

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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#17 - Timing



The subject of timing equipment is a sore one for many performance driving event organizers. The track owners hate it, their insurance companies would seize upon it as proof of danger, and therefore event personnel should and must frown upon it.

This was my response to a query on the Porsche Rennlist by a fellow Lister wondering if a stopwatch were not a very effective means of judging driver improvement.

Robert B. Wrote;

<< How would you suggest getting an unbiased measure of improvement from event to event? I agree that smoothness and consistency are the goals at this stage. How does one measure this? Would not consistent times be a good indicator?

Regards, Bob >>

Yes Bob, that is one obvious way to scale it. However, the clock also has a nasty narcotic effect, and obscures the novice driver's focus from the most effective means of gauging their success.

Anyone can pay attention to lap times. It only requires the skill to read. Where in that equation is the skill to drive made mandatory? You need this before a watch will do anything but frustrate the H%&* out of you. The HUMAN BODY is the most precise instrument at your disposal, and it is that which you MUST seek to develop as your meter of success.

Using a watch externalizes the process of novice driving, as if the watch were in control. Driving is an intensely INTERNAL experience, and the novice driver needs to be lead around by the nose until he

starts to zero in on what he is doing, and how it effects the car.

No matter how gifted, novice drivers do not have a completely developed sense of feel, which is absolutely IMPERATIVE. Without a finely honed sense of EVERY nuance of the act of cornering at speed, a driver will NEVER reach anywhere near his/her potential. Again, it is an intensely INTERNAL process.

Given little instruction, a novice driver will invariably go out and drive over their heads without knowing it. This results in there being soooo busy mentally, that they are not able to process what is really happening and interpret it. It is only a matter of time before they get frustrated because no matter how hard they try, they never get any faster, just more out of shape. Their lack of fundamental experience in driving technique keeps their driving limit artificially low, and frustration results. Timing equipment only makes this worse.

What we do as instructors is take people out and MAKE them drive a basic, conservative line. It is not because we are scared or because we necessarily want to keep them under our thumb. It is because we are programming their mind through repeated behavior. We know that given a good line, SPEED HAPPENS. The student will eventually find their initial limit safely, and that limit in reality is far from what they can (and hopefully will) achieve. Reaching their initial limit at relatively low speeds puts us in the second AND MOST IMPORTANT phase of the process: CAR FEEL.

I have never had a novice student who had a completely developed sense of car feel. I can't really remember having ANY novice student who really had much of that sense at all, at least not to the experienced instructor's level. That is not to say that they were hopeless boobs - far from it in some cases. It is just not something that most people think that much about, excepting perhaps mechanics or ski racers.

When the car starts to reach its limit and begins to talk back to the student, we have reached the break point. It is now that the good driver is made or broken. What caused that understeer? Did you feel the tail wiggle back there? At first, they never do. After a while, they start to clue in, and can actually critique their own driving, eventually even correctly. NOW we are getting somewhere.

Lap times are only important to drivers for race qualifying and bragging rights. What is really important is SEGMENT times. This tells you quite accurately where you are fast or slow as a driver. If you need a more practical and instructive measure of how well you are driving, you need "look" no farther than the seat of your pants... your internal pendulum - and your tachometer. Do a corner right and not only

will the car feel great, but you will see a few hundred more RPM at the exit than ever before. Do a corner right and you will find yourself running out of braking room in the next corner because of the extra speed you manufactured.

Using a stopwatch is setting the wrong goal. The goal is not speed, it is skill. Using a watch obliterates the acquisition of skill, and focuses the driver on the END goal with no foundation with which to achieve it. Stopwatches have their place, but it's not at Driver's Ed. OK, so people bend the rules. Save it for when you reach the Black and Red run group. Then you'll know what it's for!

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written and accurate series on a subject that
is not to be taken lightly and can obviously
be dangerous. To maintain the accuracy and
proper presentation of that message, I would
ask that absolutely no use whatsoever of any
text herein be made without my
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I ask you to please abide by this request.

Thank you.