

Performance driving means being in control of your vehicle

Before all of you race car fans begin drooling at the thought of being encouraged to shave three seconds off your personal best time on your daily commute, we should probably define performance driving.

It means always being in control of your vehicle and the situations around you. It means using the capabilities of your vehicle, without abusing it. It means having respect for the other drivers on the road, even if they show little respect for you. The performance driver strives to drive well, and enjoy the process of honing this craft.

Performance driving has as much to do with the mindset of the driver as the performance of the vehicle they choose to drive. Save your car's performance for appropriate times. Speeding around town isn't going to impress anybody. Driving is a physical activity that requires your involvement and undivided attention. Some of the basics of driving a race car can be used to

improve your driving in real world conditions. Let's think of this as a "cheat sheet" on performance driving. There are several things that we can work on, even before we leave our driveway.

The first thing that we need to address is how and where to look when we are driving. Vision determines at least 90 per cent of the decisions we make while we are behind the wheel. Studies have shown the typical driver looks about three or four car lengths, or between 45 to 60 feet in front of their vehicle. At 80 km/h, you are traveling about 73 feet per second. At 100 km/h, you are traveling about 88 feet per second. The message here, is look ahead—way ahead. You will see the traffic patterns developing and anticipate what you will need to do, if you look further ahead.

Your eyes lead your physical movements, so the second thing to remember is to look where you want to go. If you look at the object you are trying to avoid—BAM! You are going to hit it. Or, in my situation, scrape it real-

MOTOR MOUTH



Mike Corcoran

ly hard. Trust me on this one, I will not be looking at the guardrail at Corner One at Mosport ever again. Keep your eyes moving and looking for a clear path ahead. Keep your head upright. As you turn, move your head from side to side, but do not lean, or tip it. This changes your perspective and alters the information that your brain is attempting to process. Your eyes are side by side for a reason, so keep your head in the position that allows them to work at their best.

For those of you that have made it this far, I congratulate you! Now the highly technical stuff begins.

Seating position

Hey, Motor Mouth, you have to be kidding, right? Climb in and assume the Stirling Moss position, arms straight ahead, locked elbows and seat back reclined for aerodynamic purposes. Well, it looks fast, and all the old racing movies showed it that way, but we need to dispel that myth quick. Our seating position, and how we hold the steering wheel, helps us receive feedback from the car. Try and sit in the seat, not on it. The more of your body in contact with the seat, the more information you will receive about how your car is handling.

These tips should help you get nice and comfy. Start by adjusting the bottom of the seat so that when you place your right foot on the floor, under the brake pedal, you are able to maintain a slight bend in your leg. At this distance, you will be able to use your legs to brace your body while driving. This position also allows you to use the balls of your feet to control the accelerator, brake and clutch.

Next, adjust the seat back angle, or rake, so that when you hold the top of the steering wheel, you still have your arm bent slightly at the elbow. This allows you to have maximum range of motion and positions you so that when you are holding the steering wheel correctly, your arms are bent at the elbow, and not ramrod straight. This is essential to efficient steering.

Holding the steering wheel

Try this simple exercise. Hold a dinner plate in your hands as if it was a clock and your hands are at the nine and the three. Bend your elbows until the plate is about chest high. Pretend the plate is a steering wheel and turn from it from the left to the right as quickly as you can. Now try holding the plate at 11 and one, straighten your arms and lock your elbows. Try turning to the left and right as fast as you can. Please let me know which position felt more comfortable.

Hold the wheel firmly, but not too tight. The Vulcan death grip is not needed here. Do not squeeze the wheel until it is oozing out between your fingers. Surgeons do not clench a scalpel, and artists don't clasp a brush. When you have to make a steering input, use smooth, gentle movements. The rewards will be smoother, safer driving.

Practice some of these tips, and try some of these changes in your driving position. If they feel awkward at first, it means that you probably have not been in as much control of your vehicle as you may have thought.

—Mike Corcoran is a former amateur road racer, a high-performance driving school instructor and the lease renewal manager at Georgetown Chrysler



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City Highway

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Daily Commute:	150 km	200 km	250 km
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Honda Accord (2.3L Automatic)	\$683.97	\$911.96	\$1,139.95
Mazda Protégé (1.6L Automatic)	\$605.70	\$807.60	\$1,009.50
Nissan Altima (2.5L Automatic)	\$757.11	\$1,009.48	\$1,261.85
Oldsmobile Alero (2.2L Automatic)	\$636.50	\$848.66	\$1,060.83
Subaru Impreza AWD (2.0L Automatic)	\$1,022.71	\$1,363.61	\$1,704.51
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Formed consumers always read the fine print. Fuel economy ratings for the Jetta TDI, Chrysler Sebring, Honda Accord, Mazda Protégé, Nissan Altima, Oldsmobile Alero, Subaru Impreza AWD, and Toyota Camry from the EnerGuide 2002 Fuel Consumption Guide produced by Natural Resources Canada. Fuel savings based on fuel required to travel the Daily Commute distance 260 times per year, assuming the commute is 15% city driving and 85% highway driving. Cost of fuel based on April 30, 2002, average gasoline price of \$0.658 per litre and average diesel price of \$0.620 per litre. Actual mileage may vary.

Quick tips: Driving an SUV on wet roads

- Keep two car lengths between you and the vehicle in front for every 10 kilometres per hour you're travelling.
- Steering, braking and acceleration should be done as smoothly and deliberately as possible.
- Drive over standing water in a straight line whenever possible.
- Slow down. Most single car crashes are directly attributable to too much speed.
- Extend your safety, comfort and peace of mind by buying and maintaining high quality tires designed especially for luxury SUVs, like the Goodyear Fortera.

—By Tom Hnatiw, host of Speed Channel's Dream Car Garage, News Canada