

Road to better drivers

By GLEN HUMPHRIES
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A road education program has been partially responsible for reducing a “horrendous” road toll among younger drivers.



STREET SMART: Greg Rappo from Road Safety Education, the group responsible for RYDA, which teaches young people road awareness skills.
Picture: Adam McLean

Road Safety Education has been running the RYDA program for Illawarra high school students for the last decade.

In that time, more than 15,000 Illawarra students have seen for themselves how long it takes to stop a car going 40km/h, 60km/h and 80km/h, the importance of leaving a gap between you and the car in front and other things designed to give them knowledge that could save their lives.

And, according to Road Education Safety’s Greg Rappo, it is helping to do just that.

“Ten years ago too many young people were being killed on the road,” Mr Rappo said.

“Back then the figure was nearly 500 young people aged between 17 and 25 who lost their lives on the road each year.

“Something we forget sometimes is 20 times that number are left with a traumatic injury.

“The figures were horrendous, so over the last 10 years there have been a whole lot of initiatives really focused on young drivers.”

Part of that is the RYDA program as well as changes to licences, alcohol restrictions and limits to the number of passengers.

“The combined initiatives have reduced that road toll by 47 per cent,” he said.

Mr Rappo said the program wasn’t about teaching young people how to drive.

“Young people are generally very good at the skills of driving a car but the big thing is the consequences of their decision and the consequences of risky behaviour,” he said.

“Often in their lives they’re encouraged to take some risks. But the thing about being on the road is, if you take a risk and things go wrong, they go wrong in a very big way.”

It wasn’t just drivers that learned something at a RYDA course. Mr Rappo said passengers can affect what happens inside a car.

“A lot of people don’t realise the significant influence that passengers can have,” he said.

“It’s generally a negative influence unfortunately. A number of young people here may not be driving in the very short future but they’re going to be passengers and we let them realise that what they do in the car can influence the whole safety within that car.”

Editorial for October 21 edition

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EDITORIAL

THE RYDA program has been proven to save lives.

Having its origins from the community-minded organisation Rotary, the RYDA program (or Rotary Youth Driver Awareness program as it was originally known) has helped save the lives of many of our nation’s young drivers.

It's the 10th anniversary of the RYDA program in the Illawarra and on Wednesday the program welcomed its 15,000 high school student for the one-day course.

It's a course which gives students a warts and all view of what can happen on the road if you don't take great care.

Not only in the driver's seat, but also passenger seat.

"Peer pressure from passengers has a major effect on the way young people behave behind the wheel," local Rotarian David Hooper said about the program.



Studies have proven most young people are most at risk of a serious accident in their first six months of independent driving.

Road Safety Education oversee the co-ordination of RYDA and national program director Greg Rappo said "we must do more to ensure our young drivers are better prepared at the beginning of their driving lives".

"We as a community owe it to them," he said.

We as a community can also play a role.

We can be more respectful, forgiving and attentive around our learner and provisional drivers on the road too.

That is a simple an effective way we can play a positive role.

Congratulations to all the Rotarians, police officers and driving instructors who give up their time to be a part of the RYDA program.

Thank you for helping to protect our young ones.