers. However, we older folks know there's still a lot to learn and you can help the kids do it by encouraging them to enroll with you in this free website program. And, frankly, after registering in and using this program myself, I found there was a lot of good information there for me – even though I have more than 50 years of highway driving experience. If you take the time to step through the information and instruction offered on drivingskillsforlife.com, I have no doubt you will also find it well worth your time.

Good luck and safe driving.

Ralph Seekins has more than 42 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 35 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln.