



ONE VISION

There is more to driver training than simply learning how to drive fast, as the Driver Development Programme demonstrates.

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We are all good drivers, some of us exceptional. We must be, we own, drive, race Porsches and with the kudos of having a key in our pocket to some of the finest sports cars money can buy surely means we have what it takes when it comes to grabbing Stuttgart's most famous product by the scruff of the neck and showing it who's boss.

Obviously this is complete twaddle, particularly for those of us who passed our driving test in the UK at the tender age of 17 and haven't been required to take any additional driver training no matter what car we buy, since. There are of course a number of options open to those who wish to take it upon themselves to develop their skills behind the wheel, with the Institute of Advance Motorists being one such starting point for some, while others may opt for one-to-one tuition at a track day. Alternatively you can book one-on-one tuition with a number of specialist driver coaches who have driving CVs that include highlights such as winning the Le Mans 24 Hour. The latest package we have come across, and subsequently

sampled, is the Driver Development Programme run by Carolyn Barker, a former racer with an impressive CV that also includes many years in the passenger seat providing instruction to the car industry's many test and development drivers who, despite their day (and night) jobs of testing tomorrow's cars all over the world, are expected to have continual driver training to keep the expensive prototypes out of the hedgerows and headlines. It was while working on behalf of Prodrive (yes, the World Rally, Le Mans, Touring Car and, possibly, F1 motorsport outfit) that Carolyn decided that the training she was doing for the manufacturers would also be of interest to the paying public.

The Driver Development Programme is based at Prodrive's test track in Warwickshire and runs for a full day with no more than one instructor to two pupils for the duration (the maximum number on the course is 24). The instructors used by DDP are, where possible, matched to your requirements (at the time of booking you are asked a few questions about your driving history and what you would like to get out of the day), and all have enviable driving CVs that

has seen them spend their days driving a wide selection of cars every day in the best locations and getting paid for it.

The day is setup to provide maximum wheel time with your instructor, so after a brief introduction to the day's timetable and a guide to the circuits in use you are introduced to your instructor and the day is quickly under way.

The Prodrive track offers DDP three circuits to use. The Adverse Handling circuit which is a tight, twisting and technical course that places emphasis on road position, the driver's vision of the route ahead and their position and comfort in the car. The Tower High Speed circuit is a more open and quicker course that allows you take what you have learnt from the Adverse course and put it into practise at much higher speeds. What looks like a traditional wide open airfield circuit is actually a demanding high-speed loop that concentrates your mind. The final aspect of the course is a low friction, wet-weather handling course. This comprises a wet-grip straight line paved surface and a circular steering pad that offers ice rink levels of grip.

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ADVERSE HANDLING COURSE

At just over a mile in length the Adverse Handling course used by the DDP is a tricky little circuit. Waiting behind a stretch of Armco while a fellow student takes her Carrera SC around the course it looks like gently flowing inputs at a rather sedate and somewhat gentle pace are the order of the day. From the behind the wheel of our gen-two Boxster 2.9 it feels like an entirely different place.

The course is barely a car and half wide but it's all second and third gear stuff so the pace is far from sedate. With blind entries into corners, hidden apices and exits that tighten and short straights with off cambers and vicious bumps it mimics a stereotypical British B-road perfectly. Mastering it is not the work of a moment.

This aspect of the course is all about learning to focus your vision on where you want to be going and not fall into the trap of fixing your vision to the end of your bonnet. It sounds obvious, and a trait that any good driver will think he or she isn't guilty of, but when someone sits beside you and points out where you're going wrong, or rather points out what you are focusing on instead of where you should be looking, you begin to re-evaluate. Take a look at MotoGP riders for a clearer demonstration. As they are backing their bike into a corner hard on the brakes their heads will be turned to the exit of the corner as they pick out their exit point and look for their next target down the straight. They're looking at where they want to be going, which is exactly what you should be doing.

The instruction is from Carolyn Barker is incredibly controlled, calming but hugely effective. There's no pulling at the controls or orders barked, just a gentle commentary on what you are and, crucially, what you should be doing. The first 20 minute drive has you feeling as though you've just completed a climb on Mont Ventoux at full chat in a 908 Spyder. In the wet.

Sharing an instructor gives you the opportunity to take a step back when your co-driver has their turn and you can watch them tackle the same course in a different light, providing you with another perspective of what you should be aiming to achieve when it comes to dissecting a stretch of tarmac. After two or three 20 minute

runs not only do the instructions from the passenger seat subside (if you've been listening, of course!), but your pace begins to pick up speed as your confidence grows. Obviously becoming familiar with the circuit with each run helps here, too, but just how far the instructors can move you on was demonstrated when a sudden downpour presented us with a sodden track but subsequent runs were no slower and, crucially, as smooth, precise and controlled as any run had been in the dry.

TOWER CIRCUIT

Having got your eye in on the Adverse Handling circuit the move to the 1.5-mile Tower circuit provides the opportunity to take your newly acquired approach to looking where you want to go and add a dash of speed.

With a mix of long, flowing high-speed curves and a couple of deceptively slow-in fast-out chicanes the circuit becomes one of those courses that you nibble away at a bid to master it. As well as honing your ability at pace this circuit also allows the instructors to introduce you to tactics such as trail braking into slower corners that are approached from three-figure speeds. It's a technique that concentrates on keeping the car balanced as you mix deceleration with pouring the car into the apex when the entry point is long and open and the apex is late appearing.

As with the previous area of the course the key to 'getting' the high speed circuit is vision and smoothness, although being confident with steering inputs is crucial too, and these are all areas that you feel improving corner by corner, lap by lap as the instructors offer small but vital tips, advice and instruction with every tour.

But it's not all one-way communication. At the end of each session behind the wheel your instructor will question you to see if a) you're taking any of it in and learning and b) to discover more about what you wish to achieve on the course and where you think you could do with more improvement. It's a refreshing way to learn, and beats more traditional training methods that show you how to complete a specific task for a set scenario and little else.





WET HANDLING

The final part of the morning session involved time on the two wet handling courses at the Prodrive facility. The soaking wet paved course is a great way to hone your low-grip surface skills. Provoking the rear axle out of line, catching it and then sending it back the other way can, and does, provide hours of fun. It also teaches you how delicate, precise and quick you need to be with the throttle and steering inputs. Although, once again, the key ingredient is keeping your eyes locked on where you want to go, rather than looking at where the front of the car is pointing. Unless of course you want to spear off and hit the control tower, that is.

The other low-grip surface is a perfect circle flooded with water and a barely visible camber change in the middle. Primarily it's designed to teach you the basics of car control at a safe, low speed. But after a couple of spins and encouragement from your instructor it quickly turns into a duel between you and the car as you try to complete a full circle on the lock stops while the car and the surface combine to try and fire you off into the outfield.

Following a freshly prepared lunch the afternoon is spent revisiting the areas of the facility you feel you need more coaching on, or you can run through the morning programme

once again and fine tune your newly acquired skills. Either way the time will pass far too quickly and you'll be left craving for more, which when it comes to driving training you can never get enough of ☺

DISCOUNT READER OFFER SAVE 10% WITH DDP

The Driver Development Programme is offering *GT Purely Porsche* readers a 10% discount – a saving of up to £35 – on their half and full day courses, for further information of this offer please contact Carolyn Barker on 01787 278833, quoting: ddp/gt0609, or visit www.driverdp.com

