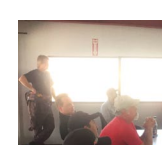
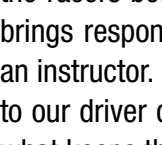
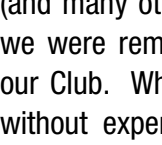
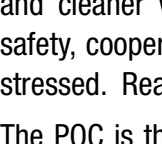
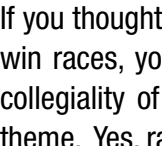
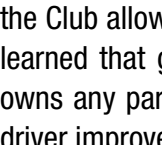
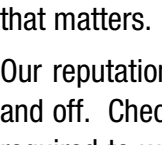
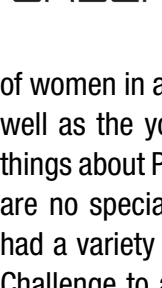


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Playing Well With Others: Racers Clinic

Karen Robinson

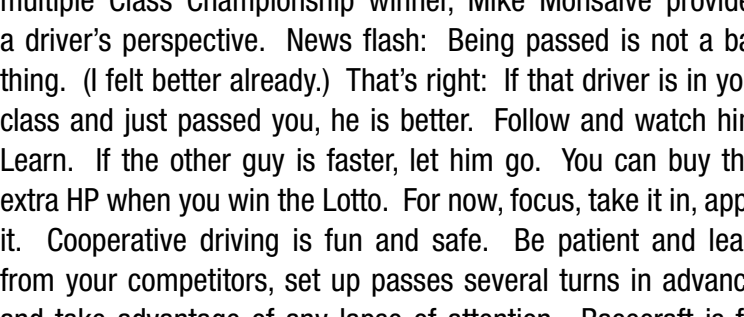
Twenty-seven Type-A personalities, most of whom hadn't had the best night's sleep, sat at attention in the Buttonwillow Raceway classroom as POC's first Racers Clinic of 2017 began. The excitement and anticipation was palpable. POC's reputation for turning out racers who are prepared and capable meant we needed to listen up, execute, and earn the honor to race with the best. The two-day clinic taught by CDI Dwain Dement and former CDI Dave Gardner reinforced why that reputation is not only well deserved, but is why a POC driver license is respected throughout amateur racing. They worked us. Hard. Getting comfortable in formerly uncomfortable zones, maintaining mental focus, building skills and confidence were on the agenda for the weekend.

Our class included the largest representation of women in a Racers Clinic for POC (seven if you're counting), as well as the youngest ever female participant. One of the great things about POC is that you're a driver, not male or female. There are no special classes or handicapping for gender or age. We had a variety of cars from a 914-6 to Spec Boxsters to a Ferrari Challenge to a GT4 Club Sport and everything in between. But, it's not what you drive, it's how you handle yourself as a driver that matters.

Our reputations as racers start now: How we behave, on track and off. Check that ego at the door. The right attitude is what's required to win. While each of us has a different learning style, the Club allows flexibility to adapt to each driver's approach. We learned that giving racing room is the way to play and no one owns any part of the track. With dedication and practice every driver improves.

If you thought Racers Clinic was only about how to drive fast and win races, you'd be wrong. Really wrong. POC's focus on the collegiality of club racing with your friends was the consistent theme. Yes, racecraft, technique, scooting around the track faster and cleaner were topics covered, but it is the importance of safety, cooperation, good attitude, and sportsmanship that were stressed. Real racers play well with others.

The POC is the sum of its volunteers. Just as Dwain and Dave (and many others) generously volunteer their time for the Club, we were reminded that we have the privilege to give back to our Club. Where else can you get this training and instruction without expensive private coaching? This is the tradition of the racers before us and we have benefited. Being a real racer brings responsibility on many levels, and every racer should be an instructor. The value of what is learned "right seat" is integral to our driver development. Preparing the next wave of racers is what keeps the Club vital, growing, and fun.



Class time included everything from the practical to the philosophical: The importance of proper safety gear, mental preparation, the responsibility for putting a safe car on track, setting goals for practice sessions, and getting into the head of your competitors were just a few of the lessons. Exercises required we purposely drive "off" line to learn how the track feels, how much grip can be found on the outside and inside, how much track is really out there, and where's the best "exit" if you miscalculate. Driving in a time trial line is a non starter if you want to be a competitive racer. You've got to get comfortable handling your car in unexpected situations. Learning to navigate traffic, without contact, maintain your focus and take advantages when presented are what wins races. Situational awareness must become your sixth sense. We practiced passing and getting passed (more of the latter for me).

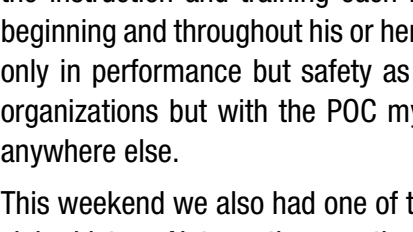
Veteran racer, Rookie of the Year, two time Driver of the Year, and multiple Class Championship winner, Mike Monsalve provided a driver's perspective. News flash: Being passed is not a bad thing. (I felt better already.) That's right: If that driver is in your class and just passed you, he is better. Follow and watch him. Learn. If the other guy is faster, let him go. You can buy that extra HP when you win the Lotto. For now, focus, take it in, apply it. Cooperative driving is fun and safe. Be patient and learn from your competitors, set up passes several turns in advance, and take advantage of any lapse of attention. Racecraft is far more important than lap speed. Fastest lap does not equate to improvement. Mike's unassuming style and emphasis on skill development and having fun personifies the Club's philosophy.

Race starts are a rush--in many ways. We took off for our first practice start, slowest car first (called the Australian Pursuit). Warming tires and brakes, we hustled around the track as the car on pole set the pace. Lining up, side by side we turned onto the front straight. Every sense at heightened awareness. Listening to, and feeling, your car. Who's behind, in front, to the side, up ahead, look for the green flag, gauge who will do what, be consistent, get through the first couple of turns without incident, don't be "that guy" who ruins the race. Remember that you don't win a race on the first two turns, but you can lose it. All of our instructors' words of wisdom repeated in my head as the rumble of the cars resonated in my chest. Green flag! I was grinning ear to ear. This is so fun! Here we were, the anxious group of the morning wheel to wheel, gaining confidence with each lap.

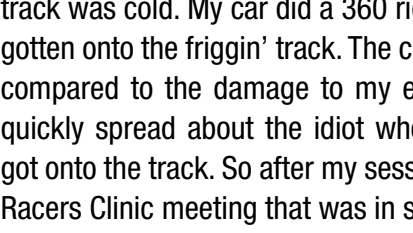
On track sessions were followed by a debrief where we shared what we experienced and learned, received input from fellow drivers, and feedback from our instructors. Our race starts were ragged, we needed to work on more cooperation to line up for the start. We needed to get closer to simulate real racing situations. We needed to pay better attention to the flag stations. Because the track is dynamic, it is imperative that we look to our corner workers for safety. "Don't miss the rat" were Dave Gardner's words of wisdom. He shared a story from a prior racers clinic where a corner worker held out a fake rat for three laps and only a few drivers took note to mention it at their debrief. Don't miss the rat. Another way to stay out of trouble. From now on I'll hear those words on every out lap as I acknowledge the corner workers.

For me it's the mental game--the psychology of racing--that is most intriguing and challenging. As the driver of a momentum car, the opportunities for advantage over my competitors are fleeting: a tiny miscalculation on entry, a nano second too early or late to the brake, a tad hesitant to throttle or a little too anxious. This is where races are won (or lost) in the world of Spec racing. "Help the other guy make a mistake" said Dwain. Gain the advantage through subtle (or not) intimidation, get into their head, get them checking their mirror more, and pressure them to make an error. Strategy, planning, patience, and calculated moves. This is racing. Getting to know our "class" of racers was one of the most important objectives of the clinic. Our fellow classmates will be our competitors when we race. We learned to watch each other, to build a knowledge base of fellow drivers' styles and techniques, and to take advantage of another's predictability as Ana Predescu did of me. She followed me around and compensated for how I like to drive Phil Hill. Our Boxsters (her BSR and my slightly heftier BSX) are well matched and she was looking to make her move. I went wider, she kept on me, slightly more inside. As I consistently sought my happy place on the track, she used that predictability to position for a pass. Dang! I got schooled, but it was fun and I know to break the habit of reverting to the comfortable time trial line.

Following on learning how our competitors drive, is developing confidence in, and respect for, our fellow racers. In order to do what we do, we must read, know, and trust that those around us are competent. That's how we can get comfortable door to door around Sunset as I did with Terry Davis. It was exhilarating to push my car for all he's got, Terry doing the same, and both of us trusting that we could handle our cars as we battled around the turn to the front straight. Wow! This is what it's all about. The stories at the impound, the smiles, hugs, and shared experiences with friends. That's why we're here. We've gained entry to the playground. Play nice and we all have fun.



Musings From the Sidelines



Don Matz

I didn't drive at our Buttonwillow event but I had a great time. Herman was at the track for the weekend. I first met him nearly 15 years ago when he was one of my students at the Streets of Willow. Like many of us, Herman's story is the same. After his first event, he went on to get his Short Track license, his Time Trial license and then he became a Cup Racer.

In 2005 at Laguna Seca, I over-corrected at turn four and hit the wall. Hard. It was bad. As I stood there looking at my car in the cold pits, thinking that my racing days were over, Herman showed up with another fellow I had never met. The other guy was Herman's mechanic. He said to me, "I would like to thank you for getting this one (Herman) so enthused about the program that he's become one of my best customers. And I'd like to show my appreciation by giving you a tub." At the time I didn't even know what a tub was but then I found out it was a car without guts; no engine, no tranny, no nothing, just a shell. What an unselfish gesture from someone I had never met!

So, the following week I drove to Riverside along with my body shop mechanic and we removed the front and the rear quarter panels of the tub and then began the process of putting my car back together again. After calling in a few favors, eventually the car was ready for the track. Except it needed to be painted. Being on a shoe-string budget, I grabbed two cans of Krylon, one black and the other red. My wife has pictures of me in our driveway spray-painting my car the day before I went to Willow Springs for my second racers clinic.

The fella at Laguna who gave me the tub was Don Kravig. Since that time, I have been having my car serviced by Don at Precision Motion in Colton. Don and I have become close friends and a few years back, we raced together on the same team at Tribute to Le Mans. We called our team, "Too Old to Lift."

A few years later, again at Laguna Seca, my muffler broke away from the rest of the exhaust system and I was black flagged for sound. A friend of mine and I removed it and took it to Loren Beggs who welded it back together. After replacing it, I never missed a run session.

So, as I'm standing here without my car at Buttonwillow, these memories are going through my mind. I'm not driving and it's kind of tough to just watch. As Director of the Performance Driving Series, I'm thrilled at what I see. We have 113 drivers participating this weekend, many of whom are new to our club. Several have already approached me to express their appreciation for putting on a great event and they're looking forward to the next one. "We must be doing something right," I think.

I've also received positive feedback for our mandatory PDS clinics. All new drivers are required to sit through this one-hour session that focuses on safety, preparation and basic car dynamics. The POC has a reputation for its nationally recognized driver education programs, racing instruction, and renowned racing series. We should all pride ourselves in knowing that the instruction and training each new driver receives, from the beginning and throughout his or her POC experience, is rooted not only in performance but safety as well. I have raced with other organizations but with the POC my comfort level is higher than anywhere else.

This weekend we also had one of the largest Racer Clinics in the clubs history. Noteworthy was that there were seven women in this group. I was so impressed seeing those seven gals sitting together in the training room listening to Dwain Dement our Chief Driving Instructor along with Dave Gardner and Mike Monsalve as they shared their "pearls of wisdom" with the class.

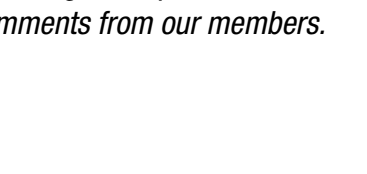
Watching the action from the deck above the main straightaway brought back other memories. Not long after receiving my Racers license in '05, I began finding things out the hard way. It was at Willow Springs. The drivers' meeting was at 7 AM and the first run session was Orange, my group. I was feeling anxious, couldn't wait to get on the track. After the meeting, I ran to my car jumped in and revved it up. Then I realized I hadn't checked my tire pressures. After unbuckling, I crawled out of my cage and began the painstaking process of letting air out of each tire. It seemed to take forever. I heard the cars in the hot pit roaring onto the track. I got more anxious. I jumped back into the car, buckled up and hustled to the grid. When I was given the go-ahead by the starter I got on the gas and immediately began scrubbing my tires... still at the track entrance. My tires were new and the track was cold. My car did a 360 right into the wall. I hadn't even gotten onto the friggin' track. The crack in my bumper was minor, compared to the damage to my ego. I knew that rumor would quickly spread about the idiot who hit the wall before he even got onto the track. So after my session I went right upstairs to the Racers Clinic meeting that was in session (yes, there was a clinic that weekend) and told everyone what happened. The lesson... expect the unexpected but more importantly, be prepared and never let emotion override your common sense.

That early morning escapade came at a cost. Here it is 12 years later and the crack is still in my bumper. I purposefully left it there in order to remind me never to forget to take time to prepare. The old saying "slow down to go fast" doesn't just apply to cornering. So, even though I didn't drive, this weekend wasn't a bust. Not at all. I enjoyed meeting some new members. I sat in on the Clinic, and I got to see our new racers go at it in their very first race at the end of the day on Sunday. What a hoot! And, I got take a trip down memory lane. All totaled, it was good. But nothing, and I mean nothing, compares to being in the middle of that pack when the green flag goes down. See you all at CFOS in April!

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Check Us Out!

Be sure to check out the new POC website for our 2017 schedule of events and to stay current on PDS, Time Attack and Cup Racing standings.

And, don't miss the Official POC Facebook Page with photos, videos and comments from our members.