

My day at the Jim Russell School

By Keith Mordoff

Like Jon Thorn's high-performance driving experience in the newsletter, I thought I'd share my own from earlier this summer. Purchasing my ZR-1 last year got me thinking about my driving skills. I figured that my car had more potential than my driving could keep up with. And if we as a club begin autocrossing again, I thought it would be a good idea to get some professional training. So to dip my toes into the world of professional driving instruction, I registered for a one-day driving school with Jim Russell. The Jim Russell school currently uses the Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, California. If you saw the NASCAR boys running the road course in California, that's the one. To the school's credit, they spend very little time talking. Most of your day is spent on the track. Their philosophy is you will learn more on the track driving than sitting in a classroom talking. They are such an experienced school that they have the day scheduled seemingly to the minute. After some basic instruction and getting decked out in a race helmet and driving suit, it's out to the cars. The cars they use are very small 900-lb, 130-hp formula cars on high-performance street tires. Half of the morning was spent driving up four straight-aways linked by hair pin turns to practice upshifting and heel and toe downshifting. They told us that this slow practice of heel and toe downshifting is more difficult than doing it faster on the full race track and this proved true for me. It was during this time that they also wanted you to do some full lock, tire smoking braking drills to learn what it feels like and practice modulating the brakes to bring the car back into control. Occasionally the instructors pull you over to give you pointers. They also get you out of the car for short breaks, some classroom instruction and most importantly, turn up the rev-limiters to dial in more horsepower which adds to the fun. Then we were back in the cars for a lead-follow session behind the school Mustang GTs around the entire course. I watched my very first live race at this racetrack in 1968 and I was so excited driving through the monstrous left-hand downhill turn called Carousel that I let out a scream. What a blast. We each got one lap behind the Mustang and then would drift back to the end of the line. You would think a 350 hp Mustang GT could run away from these little formula cars, but the more aggressive of us were locked onto the car's bumper and could have passed in several spots. After lunch we spent the rest of the day on the track. For the one-day session they don't like you to pass so on turn eight they slow you down and if you are faster than the person in front of you, you get to go around. They send you off one-at-a-time at 5-10 second intervals. I shared the day with an old friend of mine from school and enjoyed catching and passing him even more. Each afternoon session gets faster as you improve and they continue to turn up the rev-limiters on the cars. It was frustrating to keep hitting the limiters especially on the straight-aways, but no doubt they keep you from going faster than your abilities. It was a great feeling to enter turn-one at about 95 mph with no thought of hitting the brakes!

What were my major take-aways from the day? I'm a more confident driver. I learned a lot about car control and finding the edges of tire adhesion in cornering and braking. I learned clutchless upshifting and improved my heel-toe braking and downshifting. And I tried my best to keep my foot to the floor and accelerate through a blind corner!

I'd need about six-more days of on-track experience to qualify for a racing license. I wonder if I can find a beat-up street Corvette that is dying to become a track car?

Hmmm. I hope to attend another school next year that offers instruction in Corvettes. Anyone want to join me?

-Keith



The camera mounted on the rollbar captures every turn. Too bad my car number was less than my age!

New CCA membership meeting location !!!!

We are now holding the monthly CCA membership meetings at the location below. This is the same location as the old Lone Star. The December 11th meeting begins at 7:30 PM. I hope to see you there!

BENVENUTO!

MANGIARE BENE

Ristorante Italiano
Brick oven Pizzeria

BENVENUTO ALLA RISTORANTI TIPICI DA LA ITALIA

Bringing a taste of Italy to this corner of Maryland, Mangiare Bene brings you fresh pasta, calzoni, succulent veal dishes, seafood, home made desserts and much more. Once in full service to the community we will offer, buffet lunch, dinner every night, Sunday Brunch and a full bar including imported wines from Italy. We will offer private banquet settings and the perfect place for business or private parties. Our secret pizza recipes are enhanced by cooking in our wood burning FIRE BRICK over imported from Italy.

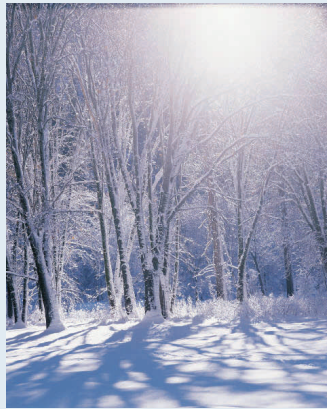
GRAZIE & BUON APPETITO

THE GREAT TASTE OF ITALIA

808 W Diamond Ave
Gaithersburg, MD 20878-1413
Phone 301-208-8880
Fax 301-208-8892

CCA WINTER PARTY

January 19



Be sure to reserve the evening of
January 19th for the CCA Winter Party.

Watch this spot in next month's issue
for full details.

-Jon Thorn
Editor