

Learning to drive still a challenge

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"What do you notice about this range?" asked Baldoni during a break. "There are no stop signs or yield signs. I don't know why we don't have them. They're sure needed."

A STUDENT, John Suh, leaned against Harrison's brown brick wall, waiting to take his final exam on the range.

"I think I could do without the classroom and the range," said the 16-year-old Farmington High junior-to-be. "They should devote more time to the on-the-road part. You just don't get the real experience of the road in a book or on a range."

Suh is a busy young man this summer. He's taking two courses — government (7:45-9:45 a.m.) and social studies (10:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.) — in addition to drivers' ed (12:30-2:30 p.m.). "Then I go home and sleep," he said.

Debbie Lang, a 15-year-old Harrison student, agreed with Suh's assessment of the drivers' training course.

"It's boring on the range, but it's great on the road," she said. "There's more competition on the road. You're out there competing with the other drivers."

On the other side of the school, instructor Steve Dollaway prepares to take three students on the road in a new Buick. He'll take them on the expressways and the subdivision streets as well as into Detroit.

Most of the young drivers are careful and courteous on the highway, according to Dollaway and the other instructors. Still, there are incidents.

"The scariest thing that ever happened to me was when we almost went into Orchard Lake," he said, explaining that he meant the body of water, not the road. "A girl saw a truck coming and panicked."

"But this is a good summer job," said Dollaway, a substitute physical education teacher in Farmington, "and it pays well — \$11 an hour when you're on the road."

DOLLAWAY AND most other driv-

ing instructors are limited to six hours a day, no matter what job they're performing.

"Farmington is very safety-conscious," Staffej said. "They don't allow an instructor to work more than six hours a day, especially the on-the-road people."

One thing the instructors don't have to worry about is teaching the students the intricacies of a standard transmission. The district's fleet of 27 cars all have automatic transmissions.

"I think it (shifting gears) should be taught," Staffej said, "but it was taking too much time."

Contrary to popular belief, the drivers' education cars are not donated free of charge by area dealerships, although that used to be the case.

In Farmington, the cars are leased at the rate of \$4 a day per car from local dealerships. The district provides the gasoline.

"I have no figures on how much gas we use," said Don Howell, the district's director of community services and

federal projects, "but the road cars probably use \$10 worth a day."

THE STATE used to pay for a big chunk of the cost of teaching the youngsters to drive. This year, according to Howell, the state is paying about \$45 per student, or about 50 percent of the cost.

"The revenue is derived from license fees, but I guess that was down a little this year."

Back outside Harrison, a student waits for his final exam on the range. "They're pretty strict about attendance," he said. "Miss one class and you're out."

Well, they're not quite that strict. "It depends on the instructor and the reason for the absence," Staffej said. "We might be a little more lenient for, say, the funeral of a grandparent than we would for a trip to Cedar Point."

Tomorrow's drivers will be looking forward to July 20. That's the day the course ends and their real summer vacation begins.

Health officials upset

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THE HILL proposes that spending requests by all the hospitals in Michigan be compared to each other instead of on an individual basis.

The annual average of spending by Michigan hospitals for the past five years is between \$300 million and \$350 million, according to state officials.

If the bill passes, Michigan hospitals, as a whole,

would not be allowed to spend more than approximately \$300 million yearly. The state Office of Health and Medical Affairs would determine what the limit is each year.

The Michigan Hospital Association opposes the legislation because it believes the certificate-of-need program is effective in curtailing unnecessary expenditures, Manninen said.

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