

**LAP 43—LET'S TAKE A RIDE**

**O**ne of the best things you can do to enjoy your Mustang is to take it out on the track and let it run. A spirited drive on a road course will test the acceleration, braking, and cornering capabilities of your Mustang in a safe and controlled manner. Some owners are reluctant to get their cars out on the track, fearing potential damage or mechanical problems but remember driving on the street comes with its own risks and many of those are beyond your control. One of the best ways to understand the track environment is to take a ride on the track with a more experienced driver. Once you take that first ride in a fast car on a road course your perspective will change forever. The most common comment made by passengers after a ride is, "I didn't realize you were going that fast." The visual perspective seen from inside the car is different and amplified by the sound of the engine, the squealing of tires, the smell of hot brakes, burning rubber, and G-forces. Add a dose of adrenaline and you have made a memorable experience.

There are so many advantages to taking a ride with someone else before taking your Mustang out on the track. Obviously, you will learn the way around the track but more importantly gain a better perspective on the basic following of instructions given by track workers through hand signals and flags. Pay attention to the location of corner stations, learn the earliest positions from which you can see each one and practice looking for them. Watch the track surface, looking for uneven areas to avoid or use to your advantage. Watch for the important things like pit entrances and exits, but also for service roads that can be very useful if a mechanical issue happens. The location of service roads cannot be understated. I was once in a race where a racer had a mechanical problem and the corner workers radioed in for the tow truck as the driver slowed and pulled to the side while cresting a hill. When the tow truck arrived they couldn't find the car because the driver's service road knowledge allowed him to safely exit the track and coast all the way into his pit!

Show up with the right equipment and leave things as you found them. Most tracks require a minimum of long pants, long sleeve shirt, and full shoes for clothing. It's a good idea to have your own helmet but most drivers giving rides have a spare lying around. Having your own just keeps it simple because its one less thing the driver has to keep track of when the ride is over and emotions are high. I've lost several helmets after passengers unintentionally departed carrying my spare. If you can, prior to your ride, find a car with a five-point harness system and practice latching yourself in the seat. Begin by loosening the lap belt and shoulder straps. Connect the lap belt first, then the crotch strap followed by the shoulder belts.

Tighten the lap belt first (get it really tight), then tighten the shoulder belts and get them even tighter. This is the key to a nice ride—tight belts. You don't want to be holding onto the car, you want it holding onto you. Enjoy the ride and when you are done loosen the shoulder belts and lap belts before exiting the car because it makes it much easier for the next rider to get in.

During your ride, communicate with your driver. Don't just get in, sit down, and shut up. If the driver doesn't initiate communication protocol then you do it. Pre-agree some hand signals before entering the track that include "I'm Ok," "Slow down," and "I need to stop." If you need to slow down or stop, let the driver know immediately and don't wait. If you want out, the best time is now and don't be afraid to say so. Road racing is just like drag racing because every straightaway

provides the opportunity to get from one point to another in a straight line as fast as you can. However, when you reach the endpoint you now have to slow as fast as possible, downshift, rotate the car, and negotiate a turn before the process begins again. Many road racers are ex drag racers that took rides and then converted because they found road racing to be an extension of the things they enjoyed about drag racing. The amount of time spent accelerating in one road course session is usually

more than what is available in an entire weekend of drag racing. There are many events that provide opportunities to take rides. Most open track events provide the opportunity and even some racing events allow riders during the lunch break.

So get out there and let that Mustang show you what it can do by taking a ride on the track!

Next lap!

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