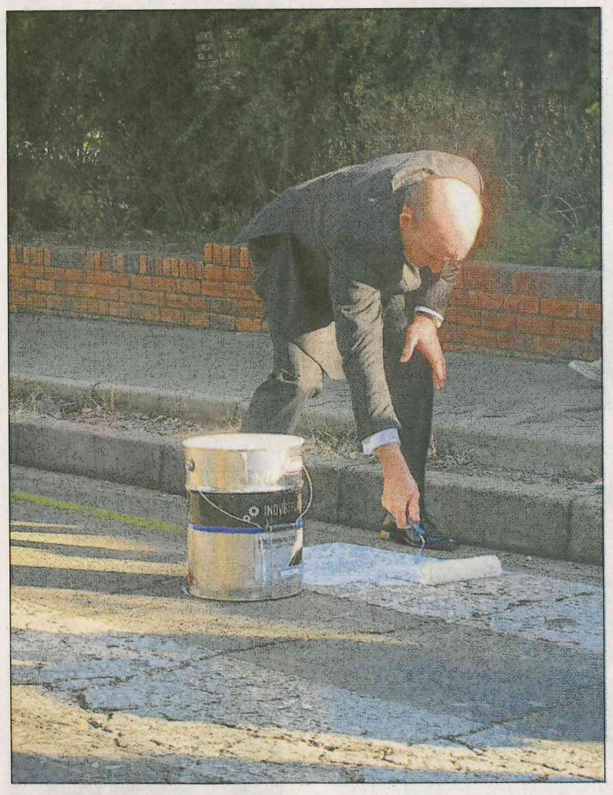
Motor News

ROAD SAFETY

More than 561,000 pupils have been taught about road safety by Imperial's Scholar Patrol project, writes **Mark Smyth**

Teaching the children well



Mark Lamberti, CEO of Imperial, helps paint a zebra crossing outside Craighall Primary School in Johannesburg.

UNFORTUNATELY the situation on the roads of SA is getting worse. The government and its various agencies host events and press conferences to promise this and that plan, but the reality is that as traffic volumes increase and law enforcement fails to do its job properly, people are going to continue to be injured and killed on our roads.

Some of the most vulnerable road users are our children, with the 2009 Medical Research Council Injury Mortality Survey stating that 741 children under the age of five died in road traffic incidents. Recent legislation requiring all children under three years of age to be in a car seat is a great step forward. It should have been introduced years ago, of course, and again the question arises of whether it will be properly enforced.

However, many children killed on our roads are not even in vehicles. They are pedestrians, often walking to and from school.

As we have seen recently with the announcement that BMW and Nissan are to implement their own electric vehicle charging infrastructure after becoming frustrated with the government's failure to fulfil its promises in this regard, the private sector is also stepping in to help save the lives of road users, including children.

Three years ago, the Imperial Group undertook a project to implement Scholar Patrols in schools. It recreates the original idea of the lollipop lady who used to stop traffic outside a school and let children cross. Now though, it is the children who hold the lollipop, helping their fellow pupils enter the school gates safely.

So far Imperial and its partners, which does include the Department of Education and metro police, have handed over scholar patrol kits to 650 schools around SA, reaching over 561,000 learners.

The latest school to benefit from the project is Craighall Primary in Johannesburg. On arrival I found an already very organised system in place that has been implemented by the school. Barriers blocked each end of the road, turning the road in front of the school into a one-way street. Cars sat in single file patiently waiting their turn to drop children off outside the gates and security guards managed the traffic with a level of efficiency that would shame many a metro police officer.

Every time a scholar patrol kit is handed over, the school assembles for a talk on road safety, led by one of the most passionate road safety advocates I have ever met, Tebogo Makofane of the organisation Active Education, which administers the entire project for Imperial. Makofane talks, sings and gets the school involved and one can only hope that when the children go home at the end of the day they demand that their parents obey the rules of the road. The passion for road safety certainly seemed to have been instilled in the children on that day.

Craighall Primary children learn about road safety. Tebogo Makofane of Active Education has a unique way of getting children excited about safety,

Niki Cronje, group marketing head at Imperiai, who has lead the Scholar Patrol Improvement Project for the past three years, adds: "The project is an initiative that is close to my heart, as I too have children who use the roads everyday, and it is vital for me to ensure that the project makes a difference to their safety and every single community it reaches."

Also present at the handover was Mark Lamberti, Imperial Group CE. "We are the biggest transporter in the country apart from Transnet," he said. "Road safety is logical for us and we are kind of fanatical about it.

"SA's road accident rate is among the highest in the world and we see the education of children on road safety an important contributor to reducing this. The awareness of road safety brought about by the exposure to scholar patrol at an early age can only benefit our older road users and we remain committed to this educational process," said Lamberti.

Imperial already has the iPledge campaign in operation but taking this project to schools adds a new dimension, one which can save the lives of children.

Lamberti not only made a passionate speech to the children, but even got involved in painting a new pedestrian crossing outside of the school.

It is great that the organisation is involved at this level, but one cannot but be dismayed at the fact that the private sector has to paint a zebra crossing outside of a school instead of the government and municipal organisations that are actually tasked to manage this simple but major contributor to road safety.

Road safety should be a passion for everyone, but getting the message to children means that not only is their level of awareness raised, but they can pass on their desire for safer roads to those around them.

Every day we see parents who do not strap their children into their seatbelts, parents who allow kids to stand between the seats and parents carrying toddlers on their laps.

If the children themselves start taking responsibility for their safety and even force their parents to take safety more seriously, then our children will not only be safer but they could well become major contributors to reducing the terrible death toll.

FUTURE MODELS

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