



Everyone wants to be better at driving, but what makes a good driver? Someone who possesses the ability to set a blistering lap time? Or gracefully power-slide around an airfield perhaps? While both may be valid skills becoming a better driver starts with the obvious; driving on the road. It's where everyone does the bulk of their driving, so it makes sense to start here.

That's where Rob Colbourn steps in. Rob is an accomplished instructor and Advanced Driving Consultant with over twenty years of experience in his field. He offers tailored courses and one-on-one

tuition for those wanting to gain more from the art form of driving. Rather than teaching how to throw a car around with armfuls of oversteer and plumes of tyre smoke, Rob simply helps you to expand and develop your current driving style in order to get more out of road driving. In short, he teaches you how to read the road more efficiently, enjoy the road more effectively and, above all, drive safely not only for you, but those around you.

Rob actually started his career with rather humble beginnings working as a white van driver, but it's that experience which has helped him shape and develop

his current approach. "We all form our own personal relationship with driving," explains Rob. "Within a year of passing my test I was racking up 80,000 miles a year driving white vans all across the country; admittedly, my skill didn't always match my enthusiasm! After several years of that I answered an advert to become a driving instructor – I certainly didn't set out on a quest to increase road safety. The people who trained me did a good enough job and helped me to qualify, but in all honesty, they didn't have any significant influence on my relationship with driving. It was two months into the job when I met





Training Day

We explore the finer points of honing your driving skills during a day of training with advanced consultant Rob Colbourn...

Words: Simon Holmes Photography: Dave Smith

Bernard Aubry, a man who quite simply revolutionised my view of driving and inspired me in a way that I hadn't conceived or experienced before. Yet, if you asked me what was taught immediately afterwards I would struggle to recall many of the specific details, so struck was I by the deeper sense of satisfaction in my driving he had ignited. But whatever the details were, they would have been redundant and short-lived if the techniques themselves hadn't inspired me to use them. Imagine it's three years on, you're late, fed up and no one is





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watching: this is when your personal relationship with driving will dictate your style and choices.”

Rob’s main work varies between private clients, who drive their own high performance cars on the road and want to get the best from them, to training fleet drivers who spend hours on the road perhaps involuntarily at times. A lot of what he teaches also lends itself to circuit driving, so it helps that he also happens to be a driving consultant for Porsche, working at their flagship venue, the Porsche Driving Experience Centre at Silverstone. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Rob is also a senior trainer with All Road Training (www.allroadtraining.co.uk), a leading provider of driver training to businesses. The enthusiasm may differ between the two groups but Rob’s goal is the same; to develop their skill levels, techniques and attitude.

Keen to experience Rob’s approach firsthand, we arrange a day of advanced driving training for the road. We meet on a sunny Tuesday morning at a location that’s convenient for us both and I’ve brought my own car along for the day. Over a coffee, we have a chat about what we want to achieve from the day, before heading out into the mid-morning traffic.

At first, you can’t help but feel as though you’re on a driving test again, but while Rob is indeed gauging your driving style, it immediately becomes clear this is no driving exam. Instead, he engages you to discuss what’s going on around you and it soon becomes easy to tune into his relaxed, yet professional approach. It helps that Rob is very articulate and incorporates a friendly tone to his advice that doesn’t ever feel condescending. He praises you when appropriate and it never feels as though he is poking

holes in your driving or confidence. The information he dispenses is awe-inspiring at times in that it’s often staring you right in the face, it’s just you haven’t thought to digest it before. He points out the glaringly obvious, natural markers on the road to help you read ahead, such as the fact streetlights are nearly always placed on the outside of corners or telephone wires indicate built up areas. It’s a little like discovering there’s a secret world of advanced driving that you never knew about. Informative hints and subtle changes to attitude may be small, but the process allows you to take every little thing on board around you, however miniscule, to give you the advantage.

Rob’s approach is refreshing and enlightening, but he’s also realistic about how his attitude and advice is likely to be utilised on the road. “I know perfectly well that every technique, idea or concept will have





The Building Blocks

Rob explains to us the fundamental aspects of enhancing your own driving ability...

Attitude

"I love the story Jackie Stewart writes in a book, about how he felt it was only when he entered the 1973 season that he had reached a 'fundamental grasp of the basics', even though he entered that season as a double world champion. It strikes me as a comment based on reflection and wisdom that may not have been so easily conceived at a younger age.

"This is also the main reason that I reference my 'chequered' past in vans. It was primarily an attitude shift that changed my approach, which led to all the various physical changes in my driving style.

"I also highlight my own natural cynicism and encourage clients to question and challenge my advice to see where it works, where it is limited and what adaptations could be made with any technique to ensure its effectiveness. Incidentally, this is often lacking in my industry, which would seemingly prefer to demand we accept each piece of advice in its entirety. Remember being taught to apply the handbrake and select neutral each time you stop? How about leaving enough space ahead in a queue in case you get hit from behind, in order to protect the radiator instead? Or how about I focus more on protecting my children in the back seat?"

Observation

"As with so many things in life or work; the further ahead you can look, the more detail you can gather with which to make your plans and the more time

you can create in which to execute them, the more effective you will become. Many of the subtleties I look for are so visible and ordinary that we easily overlook their significance or existence.

"A brilliant realisation I have learnt to develop more over the years is how to utilise the human eye's natural functions of peripheral and focused vision, in order to see as much as is physically possible. Consider whether you pay primary attention to the road layout as you approach a junction or to the traffic movement. Looking firstly for the static information will still allow your peripheral vision to monitor the movement within your scope, whereas focusing on the traffic will likely make you miss helpful information about the environment in general. The natural tendency, of course, is to watch the vehicles and pedestrians as they are more likely to cause you a problem than a static kerb or signpost, and the art of developing this concept and the observation techniques is in how you balance both issues."

Anticipation

"For me, good anticipation skills are based on asking yourself intelligent questions about the situations you face. Is that guy going to step out? Is that car going to change lanes? Is there a removal truck around the next blind corner? The obvious problem here is that you can pose the questions but not necessarily answer them.

"In fact, you positively have to wait to find out what they actually will do, but you can certainly anticipate what they could do; especially when you consider that there are only two possible options.

Will he step out? He will or he won't. Will that truck be there? It will or it won't. You simply need a Plan A and a Plan B. Anticipate the greater problem and then (in a statement that I wouldn't have understood at 21) you actually want your anticipation to be wrong. By which I mean, of course, I may well be expecting the worst-case scenario and I certainly don't want to experience it, but if I must, then I will prevent it from catching me out. So I'm either wrong or pleasantly surprised."

Space

"In regard to the practical side of driving, space is the thing to be obsessive about; after all, every single collision in the history of the motorcar must involve at least one party running out of space. But to do so requires you to have made serious misjudgments in one of the other areas mentioned. Your observation, anticipation or planning has let you down first for the speed to then become a problem and, if those skills are used well, then you should simply realise that your speed is appropriate.

"One of the biggest problems is that people also think that slowing down will always be the safer option over speeding up. This does not apply in many situations, joining fast moving motorway traffic to name just one. Whether you speed up or slow down should be dictated by the space that is available. The key thing for me is how the relationship between your space, vision, speed and time is managed. Only when you put all these factors together are you really considering things in enough depth to truly judge the accuracy and effectiveness of your speed."



its limitations; speeding up may one day be your saviour and the next day be your ruin," explains Rob. "If I tell you to 'always do this,' or 'never do that,' then I am doing you a disservice – exceptions to the rule are commonplace after all. In fact, just 'telling' you to do anything at all would soon get very tedious for everyone involved, much better to simply discuss and explore the art of driving high performance motor cars with the aim that you aspire to be the best, most accomplished driver that you can be, and hopefully benefit from the competencies I strive to impart to each and every one of my clients. My point is, if I can't genuinely inspire you to embrace and develop safe, smooth and swift driving skills then, quite frankly, who cares where I said to put your hands on the steering wheel or whether to select neutral at the traffic lights?"

As we venture out on to faster A- and B-roads, perhaps Rob's most interesting points revolve around driving psychology. It sounds strange, but once he

persuades you to try certain techniques it's amazing to see it work in action. For instance, controlling the traffic behind you by dropping back from a line of cars and, effectively starting your own pack, helps to control other road users' driving characteristics.

I leave Rob feeling rather good about myself. It's a lot of information to take in, but the things he points out are easy to introduce into your driving style, and like he says, attitude is perhaps most important. Reflecting on that, if there's one key lesson of the day it's that everyday is a school day. Driving is the kind of skill that never stops developing and you can always better yourself. Perhaps acknowledging that is what makes a truly great driver ●

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