

## BEHIND THE WHEEL: DRIVING DOWN THE STATISTICS

*Holding a driver's licence comes with huge responsibility. But, are we doing enough to prepare our young drivers for the journey ahead? Thankfully, some community members are on the safety mission of a lifetime. WORDS: Linda Hooper.*

**R**ebbecca Watson of Buderim is excited. But she admits to being “nervous and scared” too. She turned 16 on July 10 and on the same day, she obtained her learner's licence, the key to her future independence and freedom.

Sadly, the unfortunate reality of becoming a motorist comes with potentially life-altering risks. As of June, there had been 1329 people killed on Australian roads in the past 12 months.

Thankfully, many people and organisations have got Rebecca's back to ensure she has a positive start to her driving journey.

There's her mum, Bronwyn, who is teaching her how to drive. Rebecca says her mum is “calm, patient and a very good driver”.

Soon, she will also have lessons with a professional driving instructor.

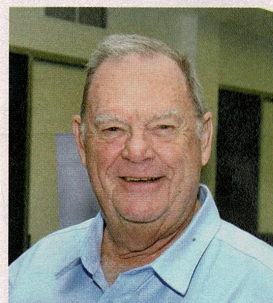
Then there are Rotarians like Geoff Leddy of the Caloundra Pacific Rotary

Club, a retired civil engineer and former president of the RACQ, who has spent hundreds of hours over the years volunteering for Ryda, a national road safety education program for youth.

The interactive program, delivered in partnership with Road Safety Education, was started by Sydney Rotarians after four young men were killed when their car veered to the wrong side of the road in Dural. The driver was 17 and had only held his licence for three weeks.

Then there are also people like the Acting Officer in Charge of the Sunshine Coast Highway Patrol, Mark Johnson, and his colleagues who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep not only young drivers, but all motorists, safe behind the wheel.

In 2024, 302 people lost their lives in Queensland and thousands more were seriously injured. Young drivers represent around 13 per cent of Queensland's licence-holders, yet are



Geoff Leddy

involved in 27 per cent of road deaths.

Rotary Club members at Caloundra Pacific, Caloundra, Glasshouse Mountains, Maleny, Nambour, Mooloolaba and Noosa are all working hard to reduce this grim statistic.

Since it was introduced on the Sunshine Coast in 2009, the Ryda program has been delivered to more

than 20,000 school students.

In addition to online and classroom learning, the program includes a one-day practical workshop. One of the venues is the Sunshine Coast Turf Club, with students being transported there in buses for a half-day course comprising six interactive sessions.

The sessions include Drive So Others Survive, which looks at the road from the perspective of other road users.

There is also a reflective session, which shows how personality impacts risk on the road, a road choices workshop, which is led by local police, and another that focuses on speed and coming to a stop.

“This is the session the students really love,” Geoff says.

“We have a driving school car that travels at 40 kilometres per hour, 60 kilometres per hour and 80 kilometres per hour, and we show them how long it