

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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Article #12 - Horsepower... the Myth!

I suppose it's not that hard to believe really, but it puzzles me nonetheless. Seems that a lot of people who get into the Performance Driving hobby somehow equate more horsepower with better driving. It doesn't take very long at all before many folks start thinking about improving the engine performance of their cars, regardless of whether they have the driving skills to utilize whatever horsepower they gain, or not. I'm here to tell ya folks... it's more likely not!

It takes years to learn to do anything complex and do it well; piano, karate, foreign language, etc. What makes you think performance driving is any different? When your talking performance cars - particularly Porsches - it takes a lot of practice, and more to the point, a lot of self evaluation, soul searching, and envelope stretching to utilize all of the potential that exists in the car, even in bone stock form. If you think you're good, here's a way of gaining some perspective; Do you think that David Murry or Hurley Haywood or Derek Bell could jump in your car - stone cold - and in short order surpass your best performance? You bet they could! You're not as good as they are. You may never be. The point is that if they can do it better - likely by a comfortable margin - then the "problem" is not the car... it's YOU!

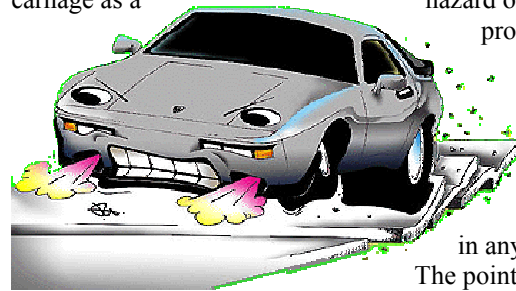
People do indeed equate ripsnorting horsepower with speed. But speed is, like many things, quite relative. Yes, a guy in a 996 GT3 will blow your doors off if you drive a 72 911T. But could the same guy blow you off in a similar car? Hmmmm. If this guy is not getting all there is out of his rocket, a better driver in a similar car will blow HIS doors off. See what I mean? Utilization is where the enlightened find true reward. If one only reaches as deep as superficiality, the thrill of speed can be an end-goal in itself. But high speed is mere titillation, not a long lasting, deep felt glow of satisfaction. After a while it's "been there... done that." Let me clue you in; True performance driving is done in the corners.

If you could develop a reputation as a driver, what would you want it to be? Having a fast car and being a good driver are not spoken in the same breathe as often as you might think. Let's face it, a lot of guys that are into Porsches have a lot of money, and they like to spend it. I'm around PCA Club Racing quite a bit. I see a lot of guys in really incredible cars that couldn't drive their way out of a parking lot. They are the GT class drivers that are being dusted by guys in C, D, E, and even F stock class cars that are in many cases hundreds of pounds heavier and/or way down on power. Trust me. It is far better to be known as a fast driver in a "slow" car than a rich guy with a heavy foot. When

you're driving a sparkling new 996 GT3R and you can't keep up with a 911 Carrera 2, there's something wrong with the equation!

Can that be a satisfying scenario for the rich guy? Of course, owning such a prize piece is quite rewarding, I'm sure. But how much fun is it to be a rolling chicane? Would not it be far more satisfying to ratchet down the expectation and demand of such a high caliber steed to a more accessible level? At Sebring, I saw a guy write off a beautiful GT3 class 911. Lost it coming out of the Esses and hit the tire wall that guards the bridge on the center straight and rolled two or three times. Guess he'd also rolled the same car the previous year. Thank goodness, he was quite all right on both occasions, but something is surely amiss here. By all accounts he is a great fellow, and perhaps even a pretty good driver, but it seems to me that a serious gut check is in order here.

If one races for a living, one must rationalize such carnage as a hazard of the



profession.

If one is prolific, one likely won't last long in any event.

The point is, what

are your goals? To drive fast, or well? If it is the latter, then driving a car with accessible limits will make you a better driver sooner than the rich guy with the mondo-zoot rocketship. If you're looking for a car, be truly honest, humble, and reasonable. Buy something not because you can afford it, but because you can handle it. If you already own a suitable vehicle (and that's a big list), leave it alone and spend your money and energy on tweaking the performance of the nut behind the wheel. Indeed, most cars in stock form will slide around considerably. The question is; can you handle it? When you can truly drive a stock vehicle to a very high level, then you can honestly justify the "need" for modifications because you will have learned the salient lessons necessary to move up the ladder while remaining safe and efficient.

Now I'll let you play. And my advice? Forget the chips, manifolds, and trick exhausts. Make the sucker HANDLE !

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I ask you to please abide by this request.

Thank you.