

SKILL AND PRETENSION

In the last newsletter submission I promised a series of articles that would shave seconds off of your lap times. And these articles might do just that. There is also, however, an ulterior motive. Think of some of the fastest drivers you know in VRG, and then ask yourself how often they spin or crash. Chances are you can't recall a spin or a crash. This is the ulterior motive: The consistently fastest drivers are also almost always the safest drivers, and not by coincidence. By helping members to improve lap times, we're also hoping to make them, and the club as a whole, safer. Many know of the legendary battles between Bob Girvin and Tivvy Shenton, who have spent years buzzing around one another like angry wasps; Bob and his Allard with horsepower and top speed, Tivvy and his Jaguar with brakes and handling. They probably have, between them, more race wins than anybody in the club and they've probably spent hours on the race track within five feet of one another, yet they've never made contact. In their combined 60-odd years of vintage racing their combined incidents can probably be counted on one hand and are all probably due to mechanical failures. This enviable record of speed, success and safety is a result of the three things: Judgment, Consistency and Skill.

Judgment: This one is difficult. We are, after all, mature adults and none of us wants some wanker with a title and a soapbox telling us how to exercise good judgment. Actually, some of us really do need to be told this, as evidenced by some of the colossally stupid incidents that have occurred, however rarely, at VRG events, but the ones who need to hear it will read this and think I'm talking about somebody else. That said, if we can get more members to make concerted efforts to improve their driving ability, which will better inform their judgment, then we may reach Utopia through a side door.

Consistency: This one is *really* easy... Lap times and, in real time, tachometer readings tell it all. If your lap times (excluding traffic) aren't generally within 0.5 seconds of one another, and if your tachometer readings at track-out vary more than 200 rpm, then you are not a consistent driver. If you're not a consistent driver then your braking, turn-in, apex and track-out points all vary too much to be making anything but tiny incremental changes, and the most obvious passes. Once again, **YOUR TACHOMETER IS YOUR REPORT CARD**. You don't have to buy data acquisition equipment, you merely need to pick spots just past the track-out points of every corner and then start noting your tachometer readings as you pass these spots (the apex of Turn 7, for example, at NHMS). If you don't run a track enough to remember readings from every corner, then start with the two or three corners leading onto the longest straights and add corners throughout the event. Once you've established consistency in a given corner, start experimenting... turn in earlier, turn in later, induce TBO (Trailing Brake Oversteer) to rotate the car at corner entry, etc., and see whether you can improve your track-out reading. When you get truly consistent, you'll be fighting for half widths of the tachometer needle. By doing this, you will become your own driving coach. If you find that you are unable to achieve the kind of consistency just described, or if you are unable to improve your track-out readings, then you need to improve your...

Skill: The difficulty of this one varies. Driving skill depends on both natural ability and the right kind of seat time. With proper coaching, even a driver with horrible natural ability can become a superior racer. What many don't appreciate, however, is that race tracks are a lousy place to develop driving skills. Unless you're able to spend several hours per week driving the same track, then you aren't seeing each corner with enough regularity and repetition to truly master it. This is the beauty of a skid pad... it's a perpetual corner, therefore geography is taken out of the equation and driving ability is thrown into sharp relief. Frankly, I don't understand why more of our members don't attend our Level 2 School on a regular basis. I've been racing for 30 years and instructing for 20. I've done thousands of laps on skid pads and each and every lap, even to this day, is a welcome chance to whet my balance, vision and sensitivity to yaw, pitch, roll and slip. With VRG's new radios, VRG instructors can kick back like John Goodman in the movie "Always" and whisper in your ear during every lap. If you're not running laps within 0.5 seconds of each other, then you need to improve your driving skill. If you try to accomplish this by running the full VRG schedule, excluding driving schools, you'll barley make a dent. If you want to make a dent, sign up for our next Level 2 School.

Next time we'll talk about how to take corners, and we'll use as examples some of the real corners that most of us see each year.