

ECONOMIST&SUN/TRIBUNE
SPORTS
& recreation



OFF THE BEATEN

STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

At Jeep College students choose their textbook from a fleet of 10 Liberty, Grand Cherokees and TJ Jeeps to navigate a carefully laid-out course that features approximately two kilometres of trails through forest, hills and knolls.

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

There are no fraternity houses, keggers or homecoming week ends.

At this college, grades mean nothing. The entrance exam has but two prerequisites — a valid driver's licence and a willingness to drive the house vehicle.

That's just the way it is at Jeep College, where students may choose their textbook from a fleet of 10 Liberty, Grand Cherokees and TJ Jeeps to navigate a carefully laid-out course that features approximately two kilometres of trails through forest, hills and knolls, logs, rutted trails and treacherous rocks.

Not to be confused with Jeep Jamborees and Camp Jeep, mobile circuits across North America geared to family-oriented and weekend outings, Jeep College is the only permanent facility of its kind in North America. It is an opportunity, in essence, to get a feel for how these vehicles handle.

Still, a visit to Jeep College is anything but a free ticket to race around the course like a bat out of hell. Seldom does the needle get much above rolling

speed, except to gather momentum to conquer a hill.

"There's always that stereotype that it's a certain type of person, but there is a lot of finesse involved," said Paul Tanchak, chief instructor at the facility since it opened in October 1999. "We educate people to the fact that it's actually an elegant process."

Elegant indeed. The program, which is free of charge, is a test of patience and thought combined with driving skills to navigate hazards and sharp turns. Still, there's nothing quite like the feeling of staring the hood of your vehicle in the eye at the crest of a hill.

"The idea is to introduce people to proper and safe driving and to get through the course safely, in case they do decide to do some off-roading or join a four-wheeler club in the future," Tanchak said. "People don't know or appreciate what their Jeep is capable of and this gives them an opportunity to find out. They don't get into too extreme situations, but it's still interesting."

Some days there's a little slippin' and slidin' if recent rains have created a slick track. After a prolonged dry spell, those areas are as likely to become dusty, rut-

ted hazards and a completely different challenge.

Not that any of the hazards pose problems for the Daimler Chrysler descendants of the Willys Overland prototype originally produced for use by the United States military during the Second World War.

Class begins with a brief lecture from Tanchak, touching on a variety of topics from safety to technique. Finer details such as hand positioning — hands at 9 and 3 o'clock, thumbs upright and outside the steering wheel — to vehicle capabilities and plain old common sense are also noted. And, of course, the Jeep doesn't move until the seat-belt is fastened.

From the classroom, it's off to Jeep 101, a scaled-down introductory practice course located near the entrance to the facility and containing the basic hazards encountered on the off-road course.

First is a steep hill climb and descent, where drivers get a feel for the powers of brake compression or engine idle, perhaps the key element of

More to sport than sequins, smiles

Reporter laces up to skate with Iced Energy team



Anne Howland

Baggy sweatpants, fleece jacket liberally sprinkled with dog hair and clunky plastic skates with enough rust on the blades to freeze the Tin Man for eternity.

It was my first practice with the Iced Energy synchronized skating club and I hoped I would pass muster.

Arriving at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex, the 19 members of the masters team, amateur skaters age 25 to 55, welcomed me warmly, exchanged raised eyebrows and whisked me off to the change room.

Minutes later, I emerged transformed. Shiny spandex tights flowed smoothly down my legs and neatly over my skate tops to fasten under the boots. A diaphanous black skirt floated around my thighs and my purple jacket was perfectly complemented by ochre chenille gloves.

I stood rinkside, one skate poised above the smooth, glassy surface. I pictured myself swooping and gliding like a swallow. I pushed off.

"D'oh! Those rusty blades. I stuck to the ice like a bug on flypaper."

My swoop reduced to a sputter, I lurched around the rink, a mere stone in the stream for my Iced Energy teammates.

"Hey, I thought you said you were a novice," I objected, as one woman swooshed by, backwards, no less.

"I am," she waved cheerily.

Then, the inevitable. I teetered, I tottered, my arms

Been There, Done That

flailed like a windmill and oomph! I was down. A hand appeared to hoist me up and I brushed off my spandex with my dainty gloves. At least I looked good.

But synchronized skating is about more than sequins and smiles. It's hard work. The masters team practises once a week September to April. Our session started with a 45-minute, dry-land warm-up.

Sneakers squeaking, the group, led by coach Allie Biederman, executed chasses, cross-cuts and Mohawks, chanting 1-2-3, 4-5-6 like ballroom dancers.

I was impressed with the assortment of ages and body types, all comfortable in their clingy outfits. The average age is 40, said member Lottie Stone, 18 women and one man from a variety of professions.

But you have to know skating backwards and forwards, edges and turns.

The masters team, one of six age divisions under the Iced Energy umbrella, competes throughout southern Ontario and is going for a third provincial title this year. Members come from all over

See JEEP, page 31.

See CINDERELLA, page 31.

Fall Sale

6 MONTHS
NO INTEREST
NO PAYMENTS
NO FEES



Visit our Showroom

Sheraton
ANTIQUES
REFINISHED BEYOND COMPARE

158 MAIN STREET, UNIONVILLE
(905) 474-9677

This carved oak Cromwellian style dining room suite includes 6 carved chairs with bulbous legs and burl backs, carved sideboard, matching closed court cupboard and a refectory style table with 2 draw end leaves.

Was \$9,995 Sale Price **\$8,995**
plus Delivery & Taxes