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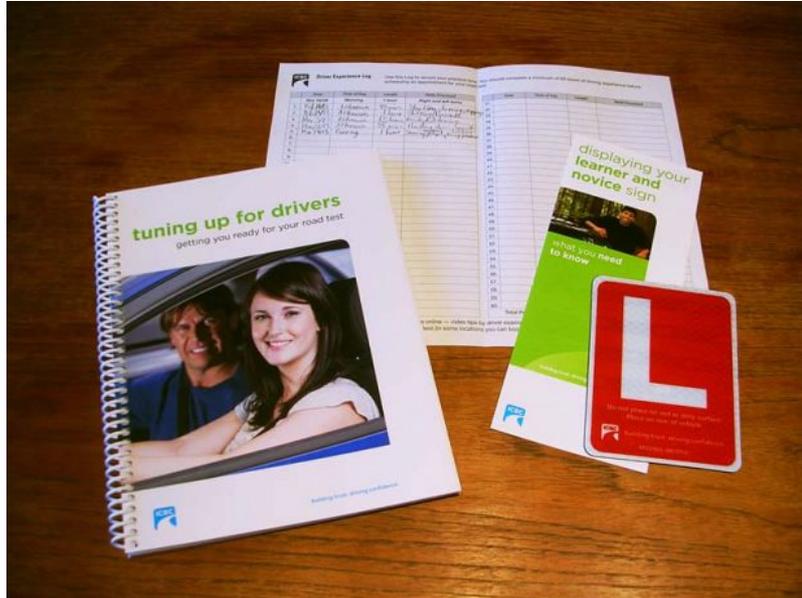
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Article and photos by Steven Bochenek and Simon Hill

This is far more terrifying than any vampire romance or zombie cable show. Central Vancouverite auto writer Simon Hill is teaching his son to drive. Central Torontonian Steven Bochenek is teaching his daughter, who also is getting Young Drivers of Canada lessons. We chronicle the two dads' journeys into aggressively greying hair. Be afraid.

Let's not make this easy, Simon Hill

"Why," I wondered, as I drove like a madman from my son's school to the ICBC driver's licensing centre, "do they make this so difficult?" My son, who'd just turned 16, wanted to get his learner's permit. This actually makes him a bit of a rarity amongst his peers. According to a recent University of Michigan Research Institute study, fewer and fewer of those under 30 are getting their driver's licenses these days (see [The Young and the Car-less](#)).

In Vancouver, where I live, a recent [Translink study](#) showed that only 49.7 percent of youth age 16-24 had a driver's license in 2012. I grew up in Calgary, and I can't remember any friends who didn't have a license by the time they were 17. But I do clearly remember having to hold my son's hand whenever we crossed the road, and that was what seems like only a few months ago.

But I digress. Among all the causes of this decline in youth driving interest – the increasing costs of car ownership and fuel, the increasing proportion of people living in inner cities where transit is excellent and parking a hassle, the increasing youth focus on electronic gadgets over cars – I think ICBC may play its own part here in BC. I'm not just talking about the obvious stuff, the restrictive graduated licensing rules that require you drive with a qualified supervisor for at least the



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first year (which makes clear sense) and now also limit with whom you can drive for two full years after you pass your road test and get your license (which makes somewhat less sense).



The Teen Driving Chronicles. Click image to enlarge

I'm talking about the smaller, simpler things like the fact that you can't take your learner's test after about 3:30 p.m. (the lineups get too long) but school doesn't get out until 3:00 pm, and the licensing centres are only open on school days. Hence my mad dash across town, which isn't exactly the sort of driving example I wanted to set.

After slipping in under the wire (we'd missed the official cutoff and had to sweet-talk the clerk) my son aced the test in less than one-third of the expected time, so apparently he knows what a stop sign looks like and what it means when you have a broken yellow line on your side of the road. But he always was a quick study when it comes to tests, and really that was the easy part, because we live in the heart of the city, with busy traffic all around, and our family car is standard-shift mid-90's BMW with a heavy clutch.



The Teen Driving Chronicles. Click image to enlarge

lessons, school field trips and so on, and so on. Especially since unlike in Ontario (or Alberta for that matter, where I took lessons in my youth to save on insurance) there's no financial payback in BC, just a six-month reduction in your 24-month novice driver restrictions.

No, for my son, the qualified supervisor is me. And from the first moment he got behind the wheel it was clear we both had lots to learn. Welcome to the jungle, kid...

Teaching My Daughter to Drive (And Myself to Breathe), Steven Bochenek

I'm not about to give up my weekly soapbox and start shilling for Young Drivers of Canada (YDC) but I have to say they teach our children well.

J is our second daughter to take YDC's comprehensive in-classroom and in-car training programs and, yes, her sister is still alive and free of any driving infractions. The courses aren't cheap, but the instruction is invaluable and ultimately saves us money on insurance.¹

The students who wish to pass their driving test after the lessons need to practice with a qualified driver. Me.

I swear it was just twenty minutes ago when I was teaching J to ride a bike. She took to it like a duck to paté. Caught up in the moment, she'd shoot up the lane behind our Riverdale house, loving her first taste of freedom courtesy of her branded 'Monkey Coaster'. (Cervélo, eat your heart out.) I recall it terrified me because jerks looking for shortcuts would cut down the lane at sickening speeds. What chance they'd even notice, never mind stop for a cycling four-year-old?

Fast-forward twelve years and multiply that anxiety because the jerks are ubiquitous.

J completed the practical YDC classes in January. But ask any overweight gym teacher: there's a wide chasm between the theoretical and the practical; knowledge and capability aren't the same. Getting her learner's permit through an online quiz that could double as a vetting process for insanity ("At a stop sign, you should: a) stop b) slow, sound horn and proceed cautiously c) park d) false e) yellow f) all of the above.") is leaps and bounds away from actually *driving* – especially in the city.

At the time of writing, April 10, J has finished four of six in-car YDC lessons. She spreads two weeks between each and we practice in our second car, an automatic. Neither she nor her sister, nor their mother, wanted to learn stick in the city. (Kudos to Simon, this article's co-writer, for his gumption.)



The Teen Driving Chronicles. Click image to enlarge

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1. [The Teen Driving Chronicles, Part 1](#)

Two of our contributors are teaching their teenagers to drive, and, well, who doesn't love watching a good horror show?

2. [Car vs. Moose](#)

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She reports how her instructor is an eminently calm soul who never raises his voice. He purrs play-by-play comments in a style that eases tension: "You should have signaled before merging", "The accelerator's the one on the right", or "You can't reverse into a bus; instead, brake and shift into drive."

The instruction in our first sessions lacked such mellow polish.



The Teen Driving Chronicles. Click image to enlarge

Not because she doesn't know what she's doing. It's me: in the GTA we groom some of history's stupidest drivers. Even the most ardent Toronto-hater would grant us that flaccid 'world-class' epithet this once.

But when you teach, you also learn. It's a paradox explaining and re-explaining something so someone else understands it, you both learn. Her driving's improved quickly and, with yogic breathing exercises, I'm coming along, too.

At first, I'd take her out on weekends and evenings when there was far less traffic. Even then, we'd still find *cul de sacs* to practice in, so I could see everything approaching.

Different as it is, the theory was drilled into her and taught her well. She understood where to position us to parallel park. She knew the default speed on city roads when no signs are visible. And she displayed a situational awareness you wouldn't expect in a generation raised in the glow of computer screens.

Then this morning during rush hour, she drove to school, 5 km across mid-town Toronto, from the Annex to Lawrence Park. You'd have to visit Montreal during Grand Prix weekend to find more bad more roadmates in one trip. (Think that's exaggeration? Just two days ago, police blitzed the GTA in an annual spring inspection of commercial vehicles. Over the past four years, 65 percent of randomly flagged vehicles failed! This year nearly half were immediately pulled from the road. More gob-smacking still, of the tow trucks called, four failed the inspection themselves!² So is my condition neurosis or just awareness?)



The Teen Driving Chronicles. Click image to enlarge

It was good driving on J's part and better therapy for my neuroses. She calmly looked and signaled before changing lanes. Whenever someone else contravened the rules of the road, she mentioned it but, with Zen placidity, let it go and gave the contravener way.

Footnotes:

¹ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-drive/car-tips/its-covered/sex-age-and-auto-insurance/article1724311/>

² <http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/Toronto/ID/2374097060/>

Here are some common mistakes drivers make, which you may not even know are against the law.

- Unless you're the front car at a stoplight, you may not proceed with a left turn on an amber. From even second in line, yellow equals red.
- Same goes for crossing on amber, provided you can stop safely. Otherwise you 'may proceed with caution'.
- Pedestrians still have right of way, technically, though the saner of us ceded it sometime in the '80s. When a ped stepped into the road ahead of us, mid-block, she stopped and waited for him to cross. Given the surprise on his face, he'd been preparing for *after* we passed. Even the stressed private school mom honking behind us with the hand not holding her cell phone didn't shake J. "I have to stop for pedestrians," J said. "It's my job."

And in case you're wondering about the aforementioned quiz? At a stop sign, you're supposed to come to a complete halt.



The Teen Driving Chronicles. Click image to enlarge

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By **Steven Bochenek**

About StevenBochenek

Despite being a member of the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada and a member of its house band, the Troubadours, Steven is a veteran marketing writer who came to writing about cars almost by, umm, accident.

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