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Middletown freshman wins regional drive safe PSA contest

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Imagine if cars could talk. A new smart car brags about its features to an older, more humble vehicle. The smart car travels fast, has the latest technology and can even drive itself — all features that escape the older model.

As they talk, a tow truck passes by carrying a similar new car. This one was damaged in a crash. As a mother and daughter hop into the older car, it says to its boastful companion, "I may not be a smart car, but I have a smart driver."

That was the scene in Middletown High School freshman Kaylee Franklin's pitch to The National Road Safety Foundation — a nonprofit that promotes safe driving — for its Drive Safe D.C. Public Service Announcement Contest. Entrants were tasked with creating an announcement to warn against speeding, which is a factor in 26 percent of fatal crashes across the country, killing about 9,000 people annually, according to the foundation.



Franklin (Courtesy photo)

Franklin's first-place submission beat out dozens of teen competitors in the Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. area, according to spokesman David Reich.

For her effort, Franklin will get to turn her idea into an actual PSA, with the help of Emmy Award-winning producer and director Alan Weiss. She also wins a \$2,000 scholarship toward college.

At 14 years old, Franklin isn't driving yet. But when she does, she suspects the other drivers will be the scariest thing on the road.

"You can only control what you're doing in the car," she said, not the actions of others.

In the age of smart cars, Franklin wanted to convey in her PSA that even the newest or fanciest vehicle can't keep a driver from crashing if they aren't taking steps to drive safely.

"Kaylee's message will help make people think about their behavior when they get behind the wheel," Michelle Anderson of The National Road Safety Foundation said in a statement.

"It shows that even as today's cars have many great features to help keep us safe, the ultimate safety feature is a safe driver," Washington Auto Show President and CEO John O'Donnell added.

The National Road Safety Foundation holds four regional contests around the country, according to Reich, in conjunction with auto shows. This is the contest's fourth year.

Franklin's 30-second PSA will air on 160 TV stations and be featured on "Teen Kids News," a nationally syndicated TV program.

The PSA is still in production. Franklin is meeting virtually with Weiss to get the job done.

Franklin's words of wisdom? "Don't make stupid mistakes that are avoidable on the road."

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