

Fast Track

Advanced driving consultant, Rob Colbourn, can teach you how to better your driving technique on track with a Performance Driving Course. It worked for us...

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Around this time last year we undertook a full course of driving tuition with advanced driving consultant, Rob Colbourn (*GT* 06/15). Our experience was limited to the road as that is where we spend the majority of our time behind the wheel. The syllabus focused largely around improving our general attitude to driving, whilst sharpening our observation and anticipation skills. It provided us with an arsenal of useful techniques and commonsense hints useable in practically every road-going scenario.

Rob's courses are tailored to each individual, no

matter their skill or confidence level, and his methods explore the idea that there is an art to driving well, a road craft if you will. His approach showcases that once equipped to practice it there is a whole extra dimension to driving, one so obvious it has been staring you in the face. You'd be lying if you claim that doesn't sound appealing.

Rob's background is rather unlikely, which makes his tutorage even more significant in our eyes: he was once a 'white van man'. Charging up and down the country delivering parcels, Rob was typically the guy in the nondescript van sat three inches off your back

bumper, headlights ablaze, chewing the steering wheel in anticipation of getting ahead of you. Since becoming a driving instructor and then an advanced consultant, those aggressive days are long gone as Rob has gone through what he terms a "shift in attitude". However, Rob's past gives him a real world insight and pragmatic level of understanding that sets him apart from many driving experts we've encountered. Rob's understanding of driving psychology ensures he is able to both relate to, and eradicate, any long-formed habits hampering your driving. When it comes to driving on the road, erasing



bad habits is a very useful undertaking; translate it to the track and it might just save your life.

Despite spending much of his professional working life tutoring on track at Porsche's Experience Centre at Silverstone, Rob would be the first to admit that he's not a 'racing driver'. There's a distinct difference between someone who can drive quickly, intelligently and safely on a circuit and an individual who can exhumate the last few tenths of a second in competitive motorsport. But if you have any level of desire to improve your track driving skill set, as we did, then Rob's teachings are most useful and the ideal basis from which to move from merely enthusiastic to

competent on track. Interestingly much of the craft Rob teaches on his road course can be translated, perhaps in an amplified fashion, to the circuit-specific driving techniques he promotes. Driving psychology features heavily once more. Although each of us may respond differently when we are behind the wheel of a car, many of the reactions caused by our actions will have the same (unwelcome) outcome. Just like on the road, first and foremost using our vision becomes key to mastering an effective track driving technique. Changing the way we observe situations can aid our ability to predict, understand and subsequently react. During road driving we're taught to anticipate

potentially hazardous situations, using a mixture of our experience and what the surrounding environment can communicate to us. This enables a driver to predict a possible course of events and act to minimise a problem which may arise in advance of it occurring. The principle is the same on track – if you know what might be ahead you can plan for it in advance. One of Rob's mantras is to look through a corner, flick your eyes ahead through the turn, then draw them back to the apex to build a picture of where you're going ahead of your arrival. Rob lets you build speed gradually, pushing on as and when you feel comfortable, and should your enthusiasm

Rob works with drivers to extract their potential, drawing on the positives and helping eradicate any negative habits



overtake adhesion, he'll encourage you to reel it in, taking a step back before moving forward again and potentially back out of your comfort zone. As you push the envelope of your perceived comfort level, your skill set grows commensurately.

Vehicle dynamics play an important part in the process of Rob's teachings. Understanding what a car is doing underneath you, and what it might do as you feed it various inputs, is vital. For example, Rob ensures you possess a level of knowledge about the physical reaction your steering inputs have – drilling into you that as you turn the wheel you should be considering the angle of your car's





tyres, exactly what you're asking of them, and the relationship between road surface, tyre and car attitude. "Many clients are perfectly familiar with the terms 'oversteer' and 'understeer' but are not necessarily confident of giving an accurate definition or explanation of how they're caused, identified, corrected or, most importantly, prevented," Rob explains.

Likewise most modern cars feature an abundance of electronic safety aids (ESP, DSC, PSM) but do you as the driver really know how they all operate? Are you aware to what extent they influence the vehicle? Or how best to use them to good effect? Through

Rob's tuition, you'll soon learn just how clever these systems are and whether or not you really need them or, rather, why you should never rely on them! It's the same with braking techniques. Rob likens emergency braking to bankruptcy. "We all understand the basic premise but spend years, quite rightly, employing other skills to try and avoid facing it for real," he says. "If we do have to face it, we are likely to find ourselves lacking the necessary skills to overcome it. Paradoxically, practicing these skills to a high competency level reinforces the point that you should not allow yourself to need them."

Sir Jackie Stewart is clearly a big influence on the track driving techniques that Rob endorses, not for his ultimate speed but for his smoothness. Stewart was famed for his chauffeur-like driving style and it's this smooth, calculated and considered approach that Rob presses home. He teaches a driver to roll off the brake pedal, not jump off it, to balance the car through a corner, in the case of a 911 often with a small input of throttle mid-turn. Using all of the available road, letting the car gently run wide out of a corner, your task is then to gradually feed the power back in as the steering lock is wound off.

If you have any level of desire to improve your track driving skill set then Rob's teachings are most useful

Opening up the 991 Carrera S served to highlight its beautiful balance and ability



"Imagine there is a piece of string between the accelerator pedal and the steering wheel," he says. "That throttle pedal cannot go down until the wheel is fully straightened."

Each and every input is designed to not upset the car; you should not overdrive it but rather make considered smooth adjustments to retain a certain level of balance. Coming out of corners this often feels like the old Martin Brundle adage of "hurry up and wait" before you're able to get on with things (and apply the throttle) but it ensures the cleanest exit and, believe it or not, will prove faster than letting

the car slide from apex to curb.

We've already stated that much of what you will learn will serve you well on the circuit but, conversely, that works both ways. Employing a smooth and flowing approach on the track can also work effectively on the road, with a focus on using and extending your vision to your own advantage.

I wouldn't consider myself a wholly confident track driver prior to spending time with Rob yet with his help I've certainly learnt both a greater understanding of what a vehicle is doing in a track environment and, perhaps more importantly, how my perceptions have

altered towards my own limitations. I've learned that I can gradually push to improve my level of comfort on track and, as a consequence, my skill levels improves with it. Rob's talent is not a dark art; rather his approach and the methods he uses enthuse and inspire drivers to believe in themselves, to hone their existing abilities almost without the realisation of what they're achieving. Indeed, far from schooling his clients in an entirely new method of driving, Rob expertly extracts the better driver that lies within us all, and he does so in a relaxed and informed manner that guarantees success ○



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TRACK REGULAR, SAM PRESTON, SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE OF ROB'S COURSE...

Although I have been on a good number of track days now, these often over-subscribed events haven't always allowed me to find the true limits of a car. At the Nürburgring Nordschleife, for example, on occasions I've found myself seemingly spending more time checking my rear-view mirror for the likes of GT3 RSs to appear out of nowhere than gaining the confidence needed to instead begin focusing on improving my own talents. With Rob sat beside me, however, and an empty track complete with nerve-settling amounts of runoff to play with, the rate of learning is naturally far quicker here, especially once I'd realised that Rob wasn't there to criticise my current level of driving. Instead he was genuinely

interested in helping me work on what I'd already learnt to become a better, faster driver.

Rob soon determined that smoothness in and out of corners was something that I could certainly use some help with. First up, he assisted me in honing the art of trailing off the brakes gradually into slower-speed corners. Known by the pros as 'trail braking', the technique is something of a mirror to the 'piece of string' theory mentioned earlier; where the brakes are hit hard as you'd expect before turning but then let off gradually as you begin to turn the steering wheel. As well as allowing you a later braking time, this technique perhaps more importantly helps keep the weight distribution of the car balanced for optimum grip and tyre usage throughout the turn. Easier said than done,

for sure, but with some practice it's soon simple to understand why this is one of most effective weapons a racing driver can keep up their sleeve.

Other small nuggets of invaluable wisdom Rob helped me pick up on included keeping your vision focused on where you're aiming as well as where you are ("don't just live in the moment – you don't know what's around the corner unless you look") and maintaining good positioning on the steering wheel ("those spokes are put in the ten-to-two position for a reason") with a relaxed grip to ensure you pick up on as much feedback from the car as possible. All techniques I don't know if I'd ever manage to teach myself, regardless on how much track time I was exposed to ○