

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS: Drivers Ed Goes 'Green'



California teen Haley Jacoby recently completed driver's training at Drivers Ed Direct, a small firm in Los Angeles that exclusively uses hybrid vehicles. Not only is Jacoby positively giddy about learning how to drive, she's excited about the vehicle she trained in as well.

"I absolutely love the Escape Hybrid," Jacoby said. "Not only is it a great car to drive and be in, the fact that it's a hybrid just makes me smile."

Jacoby added that she's recommending the Escape Hybrid to friends and family and hopes to some day soon be driving one herself.

"Everybody remembers the car they learned to drive in," said Usha Raghavachari, Ford Escape marketing manager. "It's great that kids like Haley can learn critical driving skills and about environmental responsibility on one of the most innovative vehicles Ford has ever built."

The popularity of hybrid vehicles in southern California is one of the keys to Drivers Ed Direct's success since it launched in June 2005, said Jimmy Leach, the company's president.

"Interest is definitely growing," Leach said. "Our instructors teach kids not only how to drive safely and responsibly but also how they can take a proactive role in reducing oil consumption and greenhouse gases."

By training in hybrids, Drivers Ed Direct students complete thousands of miles of training but use less fuel and create fewer carbon emissions than the non-hybrid vehicles used by other drivers' education services.

"By learning their driving skills in a hybrid they're more likely to want to buy and drive a hybrid," Leach added.

As an alternative to the standard driving school formula of old cars, impersonal classrooms and cookie cutter instruction, Drivers Ed Direct exclusively uses hybrids to teach driving techniques. Drivers Ed Direct offers its students a choice between Escape Hybrid and Toyota Prius, encouraging students from "SUV families" to drive the Escape Hybrid for at least a portion of their training.

"As long as SUVs remain popular it's important for young drivers to understand and master safe driving techniques that are appropriate for SUVs," Leach said. "The Escape Hybrid is a terrific SUV to train in, but unlike most SUVs it's a fuel efficient 'green' vehicle."

In addition to "behind the wheel" training, Drivers Ed Direct also offers Web-based drivers training in Florida and Nevada and offers drivers ed-related products such as training DVDs nationwide. For more information, visit www.driverseddirect.com.