

Learning to Drive the Palm Beach Way

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Published: October 5, 1998

In Palm Beach County, Florida, student drivers are learning to parallel park, cope with yield signs and change lanes safely. And they're learning in style: The budding motorists are tooling around in \$30,000 BMW 323i sports sedans lent by a local dealership.

While the idea of using BMWs to teach teenagers the rules of the road is sure to cause some eyes to roll, there is a serious side to the story. Don Marksz, a Wellington parent whose son died in a crash after being hit by a newly licensed driver, persuaded the Palm Beach County school board last year to restore the hands-on training program, which had been the victim of budget cuts. State Representative Rick Minton of Fort Pierce is drafting legislation that would make behind-the-wheel training mandatory statewide—it's now provided in 53 of the state's 67 school districts—as well as raising the minimum age of a restricted license from 15 to 16.

The four BMWs are being rotated among several of the county's high schools. "We wanted to get involved in the community, and thought this was a great program for the kids," says Vince Ceron, general manager of Braman Motorcars, the dealership that is providing the cars, which have a brake pedal on the teacher's side.

There are no plans to provide the student drivers with training on how to use the integrated six-disc CD players that are standard amenities of the exotic BMW sedans. But at least the 972 students who will train in them will have actual automobiles. The other 4,000 county driver education students will have to settle for simulators for now.