

BIG TRACK ATTACK!

Autosport of this kind has been growing very quickly over the past several years and shows no signs of slowing. Why the craze all of the sudden? Is it because so many people have so much money to burn that they can “sponsor” their own race team? Or is it because the industry has changed, making it easier for the average Joe and Jane to push their daily driver in a controlled environment? Personally, I think it’s because of both reasons,



but most definitely the latter. Sure, most of us know of a ‘Dana Deep Pockets’ type who became a millionaire overnight and decided they were going to become the next racing champion by throwing money at the sport. But it is the rest of us who still have to balance between the groceries, car payments, rent/mortgage, etc. and still find a few bucks to go play ‘Shannon Speed Racer’ for a weekend or two a year.

First of all, let us focus on an ‘open track’ or road racing set up. Most of the performance modifications that you can do quickly and affordably for road racing will also apply to the other forms of driving dynamic events. For Road Course events, I would focus on the driver/machine in this order:

1. Take a class on performance driving.

There are many programs available that will provide you with a balance of theory and practical skills. Most of the venues will take only a two-day weekend, some only one. I’ve been road racing for more than 15 years and I still take classes and instruction any time I can. You’ll never know it all so if you take an attitude of practice and learn, you will enjoy the sport more.

2. Safety gear.

The primary variable here is speed, the faster you and your car are, then the more safety equipment will be required. It isn’t subjective or personal; it simply boils down to physics! Safety gear is put in place only to protect you—the driver, not the car. The faster your car is capable of going around the track, the more components are required to protect the driver in the event of a ‘sudden stop.’ Keeping this in mind, factory seatbelts are usually quite safe for a car that has a stock powertrain and stock tires. However, you’ll always need a helmet and one with an automotive SNELL rating at that.

3. Setting up your daily driver.

Setting your daily driven car up for a day at the track can be done in many ways and can also be done in stages. First concern, and I think most important of all, is the brakes. If you can stop safely you will avoid all sorts of driving issues down

the road. Most production brakes are quite adequate in the beginning; I always upgrade the brake pads and brake fluid to high-performance products. Always bleed your brakes prior to going on track; this will help to ensure that your brakes function properly on track. Second, control your tire pressures—having the correct tire pressure will maximize the grip of your tires to the pavement. Maximum grip means maximum control and speed. The third component that I would add for the motorsport hobbyist concerns tire choice—a performance road racing tire will increase your fun factor more than you can imagine. I do not recommend starting with this hardware change because, without enough seat time, you will not get a feel for how the car behaves and responds to your steering, brake, and accelerating inputs. One of the good things about starting with street tires is that they “talk to you.” You will be able to hear a different level of tire squeal as you go around the track. As the tire squeals



louder, the less grip the tire has on the pavement. Race tires tend to have little or no squeal and, because they go from a state of grip to a state of slip, you need to know what it ‘feels’ like when the tires start to slip.

4. Final Components

The final components that need consideration are chassis set components such as caster/camber plates, adjustable control arms, springs, struts/shocks and sway bars that can be applied to your car without rendering your vehicle useless for the street. The right combination of these parts will increase your car’s ability to turn and slow down.

Now that the season is more or less over for another year, it’s time to make a plan for the big track attack next spring. We’ll see you there!



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