

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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Article # 20
Dr. Jekyll -vs- Mr. Hyde
The Internal -vs- External Driver

As mentioned in this series previously, solo driving (autocross or DE) is an intensely personal pursuit. Initially, while it is quite demanding, improvement generally comes in relative leaps and bounds. As one hopefully gets better at it, the gains become more infinitesimal. At some point you might realize that you have transitioned from lugging and placing the basic building blocks to chasing elusive minutia. It requires much concentration, introspection, and self-discipline to improve at this point, and has been known to cause frustration.

Early on, ones pursuit of the Holy Grail can be rather clumsy. That is to be expected, *Grasshopper*. Multi-tasking, the ability to process and perform multiple actions simultaneously, is an essential skill. It comes with practice. Until one becomes proficient at the rudiments of performance driving, a potentially dangerous battle can manifest itself. In some, it is worse than in others. As drivers, we all must learn to recognize this tendency so that we may mitigate it.

It can be quite the struggle, as Jekyll –vs- Hyde is a *contentious* relationship, and one not helpful to our pursuit. Like *David Banner*, we must studiously avoid situations that tend to provoke *The Hulk* in us. To promote our management goals, it would be far better to meld this dichotomy into that which is famously referred to as the Yin & Yang. This is a concept that seeks understanding by *embracing* the often polar extremes of life, and seeks to promote this diversity as sublime, giving intellectual and spiritual balance to what is otherwise a timelessly confounding struggle. You can fight it, or learn to live with it. Heaven -vs- Earth, Water -vs- Fire, Internal -vs- External. These latter two will be our focus.

We begin, as students of the art, as intensely internal beasts. The struggle seems to encompass little more than our most immediate periphery as we battle our inexperience for the upper hand. Our cars have no mirrors, our fingers little blood flow, and our brains swim as our eyes strain for clarity in this tunnel of ignorance. Like in every new experience, we are subconsciously reaching for synaptic responses that have not yet been created.

Gradually, as our skills improve, the embryo emerges from the shell and we learn that there is a world out there, inhabited by others like us. Suddenly, it is no longer just internal. We have these others to contend with. Now the question arises; with the outside world to deal with, will we remain as the studious and deferential Dr. Banner, or morph into the destructive Hulk who would lead us astray from our goal?

It is often said that during intense moments, time slows to a crawl. If it indeed seems to, then the act that is taking place must be occurring in a most familiar realm. For time to “move that slowly,” the pursuit must be so familiar that no surprise or trepidation exists, and the events unfold as if scripted. Your solo driving can approach this state with much practice. The search for and mastery of the rudiments of driving are the **Internal** aspects of the sport. They can and indeed must become so much second nature as to often be done without thinking. As long as one receives and heeds good council to make sure to weed out the bad habits, the Internal realm should remain a place of Pyung Ahn (in the Korean); Peacefulness & Contentedness, or Balance and Control in our less flowery, more succinct English.

If you are on the track alone, in your familiar world, and the conditions and your equipment are ideal, the Balance & Control of the skilled Internal pilot can exist for long periods. However, rarely will one find oneself alone on track for long. In reality, this would not represent a balanced state, as we all know that surprises happen in a flash. Even performance driving can become a bit boring without some variable or other tossed in to spice the recipe. Sooner or later, some emissary of the **External** world will come calling. Other drivers, flaggers, a sudden cloudburst, fluid or debris on the track, a suddenly ill-handling car, all these External forces require the driver to keep a barely hidden reserve at hand, a portion of concentration and skill available to divert in order to mitigate them. Truth be told, the external is always on the prowl, waiting to add its two cents worth. This is as it should be, no?

The Internal & External can seem to be at odds, and yet do not or cannot exist without each other. Since that is the reality, we must seek to balance the Yin & Yang in our everyday lives. In driving, it is no different. External forces will seek to upset the balance of our driving if we allow them to. Sometimes they will succeed despite our best efforts. Such is life. However, most of the time, it is in simply how we deal with them that the Internal is maintained in equilibrium.

All new drivers struggle with some aspect of internal driving. Naturally, practice makes perfect. Almost all students have difficulty with External driving in the beginning as well. I work with them to help them understand that beating one’s head against that wall is a fruitless endeavor, that this is simply part of the mix. Accepting that is the first step. That driver that is so slow or way off line is learning too, and has just as much right to be there, to drive well... or poorly, as we do.

With adversity can also come enlightenment, if ones mind is open for business. Learn to watch the other driver’s actions. See if you can anticipate their moves, Watch for their eyes in the mirror. That means not only the car in front of you, but also the one in front of him. That is the person who will get you all in

trouble. Is the car you're following paying attention to who he's following, or who's following him? How about the driver behind you? Somebody hit that apex cone and knocked it onto the track. Sheeesh... this gets busy!

Ask not first, "how poorly is that other guy doing?" Ask, "How is my driving in such situations?" Was my Internal driving upset by their performance, by this external force? That is the positive and productive question to focus upon. Again, all students struggle with this early on. I have had many students who've struggled, sometimes mightily, with their Internal driving, through perseverance have quite well found the handle, only to lose their grasp of it when another car was encountered. They let their grip of their Internal driving slip because of an External force, and were not even necessarily aware of it.

Compartmentalization while multi-tasking is key. When the occasion for clear Internal Driving can be found, take advantage of it. When External Driving must be added to the mix, do so in correct proportion and approach it with the proper open mindset. Dealing with your External situation is no less important, is obviously necessary, and actually quite fun given a positive attitude.

Coexistence is a fact of life. When the mind is open, knowledge and wisdom will flow, and are free for the taking, *Grasshopper*.

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