

Students awarded for safety

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SUPERIOR – Two Superior High School students were routinely driving home from golf practice on I-90 in late April when the vehicle lost control and rolled over.

Taryn Ververis and Sierra Bruning were lucky enough to escape with minor injuries, something that may not have happened if both weren't properly wearing their seat belts.

The students were rewarded at the Old Schoolhouse Rock Car Show in Superior on June 6, not for the crash, but for the fact that both chose to wear seat belts.

The Saved By the Belt Award program partners Buckle-Up Montana, AAA and the Montana Highway Patrol to promote safe driving and the proper usage of seat belts.

“The nominees and award recipients have been involved in what would have been fatal or severe debilitating crashes,” said Kaelyn Kelly, AAA spokesperson.

Kelly said the Saved by the Belt Award is intended to send a key message about seat belts and wearing them in Montana, which has many severe car crashes. The concern is that people think they don't have to wear them.

“Some drivers feel like they don't want the state telling them what to do,” said Juli Balenger, Buckle-Up Montana coordinator for Mineral County. “Some also feel they are already a good driver and they don't have to wear it.”

The Saved by the Belt program was established by Buckle-Up Montana because of the amount of fatality or injury accidents in the state. Parents who don't properly use child safety seats were also targeted.

AAA and Buckle-Up Montana hosted a slew of vehicle safety awareness programs at this year's car show.

Some were shown the proper posture when sitting behind the wheel. Car seats were also given out, as were instructions on proper use, all of which happened at the Superior firehouse.



Seat Belt

Trooper Steve Gaston, Taryn Ververis, Sierra Bruning and Buckle-Up Montana Coordinator Juli Balenger show off the student's Saved By the Belt Awards.

“Anyone can be nominated anytime periodically throughout the year,” Kelly said. “Each county localizes their presentations.”

Ververis and Bruning were also presented with a free year of AAA membership, which can be used when they are allowed to drive again.

Balenger said typically only the driver is rewarded in the Saved by the Belt presentation. In this situation, both were honored because they are young drivers and made the right choice by wearing their seat belts.

“We just want to reward them for demonstrating good driving behavior by wearing a seat belt and following what is a simple procedure,” Kelly said.

Trooper Steve Gaston was on the scene when the crash occurred. Bruning was cited for the accident since she was driving and was required to attend Alive at 25, a driving class offered by the Mineral County Justice Court.

“It goes to show you how quick something like this can happen even when you are doing the speed limit,” Gaston said.

Gaston said it’s hard to gauge exactly how many Mineral County teenagers are involved in major accidents along the interstate mainly because there are a lot of travelers passing through the area who also account for some.

“Everyone should keep in mind that seat belts are instrumental in not just saving lives, but also keep you in the proper position while driving,” Kelly said.