

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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Article #8 - Throttle Balance II
The Soft Shoe Shuffle... on Egg Shells!

Your instructors have likely always harped on the need for smooth, well-timed inputs to the car. As I've mentioned previously, when speed happens, things change, and your timing and input levels need to change with them in relation to the speed you are going. It's a witch's brew folks. But the bottom line remains; your inputs should never unduly unsettle the car. Now, you may go out with your instructor or other drivers as a passenger, and be shocked to see that he or she seems to ignore what is preached. They seem to drive quite abruptly and aggressively. Well, don't be fooled; remember, it's all relative.

They are likely going a lot faster than you - particularly in the turns - and what seems abrupt is only what is necessary to make the car do what the driver wants it to do. Different cars and speeds require different levels of input, and as the speed rises, the inputs must be more assertive. There is a key element - one that we have discussed before - to concentrate on in such situations. Don't necessarily focus on the driver... focus on what the car is doing!

I learned this lesson early, and well, from one of the masters of the art. My first-ever performance driving experience was at Watkins Glen at the Porsche Precision Driving School conducted by Derek Bell. I was fortunate to have Mr. Bell pilot my pokey old 84 944 around the Glen at speeds that I had never imagined, in a car he'd never driven. What initially stunned me was his driving style. It seemed to me at the time that he was a madman behind the wheel. His concentration was immense; his eyes, like laser beams, focused up the road. His craggy face was drawn tight. His hands were a blur on the steering wheel as his arms flailed - making the minutest of corrections - for reasons that I couldn't fathom at the time. All I'd heard in the classroom was "smooth, smooth, smooth," and yet here's this crazy person driving my car! Then something entirely seminal dawned on me.

While the driver seemed crazed, the car fairly floated through the turns as if on gossamer wings. The changes in the car's attitude were barely perceptible, and it was the insanely acute vigilance of the driver that was making it so. It changed my thinking and my focus right then and there. I was indeed lucky!

What I have found with my students is that when they learn the line and begin to pick up the pace, their brains become hurried, their excitement and anticipation bubbles over, and smoothness and timing usually goes out the window. The amazing thing is that most often, the student is making erroneous inputs to the car without even realizing it. "We ran wide of our apex back there, eh?" "Yeh... I can't seem to get the car over there!" "Why did you jump on the throttle so hard at the turn-in?" "Huh?!... did I?" "Didn't you notice the front end jump out?" "Yeh, but I didn't know I stomped on the throttle..." It's amazing, but it happens all the time. Time to refocus, and listen to the car... remember?

Now, if the above student had been listening to the car, even though he may have hit a perfect line, he would have known immediately that his stomping on the throttle kicked the front end out, causing him to run wide of his apex. Does fixing this problem assure a good apex? Nope. So, what to do? Well, we said don't tromp the throttle, but you may add it at your discretion to fine tune your line. If you have progressed to the point where you are setting the car hard in a clean four-wheel drift and are running toward your apex, minute additions and subtractions of throttle, along with small steering corrections, will help you fine tune your line and give you that perfect tight apex.

If you've ever been fortunate enough to do a real skid pad, then remember. Remember how you were instructed to approach the limit of adhesion, gradually bringing the speed up until the car started sliding? At



this point, you were instructed to play with the throttle slightly; just a tad more pushed the nose wider, the minutest release on it tightened your line. If you slammed it shut, the rear end stepped right out. Remember? Doesn't everybody play racer on the offramps? Try it tomorrow. Cruise through a ramp at a pace such that you feel a little tug, then back off the throttle a touch. Wow... the nose tucks in and the line tightens right up! Now add that throttle back in. Pushes right back out! Hm... It works for any car! Heck, I've even done it in my E450 Ford van with

the car and trailer in tow, although that may not be advisable as a rule!

This is really what we mean by the term Throttle Steer. Sure, tire smoking power slides and chop throttle oversteer are impressive, and technically under that heading too, but they have only the smallest of roles in a skilled driver's dossier. Look, anyone can bang on drums, right? Many can even play loud and fast. But only the true artist can play soft and fast. On the track, the loud guy is generally not the fast guy. He's in the weeds. So... how fast do you want to be?

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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.