

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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#23 – “Drive Yourself Subconscious”
Why is Driving Fast, and *Well*, so Hard?

We never really think much about the routine things we do every day. Many of these tasks are done so repetitively that they require little if any mental acuity to perform, and sometimes our recognition that we've even done them at all can be a bit foggy. Witness the old “Did I turn off the Iron” or “Did I lock the Door” phenomena. Most of our brains are so full of thoughts and problems that the duties of daily life can go by completely unnoticed. Driving is on that list.

It is interesting – and amusing to us of extended driving ability – to note a universal truth; most people think they drive well. Those of sporting pretense can even more easily convince themselves that they are a cut above, given their interest in and knowledge of racing and the like.

This self-granted status is usually not quite the case, of course, as only comparing oneself to the great untrained masses is sure to lead one to inflate one's own competence as it pertains to true performance driving. Also true is the fact that to do something subconsciously does not necessarily mean that one does it well. Certainly it would seem that many drive without thinking at all!! Still, on the street many are able to drive fairly well without much thought, and some even quite effectively.

Most of us have driven for so long that many of the ancillary aspects of driving become subconscious; we do them with virtually no thought or recognition. If we can perform at this subconscious level in every day driving, why is performance driving so difficult to master? Let's dig in and figure out why. What is it that sets performance driving apart from every day fare?

Well, for one, traffic. Sure, there is traffic at a driving event, but it is almost universally going the same direction (allowances made for the occasional spin out or off track excursion!). Generally, you don't have to worry much about anything coming up on you, except the next turn.

You will be on a closed course with no other entrances or exits to worry about. No kids on bikes, no soccer balls, very rarely an animal or other impediment to divert your attention. But... these are all items that seemingly would make the task easier?!

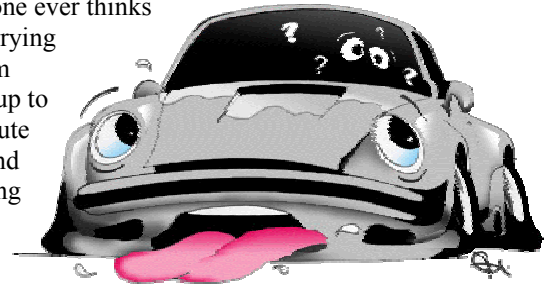
One of the big differences is something we've discussed previously – SPEED. As mentioned earlier in the series, speed is a strong hallucinogen, perhaps the most common “mind altering substance” known to

man. And yet, at novice speeds – which are pretty slow most of the time – the brain can still become deeply intoxicated, clouded in a haze of trepidation, self-doubt, and tunnel vision. If the speed is slow enough that we should be able to handle it, what else is there that is making this so difficult?

THOUGHT! Again, most of us drive around every day with very little thought given to much of what is going on. Staying in one's lane (or “anything between the ditches” as my Dad says) does not require a lot of mental or physical effort.

Performance driving is a whole different ball game. Sure, a lot of us do some apexing on off ramps, and might crank up the speed a tad doing it, but you (should) never approach track conditions. Learning to drive a “racing line” requires skills beyond the norm, something requiring thought, and therein lies the rub.

No one ever thinks about carrying maximum velocity up to the absolute last second and getting their minivan perfectly



positioned before braking hard, heel & toe down shifting, and executing a perfect late apex left turn onto Jones Road! You don't have to think of what the speed limit is, how fast you take the corners, and where the painted lines are. The only thing that might cross your conscious mind is not toppling the groceries. Where and how much to brake, when to turn, and the arc of your turn happens without you even thinking about it.

Now that you are trying to drive in a more scientific fashion, your brain is overloaded and you probably are driving poorly, or at the least tentatively. To have to think and drive simultaneously makes one apprehensive and slow. To drive on a **track** means to go fast. Put the two together and you get a mess!

It is quite helpful to your confidence and overall mental state to embrace at this juncture the notion that ANYTHING that is attempted that is new, or at a level beyond one's previous personal limit will not happen easily, and that some frustration is normal. Not letting it deter you or cloud your judgment is equally important.

On the street, you have *time* to think, yet what you are doing is something you've done so often before that conscious thought is not necessary. What trips you up at the track is having to give **conscious** thought to something you do every day in a largely **subconscious** manner.

The next step is to realize what it takes to do something subconsciously. REPETITION. For

something to become subconscious, it has to be repeated many, many times. It is only through this mental, physical, even neural memorization that one can devote ones brain to other variables. **Consistency** in this repetition is also key to cementing in your mind these rudiments of proper technique so that they can be called upon reflexively when needed.

One thing to be certain of here is that what you are attempting to cement in your subconscious mind needs to not only be repeated many times, but done right in the first place! That is why instructors are (or should be!) so picky about perfecting the line and getting everything right. To drive well and safely at a more accelerated pace will **require** you to follow the edicts that your instructor has been preaching.

A lot of what they are saying seems to matter little regarding getting around the track in one piece right now. You can putz along and drive pretty much any old way, and not scare yourself too much. However, when and if you start to pick up the pace, you will quickly find that you are up the creek without a paddle, or even the boat! To try and go back and relearn all that stuff after it has become semi-subconscious is MUCH harder than doing it right from the start.

It is not uncommon at all for a student to become utterly distracted when trying to put the pieces together. One item on the list, or one turn, will be coming along nicely. As soon as you try to fix something else, what you thought you knew goes South. Then, as if it were not bad enough already, when you do finally put something resembling a good lap together, Speed Happens, all your reference points go kablooey and you're seemingly back where you started!

All those old lessons from the series – the Business Cone, Throttle Balance, Trust is a Must and Momentum is your Friend, Don't Turn until you Turn.... They must ALL be combined now to make this witches brew a successful meal. Geez... no wonder this is so hard?!

Trust, Determination, Consistency, and Patience are what you'll need to Drive Yourself Subconscious!

Thanks to Tony Funicello for giving me the idea for this article. In an off moment, I slipped into his classroom at a recent Trackmasters event and he was talking about conscious and subconscious driving. Tony is the Chief Instructor for Trackmasters, Inc., one of the premier Driving Instruction Schools in the country. Trackmasters can be found at:

<http://www.trackmasters.com/>

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I have striven to make this an extremely well 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 express written consent.

I ask you to please abide by this request.

Thank you.

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