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Commemorating Peter Brock: Improving the skills of young drivers

Better youth driver education was one of the topics Peter Brock advocated for. Being a motor-racing legend, Brock hugely contributed to raise public awareness for safe driving. Sadly, he died in a car accident. "But it's a reason to remind people of what he fought for", John Tserkezidis says. The 49 year old from Carnegie runs a *one-day program for learner permit applicants* at Glen Eira Adult Learning Centre in Ormond.

John has 12 years of experience in instructing and holds a certificate as a driver trainer. His students get to sit in the car where they set up their correct driving position and learn about the controls. "That's when my students get really excited", John explains. But they don't go for a drive. Instead, John focuses on the theory of safe driving: "It's essential that people know and understand the road laws first".

With the *new licensing rules being introduced in July 2007 by VicRoads*, it's only going to get tougher to get a learner permit. Applicants will have to show proof of 120 hours of supervised driving. And people under 21 will have to hold their learner permit for a year instead of six months.

Knowing the road rules by heart is one of the goals John sets for his students. And he teaches them the "10 commandments for drivers". An important rule is "Think before acting". Of course, that sounds simple. But knowing what to think of when you've never driven a car before isn't easy. That's why students learn what to do in a step-by-step process, eg doing a 'head check' after setting the indicator.

John teaches his students how to drive safely in a fun and interactive way. "Learning in a group is much more fun than studying the VicRoads handbook alone at home", he adds. "And unlike in my course, you can't ask the book any questions", John says with a smile.

For the future learner drivers, *the training is all about building confidence*. Nearly everyone is afraid of passing VicRoads' learner permit road knowledge test. "People walk away from the course much more relaxed, because they have a thorough understanding of the road laws", John says. If a student still fails the test, he gets his course fee back.

According to TAC statistics, car accidents remain the number one death cause for young people. Each year 120 are killed and 2,300 are seriously injured involving the 18-25 year old drivers. That's one third of the road toll. But even repairing a car because of an accident can be expensive.

"Safe driving helps you save your life and your car", John says. But there are also humbler benefits for John's students, such as knowing how to do a hook turn properly when they tackle the CBD. Or having learned how to change a tyre and check the oil level.

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