

“Getting Started at the Track”- Kirk @WORKS

This presentation is only intended as a brief overview and should not be viewed as the official requirements or rules for any track organization. Please consult each organization for specific rules and requirements.

I. Event Overview

In general, a typical event day begins with **registration at the track** followed by **preparing your car** for track use. Next, the **mandatory drivers meeting** gives the organization an opportunity to lay down the ground rules for the day, explain the flags, and clear up any questions anyone may have.

As the first run group prepares to get onto the track for their first session, **Group one (novice)** begins their classroom session. The classroom sessions last 20 minutes and begin by introducing the concepts and techniques used in high performance driving. Instructors explain concepts like seating position, weight transfer, the racing line, apexes, smooth driving, oversteer, & understeer, etc. At the end of the first classroom session, every novice driver will have a basic understanding of what it takes to drive around a race track at speed.

Each **Group one through four** will alternate every session with usually a break for lunch. The first track session begins around 8:30 am and the last session usually begins at 4pm. (Most tracks close at 5pm daily) Each session typically lasts from 20-30 minutes with each run group based on skill and/or experience level. After each run group, there is a mandatory download session where driving situations and the previous session are discussed.

II. Run Group Explanation

A. Participants are separated according to their experience level into four basic groups: One, Two, Three, and Four. There are no speed limits in any of the groups, and the novice drivers are assigned instructors for safety reasons. Personal attention is paid to every student. Some organizations, (i.e. NCRC) only have three groups, so make sure you are placed in the proper group according to your skill level.

Group one (1)

This is where you begin. The novice driver receives **one on one** instruction from experienced racers, as you learn to control your car and yourself. Your mentor will provide you with guidance as you learn to drive at the limit. You will learn: how to approach a turn, the fastest way around it, what gear should you be in, how to brake, and how to exit. The session generally includes a lead-follow session. Passing is very limited in the Group 1 Sessions.

Group two (2)

Your mentor has determined you can drive on your own and with less supervision. You apply what you learned in the Group 1. The pace is faster, and the passing rules are more relaxed.

Group three (3)

You have progressed to the world of high performance driving. The passing rules in Group 3 are not as strict. You must learn to share the track at high speeds with others.

Group four (4)

Congratulations! You have made it, no passing restriction except those of good judgment and rules of the road etiquette. You and your peers are now experiencing the joys of doing it right in a safe environment! You can now enjoy high performance driving at its finest. Those that wish to can petition to apply for a competition license.

B. HPDE philosophy

Let's emphasize that **this is NOT a race**. Rather these events are **High Speed Driving Schools (HPDE)** where the focus is on improving your driving skills. Since there are drivers from various skill levels, every participant is expected to follow the rules. The goal is to create a safe and managed environment that is conducive to learning. **Overly aggressive drivers will not be tolerated.**

Individuals who continue to display unsafe driving or disregard for safety procedures will be reprimanded and called in for discussion. **Three infractions during the day is usually grounds for termination of your track day.**

III. Logistics

A. General:

As a general rule, an "unmodified" factory vehicle will pass tech without any problems, but cars that have been modified (seats, roll bars, belts, etc) must conform to the preparation rules listed in the rules for each organization.

- Any car in safe operating condition (from Aston Martin to Zagato).
- Mufflers. Different tracks have different sound policies.
- Roll bars in convertible autos.
- Seat belts in good working order.
- State driver's license.
- Long sleeve shirt and pants (cotton is great).
- Knowledge of the club codes and regulations.
- At least 18 years of age.

B. Helmet:

A helmet is required anytime anyone is on the track, even if you are a passenger. Helmets should be **M/SA 95(Snell rated) or newer only** . SA95 or later helmets are strongly recommended due to their fire retardant characteristics. Typically helmets are approved for 5 year periods,(ie Snell rated 95, 2000, and now 2005) when purchasing a helmet look for the latest year rating available.

C. Passengers:

All drivers may carry one passenger in the car out on the track. All non-participating passengers are required to sign a waiver before being allowed to ride in any car. A helmet is required and all track rules apply.

For most track organizations, passengers are not allowed until the novice driver shows proficiency at driving safely by themselves.

D. Tech Inspection:

Every car that will be on the track must be in good running condition. Cars deemed to be potentially unsafe for it's driver and towards other drivers will not be allowed on the track.

Every participant must have their car tech inspected by a trained technician prior to an event. Each driver is responsible for his/her car's operating condition and must produce a signed tech form during morning registration. **See attached form.**

E. Preparing Your Car:

1. Before the Event:

Ensure that your car is mechanically sound, if in doubt, have a professional look over your car. Typically, track events put more stress on your car and thus wear items such as brakes and tires will need more attention. A confident driver requires confidence in their equipment.

-Plan to accelerate your oil change schedule (the hotter your engine runs, the sooner the oil degrades), possibly changing it after every 2K miles.

-The brakes should be bled after an event, and the rotors and pads checked for wear and cracks.

Brake upgrades are highly recommended...vented rotors, high performance pads etc.,

-Check your wheels and suspension for bolt tightness, stress cracks or other damage.

-Check your wheel bearings as well. Check your tires for wear, and reset pressure back to normal street pressures.

- R compound tires are suggested once you have a few events under your belt.

2. At the Track:

-Put numbers on your car windows or doors. Each organization has their own rules...tape is usually fine.

-Change wheels from street to race(intermediate/advanced)

-Mask off your headlights, turn signals, maybe even the whole nose and fender edges, to protect them from rock chips

-Remove everything loose from the inside of your car. This includes radar detectors, cell phones, handheld cameras, tool kits, everything from the trunk, etc. Loose cloth items (jackets, hats, etc) in a closed trunk are fine.

-Get out your helmet, shoes, gloves.

-Adjust your tire pressures, consult other drivers for proper range.

You are now ready to get on the track. Have fun and always drive within your limits.

3. After the Event:

Clean up your pit area and prepare your car for the ride home.

-Check tire pressures, oil, and water levels.

IV. Preparing Yourself:

-Ask yourself why you are doing this?

Do you want to become a better driver? Do you plan to competitively race?

Answering these questions can help you maintain focus and plan some long term goals for you and your car.

-Get a good night's rest. Mental fatigue is the leading cause of accidents on the road and the track is no different. Many drivers prefer to stay overnight at a motel near the track.

-Learn the track and turns before your event. All local tracks have trackmaps on their sites. The more familiar you are with each turn and their respective numbers, the more prepared you will be for your track day and classroom instruction.

-Keep yourself hydrated, especially if you're new to tracking.

-Keep an eye on how your brain is working. It's very easy to get mentally worn out and find yourself making small mistakes on the track. If you find you are missing braking zones, putting a wheel or two off the track, or losing your concentration - come in for a break! These signs are your advance warning signals that you need some rest, and you want to do it before something worse happens.

-Lastly, **avoid “red-mist syndrome”**...this is when you think your last name's Alonso or Montoya and you just have to catch that faster car in front of you....relax...There are no trophies or podiums being awarded at the end of the day. **You are not in a race.**

The whole purpose is to have fun, be safe and not harm you or anyone else. Safety is the number one priority.

V. Various Track Groups:

For novices, two of the best organizations to get started with are NASA and NCRC. Both organizations provide great instruction for the first-timer and are geared for introducing beginners to the track.

In addition, these sites contain articles, tips and suggestions that are invaluable to all drivers from novice to advanced.

<http://www.nasaproring.com>

<http://www.ncracing.org>

There are many other groups that hold track days. These groups range in price, length of track time and requirements. Some offer catered food and some are just bare bones.

Ask around and find a group that best suits you and your car.

Here are a few groups I can recommend:

<http://www.speedventures.net/>

<http://www.unlimitedlaps.com/>

<http://www.tracquest.com/>

<http://www.trackmasters-racing.com/>

<http://www.greenflagdriving.com/>

VII. Improving as a Driver

This comes with time and experience. My best advice is to talk to and learn from more experienced drivers. Even the most advanced pro drivers can always learn from instruction.

-Get some seat time with an advanced driver and see what lines they use.

-Remember smooth is fast.

-When increasing speed, do so at small increments so you are able to adjust and remain in control.

-Never drive at the limit (10/10ths)...give yourself room for error and you will be taking your car home safely.

The NASA site has some great articles on learning the line, heel & toe technique and weight transfer. Use these tools and maybe pick up a book like Hank Watts-“ Secret’s to Solo Driving”.

Hope this helps,
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