

LAP #7, GET TO KNOW YOUR CORNER

You need to know about a group of people that can be called upon to work at a moment's notice, with minimal pay and little recognition. Coming from all walks of life, they share a common love of motorsports and the people involved. Some have driven race cars, most have not, and all, given the chance, will help you become a better driver. They are the corner workers, the most important people at the track, those that literally have your life in their hands. Few are known by name because they go about their job of keeping you safe with little recognition and low pay. Yes, there are many other hard working workers at the track performing duties such as timing and scoring, pit marshalls, grid organization, and technical inspection but the corner workers are the unseen heroes since they spend the majority of their time far from activities in and around the pits. Some racing organizations, as part of their competition licensing procedure, require drivers to spend a full day working corners and learning from the regulars. It's a great idea because it helps keep things in perspective for the driver and generates respect for the critical job function the corner workers perform.

The most misunderstood thing about a corner is that it has downstream responsibility. This means their responsibility is only for the section of track extending from their station downstream to the next. When you think about it, this makes good sense as it's the only section of track they have control over through use of the flags. Waving a flag for something upstream of the station is of no help as it's likely you've already encountered and passed the obstacle before ever seeing the flag. When you work a corner station the first thing you'll notice is everyone is intently looking downstream, watching cars after they pass the station. Usually, one worker is facing the opposite direction, just as a precaution. They always work in pairs as safety is the main issue. You may also notice that they are dressed all in white. This is to be sure drivers don't mistake their clothing for a flag. It's easy when you're taking a corner at speed to glance up and see something blue, green, or red moving. The white clothing makes them more visible to you if and when they are holding a flag, whether waving it or displaying it in a stationary position.

Mechanical failures, spins, accidents and resultant debris occurring on their responsible section of track can only be seen if intently looking for it. From the drivers' perspective, this is quite different as it appears the corner worker is looking upstream at you as you pass. In green flag conditions corner workers are looking downstream if they're doing their job.

Your job is to communicate with the corner, acknowledging when they communicate to you by using their flags. Remember, every corner around the entire track is linked by radio which allows track control, the chief steward, the starter, grid workers, pit workers, and all corner stations to listen and communicate with each other. You screw up, everybody knows it, you do good

and everyone appreciates it. Make sure to acknowledge every corner station on the pace lap to give them the assurance you know they are there and to be communicated with. Later, during the race, it is easy to check-in by making contact under green flag conditions using a simple wave. This is very helpful and gives them the assurance that you'll be paying attention when it's really needed under an emergency. Also, be sure to wave your appreciation to them on the cool down lap.

Corner workers have the advantage of seeing all types of vehicles driven in a variety of conditions by drivers of differing skill levels. They can help you become a better driver by suggesting alternative techniques to apply over a given section of track. I have never been disappointed when asking for this type of advice and you should try it too. The information gained can be tremendous, for example; hearing how smaller and lighter vehicles tend to take a particular line as compared to the heavier cars. Many times, just hearing how and where most off-track excursions (spins) occur and where they usually terminate is highly useful information and can help you avoid doing the same. The perspective from the safety of a corner station is certainly different from that of the drivers seat so use it to your advantage.

One last point, remember corner workers are human too and are capable of mistakes. More than once, the wrong car has been black flagged and called into the pits or been shown the passing flag after just completing a pass. Try to remember without these workers you would not be enjoying yourself on the track. And if you're in an accident, on fire and unable to move, it's likely the one that saves your life will be a corner worker. So the next time you meet one of these special people at the refreshment stand or trackside restaurant make sure to say "thank you" and offer to buy their coffee or meal.

Until next time!

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