

LAP 20 — SETTING GOALS

Ernest Hemingway is quoted as saying, "There are only three sports: bullfighting, motor racing, and mountaineering; all the rest are merely games." Don't ever doubt race car drivers are athletes. The preparation, stamina, mental toughness, and dedication required to excel at the sport combined with the obvious risks make driving a race car one of the most satisfying things a person can do. Too many times, we become caught up in the mechanical aspects of our Mustangs and neglect working on the more difficult part of the equation, the human element. Like a golfer on the driving range hitting ball after ball with no specific target in mind, your driving will not improve without setting proper goals. No doubt, turning a fast lap is a great feeling. Setting a personal record or beating a car you've been chasing is a great reward for all the time and effort spent getting to that point. But what is next? Better tires? Better motor? Better suspension? How about better driving?

Really improving your driving requires identifying where you need to improve and dedicating yourself to the goal. In order to achieve them, goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.). If you cannot specifically measure an achievable, realistic goal and do it in a timely manner you should pick something else to work on. The good news is each of these attributes can be found on the track.

A great place to start is to have the goal of finding the braking limit of your Mustang. Braking at the limit, called "threshold braking," occurs when using the maximum amount of brake the tires can withstand without skidding and loss of control. This is important because driving fast requires using all available grip at all times. Most drivers don't even come close to this limit because they're not sure where it is for a given situation. Why not set a goal to go out and find it for a portion of the track you're very comfortable with? It's easy to do, just brake early and hard. Really squeeze on the brakes until you feel the car start to lose traction. How does it feel? Can you control it? Is it repeatable? After some time, you'll become comfortable with the feeling and will wait longer and brake deeper into the corner. With time you'll learn how to "set" the car into the corner and turn it using the brakes. This will make you faster and improve car control skills. Just making laps without developing skills is wasted track time.

Let's look at consistency, say you're turning repeatable lap times on a familiar track, doing the best you can to squeeze out that last tenth of a second. But, you know there is a part of the track where you could improve and become even faster. Like an athlete, set a goal to work on only that part of your game. Good racers do this because they understand the best way to improve is to manage the track in sections and give your mind time to think and the body a rest period as it prepares to re-attack the problem area on the next lap. Top road racers only put the entire track together during qualifying and on race day because there is no point in doing it at any other time. It's very hard to have the discipline to do this. Your brain is begging you to go as fast as possible through the comfortable sections of the track you know so well but to improve you must slow down, re-group, and assess your performance. This will allow you to decide what changes to make in your line, braking point,

or throttle application on the next lap through the problem area. Try spending an entire session dedicated to improving in just one area of the track; you'll be glad you did.

Driving the streets in traffic is something we do every day. Driving in an open track environment, where egos are on display down every straightaway, is an entirely different thing. Set a personal goal to rise above this and check your ego at the gate. Don't kid yourself; open track driving is not racing. Controlled environments where passing is limited to specific areas of the track or only after a "point by" are no place for a big ego. How many times have you heard someone say they "ran someone down" in a "race" in an open track environment? This is an absurd statement; so beware of this trap and don't fall into it. Unless you're truly racing in a sanctioned event, worrying about how fast you are compared to others is time wasted. The only time you can compare your skills to someone else is in a true race environment because otherwise there is no way to know how hard the other guy is pushing it. Maybe, he is working on a specific portion of the track, like you should be? How would you know? In an open track environment, use your precious track time to improve your driving skills and don't be concerned about what others think.

Remember, this is all about having fun with your Mustang, so check the big ego at the gate.

S.M.A.R.T.

SPECIFIC

MEASURABLE

ACHIEVABLE

REALISTIC

TIMELY

Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

