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By Katherine Kapos The Salt Lake Tribune

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Taylorsville - The new driver education teacher in the Granite School District is a monster.

Actually, students have nothing to fear. But they should be prepared for crashed cones, 360-degree turns and wobbly knees.

That is because the Skid Monster simulates some nasty road and weather conditions, giving students a change to practice control in the safety of their school's driver education course.

Granite is the first district in Utah to purchase the Skid Monster, the brainchild of Fred Mottola, executive director of The National Institute For Driver Behavior in Connecticut.

Mottola and three other instructors were at Taylorsville High School this week training driver education teachers from all nine of Granite District's high school how to use the device.

"The monster" is used in many other states, Mottola said.

One Skid Monster cost the district \$5,000. It will be rotated among the high schools so that all 5,000 students who take driver ed this year will get to practice with the monster.

The Skid Monster replaces the rear tires of a student driver car with two, 13-inch aircraft tires on casters.

Mottola said while the car may be traveling only 15 or 20 miles per hour, the casters simulate a situation at four times that speed.

So when an instructor flips a switch on the front passenger side, students will understand what will happen if they take a curve in the road too fast.

Long before students ever drive Interstate 15 in a winter snowstorm, the Skid Monster will show them how it feels to hit a patch of ice and have to correct a fishtailing car.

Besides understanding speed and following distances, students are taught about "targeting," or keeping their eyes on the place in the road where they want their car to end up.

For Steve Cramblitt, Granite driver education curriculum supervisor, the Skid Monster is all about creating better drivers and preventing accidents.

"It's as realistic as you can get" in a safe environment, he said Thursday.

Driver-education teachers are just as excited.

"It will be really good for our kids," said Dan Leatherwood, Taylorsville High School instructor. "This compounds any mistakes they make and helps them learn how to avoid that in the future."