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As the 16-year-old daughter of parents who both work in the motorsports industry, I suppose it was inevitable that at least part of my driver training would take place at a racetrack.

So it was that I found myself at the BeaveRun Driving Academy, just outside of Pittsburgh, Pa., enrolled in the Total Road Skills course.

The course is designed to teach students about basic vehicle dynamics as a hands-on experience. The instructors break down each part of driving with a lecture and in-the-car instruction. Also, the student is able to observe other students in the car and learn from their mistakes. The course covers skid control, accident avoidance, driving skills, and addresses emergency situations.

I was in a class of around 20 students that ranged from other teens, like me, to adults. All attended for various reasons. Some of the teens had to be there because of speeding tickets. Others were compelled to attend by their parents. There were a few who actually wanted to be there.

We started off in the morning getting a general overview of the program. Our instructor used a Powerpoint presentation in order to visually go over what we were going to learn. Instead of trying to give us all the information at once, they broke up the program into sections with driving sessions on the facility's 1.53-mile racetrack in between.

Our first task of the day was the serpentine maneuver. We had to weave through cones that were unevenly spaced. Then we practiced emergency braking with some off-road recovery. My instructor taught us the importance of heel-to-toe braking to avoid locking up the brakes. Instead of just yelling "Stop!" to signify our braking point, he would yell out different objects in the road, like "Baby!" or "Dog!" After all three students in the car got a few laps and understood, we returned to the classroom for our next lecture.

The next thing we focused on was skid control. We learned how to get out of a front and rear skid. They took us out on a big, flat paved area called a skidpad and we drove on a circle of sand where, in some sections, there was more or less traction. The scariest part was that our instructor controlled both pedals and we were only allowed to control the steering. Following all of our spinning, we had a lunch break.

After lunch, we proceeded back to the classroom for a lecture on braking in a turn and swerving to avoid an object in the road. We went back out to the cars and went on track. The object of braking in a turn was to avoid locking the brakes while staying in your lane and coming to a complete stop. The swerve to avoid exercise was pretty difficult. There were two cones set up that you entered through, one cone in the middle that you had to go around, and four cones as a box that you had to stop inside. The tricky part was that you didn't know which direction to go

around the middle cone until the last second. The instructor distracted us until it was absolutely necessary to tell us, to illustrate a real-life situation.

The toughest exercise for me was the reversing. They told us cars aren't meant to go in reverse, and they were right. We started off driving in reverse through the serpentine cones. Then we drove to a second set of cones and did the same thing. We made a three-point turn and continued up the hill to a simulated parking garage. We had to reverse through two cones acting as pillars and into the parking spot. That was very realistic and helpful.

We finished up with the last of our classroom lectures and went on the facility's 0.8-mile karting track to simulate a real on-the-road situation. This final exercise was a combination of everything we had learned. To make it more difficult, there was a car following that acted like a person with road rage. He honked and pulled out in front of us and we had to remain calm and keep going.

This was a wonderful experience and I had a great time. It teaches you how to deal with situations you would encounter on the road, and how to really control a vehicle in emergency situations. I highly recommend this course to any driving teen. It's much more advanced than a local driver's-ed class. I learned a lot, and my confidence level as a driver is much higher now. If more teen drivers would enroll in courses like the Total Road Skills program at BeaverRun Driving Academy, there is no question that many lives could be saved.