

LAP 30 — DRIVING ETIQUETTE

Have you ever thought about what the other drivers on the track think about you? Are you alert, aware of your surroundings, and considerate of others? Do you add value to the track experience or are you a “moving chicane” creating an obstacle for others to deal with while negotiating the track? Driving in close proximity at high speeds in a racing situation with drivers you personally know and trust is a very rewarding experience. The same can be had while driving in controlled environments like open track and drivers education events provided you are the type of driver others can trust to be aware of the situation and courteous. We’re talking about driving etiquette.

Probably the most important thing to remember is to hold your line. That means when being overtaken, hold to the normal line you drive and force the passing car to overtake in a safe and responsible manner. It doesn’t matter if racing or in an open track environment, holding your line signals your intentions and creates the best opportunity for a successful pass. Never make abrupt corrections to “help” the driver that is passing you. Always make slow changes in speed or direction that will allow the passing driver to gauge the situation and select when to make a passing move. Many avoidable accidents occur when drivers attempt to “help” the other driver make a pass and inadvertently create an unsafe driving situation. You have as much right to the track as the faster cars as long as you behave and give them the opportunity to pass you.

Be courteous, if you see a car in your mirror that doesn’t fall further behind it’s likely you’re slower. Think about it, if you are faster, the car behind will be falling further and further back with every lap. Don’t worry about cars that fall behind, pay attention to those that get closer and never go away. Plenty of races have been won by slower cars that couldn’t be passed because they held the best (fastest) line and thus prevented the follower from being fast enough to pass off-line. In racing it’s fair and understood but in a non-race environment, like an open track event, it demonstrates very poor etiquette. Hold your line and back off the throttle just enough to let that car behind you pass. Then you’ll get the chance to see if you can keep up. Who knows, you may find that if you can keep up the other driver may do the same for you at the appropriate place on the track. This is a fine way to enjoy your car on the open track, experience the thrill of passing while doing so in a safe manner.

Drivers that block and don’t let you by can become very unpopular at the track. They ruin the experience for everyone by creating a slow spot on the track that requires unusual action from all other drivers. This creates an unsafe situation much like a slow moving vehicle does in the fast lane of a freeway. The rule here is; if you see a car close by in your mirrors and

it’s not falling behind then **hold your line** and let it pass. When you first enter the track, give your Mustang time to get up to operating temperature. This means engine oil, coolant, brakes, and tires. Don’t rush it, give it some time. While you’re doing this make sure to watch your mirrors closely and let others pass by holding your line and moving at a speed that gives them the ability to pass you.

When the checkered flag falls keep moving, don’t hit your brakes. I almost hit another car once when for some reason he hit the brakes to slow down when the checkered flag was shown. Just roll out of the gas and let your Mustang slow normally, it’s much safer. Watch your mirrors at the same time for others that may not have seen the checker and are still at speed. Remember there are probably other cars in

the grid waiting to enter the track while you’re on the cool down lap so keep your speed up to clear the track for them sooner. I’ve seen discourteous drivers drive cool down laps so slow they were almost walking so keep the speed up as you make your lap. Speaking of the grid, make sure to show up early, not late. Track workers will

appreciate this because they won’t be rushed trying to organize the grid and check each car for safety. I know several drivers that use radios to monitor the grid allowing them to show up at the last minute and avoid waiting for long inside a hot race car. Bad idea, the grid workers know who habitually does this and it becomes a cloud that hangs over you when you drive.

Do the best you can to become a driver known for good track etiquette and you’ll enjoy a better time out on the track.

See you next lap.

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Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

