

TEENAGE MENACE

Teenage drivers are dying. They are also killing others on the roads. In the United States and all over the western world, the lives of young people are coming to an untimely end in a crush of twisted metal and broken glass. In the past decade, more American teenagers have died in traffic accidents than from all the diseases combined. Although teenagers make up 6% of all drivers, they are involved in 14% of all fatal accidents.

International experts explain the phenomenon in different ways. One theory is that young people are looking for “thrills” and driving is a great way to get them. Teenagers are also likely to take more risks than adults. These two things, coupled with the childlike belief that “it will never happen to me”, often results in disaster.

A second theory relates to experience. Good driving comes from experience. Whereas an older driver might not be as quick to brake in an emergency as a teenager, he is more likely to recognise danger sooner, a factor which gives him more time to react. These critical seconds can mean the difference between life and death.

A third theory relates to young drivers “showing off” behind the wheel. In an attempt to demonstrate what a “pro” he is at driving, a teenager will drive fast or show what other things he can do while driving, such as smoke a cigarette, select a CD and put it into the CD player or turn around to talk to someone in the back seat.

Governments have tried different approaches to solving the problem. Some have raised the legal driving age. Some give the teenage driver a “conditional” driving licence that allows the young driver to drive, but with limitations such as no night or weekend driving. Thus, the young driver gets experience but is prevented from being behind the wheel during particularly dangerous times.

In some places, drivers must complete a driver-training course, in addition to passing the normal driving test. In others, the young driver is issued a licence for one year. If, during that time, he gets a ticket for anything other than a parking violation, his one-year waiting period for a normal driving licence begins anew.

One of the most serious aspects of the problem of teenage drivers is drinking and driving. In response to the rising number of deaths caused by the deadly mixture of alcohol and driving, dozens of school and community-based programmes are being developed in the USA. The students themselves are also taking responsibility. In thousands of high schools, students have joined an organisation called SADD (Students Against Drunken Driving) and have pledged to call home if they have been drinking. For their part, SADD parents promise to pick them up or send a taxi, with no questions asked. Other teenagers have decided to take turns being the “designated driver” of their group, drinking only soft drinks with no alcohol for an evening out.

PART ONE: READING COMPREHENSION

Choose the best answer according to the text.
[0.5 points each correct answer]

1. American teenage drivers...
 - a) are involved in more fatal accidents than adults.
 - b) are involved in 6% of all serious road accidents.
 - c) die in car accidents more than they die from illness.
 - d) are killed in 14% of the road accidents.
2. According to experts, teenage drivers...
 - a) like excitement.
 - b) aren't aware of danger.
 - c) don't care about other people.
 - d) need more confidence.
3. Older drivers...
 - a) need more time to react than teenagers.
 - b) need less time to react than teenagers.
 - c) tend to lose control in emergencies.
 - d) are more afraid of dying than teenagers.
4. Teenagers think that fast driving...
 - a) is a good way to relax.
 - b) impresses their peers.
 - c) is good driving experience.
 - d) is better when accompanied by music.
5. A conditional licence is given to teenagers...
 - a) when the legal driving age is raised.
 - b) if they are not car owners.
 - c) who have been involved in accidents.
 - d) to make the roads safer.
6. In some countries, a new driver caught speeding...
 - a) has to do a special training course.
 - b) won't get a normal licence for at least a year.
 - c) loses his normal driving licence
 - d) is given a conditional licence.
7. Members of SADD...
 - a) report drunk teenagers.
 - b) get parental co-operation.
 - c) don't drink alcohol at parties.
 - d) work for the community.
8. Which of the following statements is true?
 - a) Designated drivers are teenagers who prefer soft drinks to alcohol.
 - b) When a driver has drunk too much, he is replaced by a designated driver.
 - c) Only teenagers who have never violated a driving law can be designated drivers.
 - d) Each time the group goes out, a different teenager is the designated driver.

PART TWO: WRITING

Choose one topic. Write about either 1 or 2. Minimum length: 100 words.
[0-4 points]

1. Your friend took you and two other teenage friends out for a drive in his/her father's new car. Describe the experience and explain why you will never go out in a car driven by him/her again.
2. Give arguments for and against giving teenagers "conditional" driving licences.