

# Myths of the road dispelled in driving programme

By John Andrews

Take everything you learned in driving school and throw it out the window." So says Gary Magwood of the Labatt's Road Scholarship programme. The programme, started by Magwood with the sponsorship of Labatt's and Ford of Canada, travels around the country to various universities. Although it is billed as an advanced driving course, it teaches the basics of driving and makes the student realize the myths of driving which our elders have taught us.

The course started off with a two hour lecture last Thursday where Magwood said that what most of us were taught in driving school was wrong. The thrust of the course is, says Magwood, "to gain one second before a potential accident and avoid it." Aided by an instructional video, Magwood shows how proper braking techniques and ocular driving (eyesight) tactics can help the driver gain that one valuable, life-saving second.

Magwood, a former Canadian race car champion, and six other race drivers, instructed 24 students per four hour session which is spent almost entirely in the car.

At eight o'clock last Saturday, we all met in McLaughlin College to start our driver re-education. My instructor was Niall Leslie, a former North American production rally champion. With five of us in our Mercury Tracer we headed off to parking lot 3B for our lessons. My three fellow students were as anxious as I was.



One was interested in improving his driving talents, another was a gentleman who will shortly be heading off on a 9,000 mile rally from London, England to China. My final companion works for the Metro Toronto Police and is involved in driver training at the police colleges.

We were taught that the most important part of driving is how you sit in the car. Your arms must be slightly bent and you hold the wheel at the equivalent of 9 and 3 o'clock. If you can turn the wheel half a rotation without letting go of the wheel, you are positioned correctly.

Our first exercise was to prove that you cannot steer with all four wheels locked. There was a skid pad with pylons to mark it off and it was made slick with water and

some non-toxic granular substance. I raced toward the skid pad, accelerating to about 60 km/hr. Once on the skid pad, I slammed on the brakes and turned the steering wheel from side to side with absolutely no effect on the car's dynamics.

The next run was basically the same except that once I had the wheels turned, I let off the brakes and the car suddenly jumped to the left and I had to catch the car and correct it. We then rotated through the car with everyone getting a chance on the pad.

The next exercise was threshold braking. This is by far the best technique for braking as you hit the brakes almost to the point of lockup but keep the wheels rolling. This allows one to steer under heavy braking to escape an

unexpected object.


We sped up to the skid pad and squeezed on the brakes to a safe stop. This type of braking takes some practice, as many students continually locked up one, or all four wheels. However, this is not rocket science and most students had the idea before the lesson ended.

Next was the slalom course. We were to drive through the slalom course at about 20 km/hr, while keeping our hands at the 9 and 3 position. As well, we had to keep our eyes looking down the course as one instructor would raise his hand to tell us to skip a pylon. This was an exercise to make us use our peripheral vision and not focus in on the individual pylons.

The final exercise was accident avoidance on the now very slick skid pad. We entered the skid pad at 40 km/hr, going straight at five pylons. One instructor was on each side of the pylons. One of them would jump out unexpectedly and we had to squeeze the brakes as hard as possible, avoiding lockup, and while still braking, steer around to the open side. We would never know which side the instructor would jump from so our peripheral vision had to be working well so we would not focus on any one object. As Magwood said, "If you focus in on one object, you will hit it. You must always look where you want to go and steer that way." Some students could not grasp this at first and either went through the pylons or towards the instructor. It was a humbling experience for some.

This course was a lot of fun and most importantly, very educational. Each student learned most if not all of the concepts although it was hard for many to forget old habits. Driving school should be like this, as most drivers are ignorant of any of the concepts taught by Magwood. Magwood believes the current driving tests are far too easy and hopes that this course will help teach young people to avoid the myths that our parents were taught.

The Labatt's Road Scholarship will be at the University of Western Ontario this weekend, and Brock University the following weekend. If you are in the area, give this course a try. It will do a wealth of good.




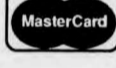



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