

TRACK TIME

By: Brant D. Nystrom



This is it. All around the racing world, series are drawing to an end. Drivers take a couple weeks to unwind and reflect on their performance; teams develop plans for a hopeful new year; and amateur track drivers mourn the break, appreciate the financial relief, and plan for the coming season. I am fortunate to have so many friends that enjoy the sport that I find to be more and more a personal obsession. We all talk racing, watch racing, and have track cars. As a certified Porsche instructor, I have had the pleasure of introducing many drivers to this sport, and I have many racing mentors that I can turn to for honest advice.

That, ADVICE, is what this month's edition is all about.

I get asked an exorbitant number of questions about car set-up, upgrades, performance, etc. By the way, I also ask an endless number of questions. I do tons of research regarding parts and part providers, vehicles and upgrades, driving and teaching techniques. I watch a lot of racing and different racing series, and have long talks with my closest track buddies where we pose endless questions like: "if you had exactly \$100,000 for a racing only vehicle, what would you buy?"

Questions, research, and experience help anyone to gain insight on a topic, but honestly I learn the most instructing others and answering their questions, and preparing articles like these. A close friend and mentor of mine once said, "don't trust anyone in racing". In many ways, I understand his point of view, but I've also found the critical few individuals whose opinions carry great weight with me, and that generally provide advice that accelerates my own understanding.

Below are a few common questions I receive and reflect upon, and my best answers. I promise to always share my honest opinion on any topic, but like all

of us, I grow and gain perspective. My answers may change through time as I learn more about this sport, and as others enlighten me to new ways of thinking.

Question 1: What is the best track car?

Answer 1: This is a really difficult question to answer, but it comes up all the time. Porsches, BMWs, Corvettes, and even Miatas are all great track cars. The right answer really depends on your needs, experience level, application, and budget. However, as a Porsche club publication, I can say this: I truly believe that the Boxster, Cayman, and 911 are great cars to learn high-performance track driving in. These cars are well balanced, fast, fun-to-drive, and built to a level that allows anyone from a beginner through an instructor to push hard and get good results. You won't learn bad habits in these cars, or become a single-faceted driver. In stock trim they perform as well as any other stock vehicle at any price point, and there are many quality aftermarket parts for those who want to upgrade.

Question 2: What performance upgrades would you suggest adding to my car?

Answer 2: First and foremost, assuming you have a suitable vehicle (like a 2006 Boxster S – great track car) my advice is this: Work on the driver!!! A fast experienced driver will outrun any beginner in any vehicle, and that's fact. So, the best approach is to learn to drive and work on driving skill. As a learning driver, vehicle upgrades should be limited to reliability-oriented parts (oil pan spacers if warranted, oil / power steering coolers). Once the driver advances to the intermediate level he should consider the option of racing seats and harnesses (safety should come first), and this may be the point to consider higher performance track tires. Good tire upgrades include the Nitto NT01 and Toyo Proxes R888, or you could progress to a more pure track tire like a Hoosier R6 or Hankook Ventus Z214. Another good investment at this point would be a track oriented alignment and the associated suspension upgrades (racing control arms and maybe even coilovers). From this point, upgrades are limitless.

My strong advice – avoid driving too powerful of a vehicle too soon. Drivers that begin in very high horsepower cars (>450 hp) can fall into the trap of drag-racing for fast lap times without ever learning the fine art of mastering turns. In the long run, this will be very detrimental to your development and will cause frustration, as your buddies will eventually overtake you in lower power cars.

Question 3: Am I ready for more a more competitive level or competition racing?

Answer 3: If you feel completely at ease in your current level and feel unchallenged by it, and if you are considered a safe and fast driver, you may be ready to step up a level. If so, I suggest looking at the lap times the next level of competition runs. If you are able to run times at the average rate of the next level, you are ready to give it a shot. If you are contemplating competition, remember this is a big step. You will not be given a lot of leeway, and you will experience a nervousness similar to the first time you ever drove on track (remember that).

When you start competing, concentrate on the traffic around you and being a safe and predictable driver. As your comfort level increases then you can go for the win.

As you can see, even simple questions take a long time to answer. I am always available for Q&A, and enjoy helping others work through their track-related issues. If you have interest in joining us at any upcoming event, or would like more information on PCA DE events and what is required to join-in, please feel free to contact me: brantdnystrom@gmail.com

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