

**Teenage driver who killed schoolgirl
after ploughing into 30 children jailed
for six years**

By Daily Mail Reporter

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A teenage driver who killed a schoolgirl and seriously injured eight other youngsters when he was 'showing off' was today jailed for six years.

Ben Gemmell, 17, had only passed his driving test weeks earlier when he went for a trip in his Citroen this March.

Prosecutors told how he deliberately swerved towards a crowd of teenagers to try and frighten them but lost control and the car ploughed into the group.

Eleanor McGrath, 14, was fatally injured in the smash and another teenager, Jack Horton, 16, was left in a permanent coma. Basildon Crown Court heard.



Deadly show off: Ben Gemmell, 17, arrives for sentencing this afternoon. He was jailed for six years

More than 50 people packed the public gallery to see Gemmell in the dock and many sobbed as the horrific accident was recounted.

Andrew Jackson, for the prosecution, said the driver had only passed his test three weeks before the crash in Thorpe Bay, near Southend in Essex.

The teenager had been driving 'loops' around a block of houses, near to where the large group of teenagers were standing, he told the court..

'He was showing off in the vehicle - that is the expression used by many witnesses,' Mr Jackson said.

Another smaller group was walking towards the crowd when Gemmell 'deliberately swerved to try and frighten them', he said.



As the driver pulled away, he found himself facing a Mini parked on the opposite side of the road.

'To try and avoid the car he applied significant steering to the left,' said Mr Jackson.

'This caused the car to rotate around clockwise and he no longer had control of the vehicle. Within a split second he hit the kerb and the car ploughed into the larger group.'

Experts said the Citroen hit the crowd at 47mph and bystanders saw people 'flying through the air'.

One witness, Samuel Holt, said: 'The whole incident was horrific, it was like something out of a movie. People were covered in blood and unconscious.'

Eleanor and Jack's friends put them into recovery position before ambulance crews and two doctors who live in the road rushed to the scene.

A fleet of 10 ambulances, police cars and firefighters were scrambled and emergency workers used torches to find and treat the youngsters who had been thrown across the driveways of two homes.

Jack is still in hospital in London. Today was the first day that his parents had left his bedside, the court was told.

A victim impact statement from Eleanor's mother, Gillian, was read out to the court.

She said: 'The fact that Eleanor has been snatched from us is unbearable. It has left a tremendous void which can never be filled. My family will never be truly happy again.'

Eight other youngsters suffered serious head injuries, broken limbs and scarring, said Mr Jackson.



Killed: Eleanor McCaig

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Gemmell's smashed up Citroen C1. The 17-year-old had only passed his test three weeks before the accident

Gemmell, who turns 18 tomorrow, pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing to causing death by dangerous driving and eight counts of inflicting grievous bodily harm.

He was jailed for six years and banned from driving for a decade and told he will have to complete an extended test before being given another licence.

Judge Christopher Mitchell said: 'In your immaturity, you were using the car as a toy to do tricks with, ignoring the the fact a motor vehicle is a potentially dangerous, very dangerous weapon.

'You were showing off. You took a deliberate decision to do what was clearly an inherently dangerous act to deliberately swerve your car towards a group of young people with the intention of frightening them. It did frighten them.

It's been described as a moment of madness, it was a moment of complete and utter irresponsibility.

The harm you have caused by your actions is extensive. A whole community linked by schools, families and clubs has been affected by this.'



Family agony: Eleanor McGrath's mother Gillian and Father John and brother Richard (left) after the sentencing

Chief Inspector Tom Diment, of Essex Police, who led the investigation, said Gemmell's immaturity had 'wreaked devastation on may'.

'If ever anyone, especially young motorists, needed a wake-up call to remind them of the dangers of reckless driving, then this incident sadly does so,' he said.

'Many young drivers don't recognise their own inexperience and so don't realise the consequences of driving outside their abilities.

'Ben Gemmell's start to adulthood has been ruined. He has to live with the fact that he took a life and maimed several others. However, he also has to live with a criminal conviction.'