

Bus Service, Rally School, Team Up to Solve Shared Problems

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Contributed by Snoqualmie Valley Transportation

Most people learn rally driving at [DirtFish](#) in Snoqualmie for fun – maybe even for their bucket lists. A few, a very lucky few, do it for work.

It really is work, too. When the [Snoqualmie Valley Transportation](#) (SVT) bus drivers report to the racing school, it's for safety training.

The “slip and slide” course developed by SVT training coordinator Wendy Wright and DirtFish staff is focused on keeping buses from slipping and sliding and how drivers should react if they do.



“It will be on tarmac in different conditions, mud, gravel, and other different surfaces, so you know what it feels like,” explained Josie Rimmer, DirtFish’s Head of Strategy and Women in Motorsports Coordinator. *“Just so you know what your vehicle can do....”*

And racing? Not on the curriculum. *“We’re not teaching them how to drift a bus,”* Rimmer laughed

Wright, Rimmer and Amy Biggs, director of SVT, met recently to discuss their organizations' unusual partnership. Biggs and Wright stressed their gratitude for the relationship, and the SVT-specific training that DirtFish developed, which benefits everyone who rides an SVT bus.

"I get a lot of kudos from Metro (King County Metro owns the SVT buses and contracts with the company for service) for using DirtFish," said Wright. *"They say 'for small rural, you have an extensive training program, keeping the costs down, very innovative.'"*

"We so appreciate what DirtFish has done for us," Biggs told Rimmer, *"because you make our drivers better drivers. Better drivers – not faster drivers...This collaboration between SVT and DirtFish has been making our drivers safer."*

Snoqualmie Valley Transportation is a program of Mt. Si Senior Center.

Safety is a big part of all the training at DirtFish. Rimmer explained, *"Even though our product is 'yeah, you get to slide sideways,' well, when you accidentally slide sideways in the middle of the street, you know how to fix it."*



Naturally, safety is also a huge component of SVT operations. Wright is a certified instructor through the Evergreen Safety Council. In addition to all new drivers' training, she conducts ongoing safety training, and every driver gets at least one hour of coursework each month. That training schedule is actually what led to SVT's collaboration with DirtFish.

Wright said that finding the space to give the drivers and their buses the practical training they need is an ongoing challenge, so she had initially contacted the company *"to borrow a parking lot."*

DirtFish employee Malli Sheaffer coordinated with Wright for the parking lot use. She also suggested and helped create the SVT training with classroom and course instruction from DirtFish's rally sports drivers.

That training, Wright said, was pivotal for her, even with 20 years of driving experience. *“There are things that your drivers were able to pass on to our drivers,”* Wright told Rimmer, *“and that hands-on experience goes a whole long way for them.”*

Drivers Nate Tennis, Jack Harrison and Mitch Williams earned high praise from Wright. *“They’re really good at communicating, they’re very patient, and very supportive of our drivers, and pushing them past their fears,”* she said.

DirtFish also generously provided all SVT staff with half-day certificates for their own use. Wright said her drivers are still talking about those events and looking forward to the next training day this month.

And the DirtFish drivers got something out of working with the bigger, less-nimble buses, too. *“I say this in the most loving way: Our instructors are nerds, and they love seeing ‘what can I make this car do?’”* Rimmer said.

Besides, Rimmer told Wright and Biggs, *“We’re grateful to be working with you guys, and our team loves you.”*

Wright says she is so grateful for DirtFish and all its help. She wishes there were more that SVT could do in return. Still, the company is tightly restricted on its operations, from any charter or charter-like service to school-bus service, unless it’s for a student with a disability.

Instead, Wright does things like offering her help with training DirtFish staff on areas of her expertise, such as wheelchair securement.

“We’re working together to help solve each other’s problems,” she said.

Biggs says partnerships like the one between SVT and DirtFish are beneficial and essential in rural areas like the Valley.

“It’s something that already goes on here, where we sort of roll up our sleeves and pitch in to help each other.... Rural areas operate on community connections rather than huge systems,” she said.

Since its launch in 2010, DirtFish has also relied on these collaborations with sponsors, community organizations, and the industry in general. *“In the motorsports space, partnerships are everything,”* said Rimmer. From the logo-covered drivers’ gear to the community events, like the Women in Motorsports summit coming up on March 11, partnerships bring people together and help them thrive.

DirtFish celebrates women in motorsports in March, hosts Women in Motorsports Summit March 11

Next month, DirtFish is hosting its second annual celebration of women in motorsports, under the coordination of Josie Rimmer, on March 11.

“We’re going to have women in the industry speaking. Michèle Mouton is coming – she’s literally the top woman in rally, and it’s going to be a big celebration of women in the sport.”

It’s also going to *“show young women that there’s space for them in motorsports,”* Rimmer said.

Lots of space. This year’s main event, the Women in Motorsports Summit, is March 11, but DirtFish will host women’s classes and events throughout the month. Rimmer said that local women-owned businesses will be invited to set up booths at the event, along with women-owned food trucks. Plus, she and the other female instructors at the school will take people out in the cars for thrill rides.

The event started last year with the school’s creation of Women’s Month in March, and it will continue, Rimmer hopes, *“forever and ever.”*

“The point is to celebrate what you’ve done. I think that’s how you empower the younger women.”