

Use 'em or Lose 'em

- **Intensive Driving Course Hones Operators' Road Skills**

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Jan. 2, 2003) Use 'em or lose 'em! That's what LAPD's defensive driving experts say can happen when Metro Bus operators don't regularly use their full range of driving skills.

Driving skills are "perishable" and can deteriorate, says Capt. Kenneth Garner of LAPD's Transit Bus Division. "MTA statistics show there's a spike in accidents at the three-year mark of an operator's career."

Even more dangerous – professional drivers can become overconfident of their abilities and become too aggressive on the road.

During a weekend of intensive instruction last month, a select group of operators – 15 from West Hollywood Division 7 and one from Venice Division 6 – worked with instructors from LAPD's Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC) to hone their behind-the-wheel skills on an obstacle course set up in a remote corner of Van Nuys Airport.

They also participated in classroom sessions covering vehicle control techniques, road position, proper steering and clearance, throttling and braking, vehicle dynamics and speed judgment, and California vehicle codes.

Refreshing their skills

"Our goals were to provide knowledge the operators could use behind the wheel and help them overcome bad driving habits," says Sgt. Ron Moen, officer in charge of EVOC. "We wanted to refresh their skills and make them better drivers."

General Manager Tracy Daly, who arranged for Westside/Central sector employees to participate in the weekend event, says MTA is looking closely at the type of training provided by LAPD. Some elements may be incorporated into instruction for beginning operators and into refresher courses for experienced operators.

"This is all aimed at reducing accidents and keeping everyone safer," she says. "We want our passengers to know they're in good hands, but when a bus gets into an accident,

PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD



General Manager Tracy Daly was on hand to congratulate obstacle course winners, from left, Operator Phil Winston, second place; Operator O. Wendell Price, first place; and Operator Reginald Ables, third place.



Buses line up for the timed obstacle course run.



TOS Don Delay of Operations Central Instruction keeps a sharp eye as an operator negotiates a tight turn on "The Snail Shell" obstacle course.



General Manager Tracy Daly, LAPD Sgt. Ron

it's a lot more than just our passengers who are involved."

To participate in the driving course, Division 7 Assistant Transportation Manager Derrick Mahome gathered a group of operators whose experience ranged from less than a year to 22 years in the seat. He also worked with LAPD instructors to set up a series of driving problems.

Similar to MTA's annual Bus Rodeo, the courses included a serpentine run, a parallel parking exercise and "The Snail Shell," a circular run that required the operator to make a 360-degree turn, back out of the circle and make a precision stop.

'Having a good time'

"We're having a good time out here," Operator Phil Winston said at one point the second afternoon. "I've very seldom backed up a bus. I've gained some new skills on how to do that."

Operator Paula Richardson, who has 13 years' experience, agreed. "It was a good experience. It's good to be prepared."

Instructors from MTA's Operations Central Instruction supervised the operators during their obstacle course runs. They watched to see whether the operators made the correct turns and stops without knocking over cones. They also judged the weekend's final event, a timed run of all the obstacles.

Although the purpose of the training was to sharpen skills, the 16 operators also were competing for trophies in the timed run.

Taking top honors was Division 7 Operator O. Wendell Price. His colleague, Operator Phil Winston, placed second, while Division 6 Operator Reginald Ables placed third.

Operator Robert Jenkins, 17 years on the job, may have summed up the weekend best. "Everybody should walk away from this training having learned something. If everybody here gets something out of this training, we'll see a decrease in accidents."

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Moen and Division 7 Assistant Transportation Manager Derrick Mahome discuss the training.



Division 7 Operator Jon Linton is ready to start his timed run with Officer Marc Hemsworth of LAPD's Emergency Vehicle Operations Course.



Division 7 Assistant Transportation Manager Derrick Mahome reviews the training course to General Manager Tracy Daly.

Also participating in operator training

were Marcial Mijangos, Deborah Johnson, Robert Beard, Lawrence E. Bell, Lyndon Bailey, Jon Linton, Jerome Watkins, Mark Roat, Michael Korp, Ranulfo Yanez and Leticia Sifuentes. Division 7 instructors were Anthony Salcido, Elva Garibaldi-Dukes and Phillip Samuels. Instructors from OCI were Lee Quick and Don Delay.