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## Teens tackle winter driving

Simulation » Youths are mastering dicey road conditions.

By Melinda Rogers  
The Salt Lake Tribune

Updated: 12/04/2008 09:58:00 AM MST

Dominick Iwaniec's first brush with the hazards of winter driving came a couple of weeks ago, when the almost-licensed 16-year-old hit a snowy patch while driving on Interstate 15 between Salt Lake City and St. George.

The slick road put Iwaniec's few hours of driving experience to the test, he said. He was challenged further on Tuesday when he and 35 other students at Hillcrest High School in Midvale dodged black ice, spun out in the snow and avoided crashing into oncoming traffic.

This time, though, the conditions were created by a "Skid Car" simulator in the high school parking lot. Driving instructor James Burke talked about how snow and ice affect how a car stops, starts and turns as part of a joint initiative offered

by the Utah Highway Patrol and Utah's Teen Driving Task Force. The goal is to teach teens enrolled in driver education how to safely drive a vehicle in bad weather.

"It was almost the same as driving on winter roads. It teaches you a lot," said Iwaniec, after completing a few laps around the parking lot as Burke adjusted large casters attached to the car through a remote control. By raising and lowering the casters, Burke was able to simulate traction on wet roads.

Teenagers are the group most in need of winter driving instruction, said Trooper Mary Kaye Lucas of the Utah Highway Patrol. UHP is bracing itself for the winter season, where hundreds of crashes are attributed to driver error, she said. Accidents in the winter are most commonly caused by drivers following too closely or driving too fast for conditions. Many winter accident victims are newly licensed drivers,

who often hit the road with no practice in driving in tumultuous conditions, Lucas said.

"They almost always will not know what to do," she said of teenagers' first experiences on winter roads.

Lucas said Tuesday's winter driving lesson is a start toward trying to reduce the number of traffic crashes involving teenagers.

Hillcrest High School driver's education teacher Gary Daniels said the driving simulator offers instruction he can't with a textbook.

"The safer they can be, the better off we'll all be," he said of his driving students.

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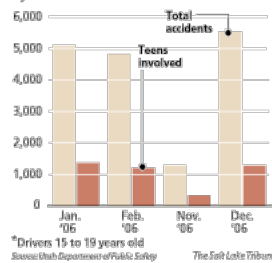
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James Burke, left, shows teenager Alex King how to... (Paul Fraughton / The Salt Lake Tribune)

### Winter traffic mishaps

Teenagers\* were involved in about 25 percent of Utah's winter-month traffic accidents in 2006. Breakdown by month:



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