

LAP 23 - TAKE A ROAD TRIP

The Mustang hobby is one that allows room for a wide range of interests, not only in terms of the model year you enjoy, but also the specific area of interest you participate in. Through the MCA, many opportunities are provided giving the chance to participate in events specifically designed to meet your particular needs. This can be seen through the numerous car shows, their many different classes, and the events allowing you to get your Mustang out on the track to run. As you begin meet your need for more speed, it's common to do so through local track events offered by others. It's natural to focus on a convenient track that may even allow for a day trip without the need for an overnight stay. Maybe you've visited a particular track so often you can no longer remember particular track days and you need a change. This year, make yourself a promise, trailer your Mustang on a long road trip and drive that track you always felt was too far away.

The benefits of enjoying your Mustang on a long road trip by driving more than eight hours to a far away track will create memories lasting a lifetime. Where I live in Texas, we are fortunate to have several tracks to choose from, Texas World Speedway (TWS) in College Station and Eagles Canyon Raceway in Decatur. Nearby, in Oklahoma, we have Hallett Motor Racing Circuit (HMRC) in Jennings. Each of these tracks are familiar to members of the vintage racing organization I belong to and we hold several events there each year. You may have a similar situation in your area, so it's easy to see why you'd never be inclined to travel outside the normal group. Let me share with you an experience I had just last year when a group of us traveled to Colorado to participate in a Rocky Mountain Vintage Racing event held at a new track outside of Denver named High Plains Raceway.

Prior to this trip, Hallett was my favorite track. It's where I learned to race and I am fortunate to have many great memories of this relatively short, tight track. Much closer to home, the longer and higher speed Texas World Speedway is where I have the most racing laps. Where I live in Texas, the terrain is relatively flat so TWS has relatively little elevation change compared to the challenges of the hills found at Hallett. The elevations changes found at Hallett made it my favorite for many years but things have now changed. My new favorite is High Plains Raceway and I would not have known about it had I not made a very long road trip. The track is best described as a fantastic new surface with the elevation changes of Hallett and the length and speeds of Texas World Speedway. We were routinely hitting 145 mph on the front straightaway like TWS but shifting all the way down to second gear in several places like the tighter sections at Hallett. What a blast!

A long road trip is always filled with the anticipation of new sites, stops, and restaurants to explore. We always buddy up and tag team the driving, one sleeping while the other drives. It seems to work quite well, but if you're forced to drive alone make sure to stop, get some rest or sleep if necessary. The longest drive we've made straight through is about 20 hours and then it's time for a shower and a real bed.

When you arrive at a new track, be sure to remember you don't know the track. Take the time to get a preview of it with

an experienced driver in a street car or van prior to going out in your Mustang. There is no shame in this, even the professionals do it. Your first time out, don't try to set the world on fire, let the faster guys pass and learn from them, watching their line and braking points, then try them yourself. With time, you'll get faster and realize the excitement of improvement is what you've been missing at your home track. Enjoy the experience and make a memory.

In the pits, walk around and introduce yourself to the locals. The people you'll meet will be interesting and maybe you'll wonder what your life would be like living nearby and racing regularly on this track. You might even begin to wonder what it would be like to travel far away to drive at a track like your home track. Understand the locals may feel this way and would probably like to hear from you about what your home track is like. People recognize the effort required in traveling long distances to experience new things and you'll be rewarded with their appreciation.

Now that you've been on the track I bet you car is handling a little differently than you expected isn't it! Developing an understanding of how to tune your car for different situations becomes much more apparent when a long way from home. For me, traveling from Texas to Colorado requires stepping the carburetor jets down three sizes to compensate for altitude. Not to mention the changes in handling resulting from differences in the track surface or the importance of rear gear selection for a track you've never driven. Determining if the difference in handling is due to your lack of track knowledge or something that needs improvement on the car is a large part of the challenge. It's these things that keep us fresh by challenging us to make necessary changes. Consider each challenge a learning experience and take notes because you'll need them to return the car to the setup you use when you return back home. Remember, it might be a good idea to compare your new setup to your old one on your track back home, it might be better.

So this year, make it a point to take a long road trip with your Mustang and expose yourself to new people, places and challenges. Maybe attend the MCA event you've wanted to but always felt was too far away. I assure you the memories you make will carry you through to the next time you get your Mustang where it belongs out on the track.

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