

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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Article #9 - "Let's Get Wet !"

"Real" racers drive in the rain. Should you be any different?

The short answer would be, No; you shouldn't be different. Remember, the real mission of Driver's Education is to teach you skills you can use on the street everyday in an emergency, and sometimes it does seem like there's one around every corner, doesn't it?!

Many Driver's Ed. participants dread the rain, choosing to park their vehicles rather than "chance it" in the wet. Truthfully, they may have a point. If their tires are down to their last few 32nds of tread, they need to think this one over carefully. However, you drive on the street in the rain and likely don't think twice about it, right? Every driver - be they stone novice or grizzled veteran - should jump at the chance to drive in the rain for one big reason; you simply MUST drive smoothly and at the peak of your skills to be successful. If you don't feel you have those peak skills yet, the rain will teach them to you in a big hurry. Like yesterday!

So how does one drive well in the rain? There are a few things to think about. First, relax. No one drives well when they are tense, and driving in the rain is not as horrifying as it may initially seem. Heck... just slow down, take your time, and work up to it gradually. Trust me, no one will expect you to be Senna out there.

Next, we need to review some of the earlier lessons in this series; specifically Car Feel, Throttle Balance (Smoothness), and the Business Cone. The great thing about rain driving is that it literally forces you to pay close attention to what the track is like and what the car is doing. In some instances, grip can be moderately to completely nonexistent, and you must plan ahead and be prepared to make split second corrections in the cars attitude.

Car Feel: You must interpret the limits of adhesion very carefully and remember where you found grip on the track, and where you didn't. This process of hunting for grip is key to your survival, and pays great dividends because it can be directly applied to high speed running in the dry as well. Driving in the rain will force you to step outside the bounds of what you have learned to be fast in the dry, and open your mind to new ways of thinking about driving swiftly.

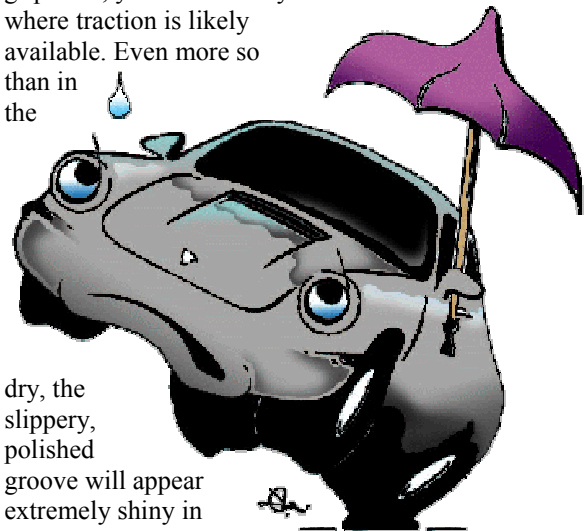
Throttle Balance & Smoothness: You must have these in spades. You may get away with jerky driving

in the dry, but you won't for a heartbeat in the wet, for that's all the time you will have to come to the realization that you need to smooth out your style, and by then it might be too late!

The Business Cone: It is absolutely imperative that you be Done with your Business before you turn in on a wet track. If you have not learned this lesson well, you will find yourself in big trouble in a big hurry. You need to be coasting and at the ready in the proper gear so that the suspension is as close to "at rest" as possible - as balanced as can be - and there is not an overload of force on any given tire.

You may have heard people talk of the "Rain Line." In very general terms, this means everywhere but the dry line! In most cases, the normal dry line will have a lot of rubber ground into the surface. If there are any slippery fluids on the track, they will more than likely be on the dry line as well. Also, the track surface usually tends to be polished smooth by the repeated traffic in one spot. Although it is not always the case, all of this usually conspires to make the dry line very slippery when it rains. This knowledge, along with a careful scanning of the track surface will tell you where to go for grip.

Your vision - which is always of paramount concern - will now be called upon to find areas of grip. Yes, you can actually see the areas where traction is likely available. Even more so than in



the dry, the slippery, polished groove will appear extremely shiny in the rain, and indeed shiny surfaces tend to be slippery. You will be looking for the darker areas, as these are where the surface has more grain and consequently can better manage the water without becoming flooded and leading to hydroplaning.

The condensed sequence will have you Done with your Business well before turn-in. You will find an amazing amount of braking grip - perhaps up to 75% of normal - if you've picked the right line. You will be looking for the darker, drier pavement; perhaps entering a turn one car width inside the dry groove,

crossing that groove in a relatively straight path to get to the grainier pavement on the outside of the turn, then turning and accelerating gently and crossing the dry groove again to come out about a car width inside your normal track-out point. Again, generally driving everywhere but the dry line as much as possible. In the end, you have to experiment to find out what works best.

And this is the wonderful lesson to be learned in the rain. Experimentation. For the novice, it will speed your learning of smoothness and feel, for although they may be masked in dry conditions, your deficiencies will scream at you in the wet. For the more experienced driver, it will refresh this lesson, plus it will force your mind to try new things and expand its processes. Don't be afraid to try a line that in the dry would be truly wacky, like using the complete outside edge of a turn all the way through. In wet conditions, grip is where you find it, and you don't question it when you do!

Driving in the rain is the best instructor you will ever have, and increases your knowledge and progress many times over. Just suck it up and don't worry. Like the legendary Gene Kelly, in no time at all... you too will be Singing in the Rain!

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by John L. Hajny

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.