

ROADKING

High Octane

Sign On

A mom comes up with a way to alert motorists that a teen driver is on the road



Any parent who has spent time in the passenger seat, guiding their teenage child through driving lessons, knows the fear of letting a novice driver out on the road. Getting a license may be easy, but learning the actual rules of the road takes experience. How do you protect your child? For that matter, how do you protect yourself from everybody else's teenager getting behind the wheel?

A mother in Michigan came up with a solution. The Rookie Driver magnet attaches to the back of the car and alerts fellow drivers that they are sharing the road with a beginner.

Corinne Fortenbacher worked with her 15-year-old son Austin on the wording and design. "After Austin got his learner's permit at the license bureau, naturally he wanted to drive home," Fortenbacher recalls. "As we were going through a construction area, and he was doing the posted speed limit of 25 mph, a semi came up behind us and he freaked out a little and slowed down. The trucker beeped at him, and then he got even more nervous and looked around instead of keeping his eyes on the road."

Back home, rattled but safe, the two discussed the incident, realizing that the truck driver would have acted differently if he had known that Austin was a novice driver. They looked for some kind of sign that would alert other motorists, but Austin instantly rejected the "Student Driver" yellow-and-black stickers available as embarrassing. So, after consulting with his friends on wording and design, the Fortenbachers came up with the Rookie Driver magnet. (www.rookiedriverintraining.com)

The concern about teenage drivers is based on fact. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, new teen drivers have a crash rate that is five times the rate for 18-year-old drivers, due to their inexperience behind the wheel. Since creating and using the magnet, both Austin and his mother have noticed its effect on other drivers. "One day recently I was changing lanes, and I had plenty of room, but the woman I was moving in front of held back and gave me a lot of space," Fortenbacher says. "I didn't know why, and then I remembered that Austin was driving the car before me. The Rookie Driver sign was still on the car."