

LAP 12—TIME FOR A PIT STOP

This month represents a significant milestone as it's now been a year since we took the first green and started the race to become better drivers.

We've covered a wide range of topics from brakes, tires, gears, and driving technique to how to respect your corner workers. Now it's time for a pit stop, go ahead, you've earned it. As you sit in your pit, exhausted from the thrill of the track, you're probably thinking, "what can I do next?" Relax, I've got you covered.

SPEND THE NIGHT AT THE TRACK

Yes, it sounds like more work, camping out and all but it's really not. Here's a little secret, most racers stay at the track because of the fringe benefits. After the track closes, the time spent socializing is a great opportunity to make new friends and learn more about the people that share the same passions as you. Some of my best friendships were made this way and you'll probably experience the same if you try. Everyone has to eat and there is never a problem throwing something you've brought on someone else's grill (provided you share of course!). Telling stories, talking cars, and planning the next road trip to a distant track are better done at night in a lawn chair under the stars. Most tracks have large rest rooms, hot showers, and a place to change clothes. Imagine the time and money saved by not driving back to the hotel, checking in and then later driving around to find a place to eat. Speaking of money, have you ever calculated how much you'll save by spending a couple of nights in yours or someone else's trailer at the track? It's enough to buy several more tires. The best thing about staying at the track are the mornings because you can sleep in until the drivers meeting, get up at your leisure, have breakfast and start enjoying the day.

WORK ON SOMEONE ELSE'S CAR

When you find you're having a good day relaxing in your lawn chair between track sessions instead of repairing your car, get up and go find someone that is struggling and help. You'll make a friend and probably learn something in the process. Walk around, plenty is happening and someone needs your help. Whether helping find a tool, bleeding brakes, or making a run for race fuel, there is always something that needs attention. I once remember helping a friend change front brake pads on a Corvette Stingray. Being a Chevy guy, he'd never seen the Kelsey Hayes four-piston caliper used on early Fords. The job on the Chevy took 45 minutes compared to only 15 on the Mustang. I would have never learned that relaxing in the lawn chair.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE STARTER OR CHIEF STEWARD

Go find one or both, walk right up and make an introduction. Tell them the number of your Mustang and its color and ask them if they've noticed you on the track and if they have any advice. You'll probably be surprised by the answer and you might learn a new tip to try next time out. Tomorrow when you show up for grid you'll also have a

new friend watching out for you. That personal relationship gives them the comfort they need to focus on others meanwhile knowing "you get it" and are not just another head in a helmet. Not that I would recommend it for this purpose but it's always good for the chief steward to know you before you need to know him after making a big mistake. One race several years ago I ran the checkered flag, a term that describes slowing after passing the checker but missing the entrance to the pits. This bone-head maneuver results in a long lap of shame making the entire circuit all alone while everyone waits for you to make it back to the pits. Previously knowing the chief steward helped me in this case and it just might for you.

VISIT THE TRACK STORE

For many tracks, the local store is their single largest source of profit margin. I've heard uninformed people complain to others of high prices at the local track store but you need to understand the situation. Tracks are closing every year as property taxes and insurance costs rise disproportionately to revenue. Most track owners are not in it to make big profits, they love the sport and most likely reinvest everything they make back into the facility. Buying some items at the local track store is a great way to gain a memento of your trip while making a donation to support the local track.

TAKE THE TIME TO SPEAK WITH SPECTATORS

Say hello, introduce yourself, tell them about your Mustang, the MCA and the issues you're currently trying to solve. Be an ambassador for the sport by asking about their interests and what brought them to the track. Offer to let them sit in your car and if they have children, buckle them in and explain the cockpit. Tell them about the engine, what type of motor oil you use, who painted the car and get them talking to you about their interests. Get them interested and involved because we could all use more Mustangs out on the track. Spectators are the life blood of the hobby because they represent the feedstock for the network of suppliers that provide the products and services we need to enjoy our Mustangs.

Your pit stop is now over, leave some stripes on exit!

Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

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