

LAP 41—PASS OR BE PASSED

Maximum driving enjoyment is found near the limit, either yours or your Mustang's. Since limits differ between drivers lap times vary, resulting in the need to either pass or be passed. An important skill is to know how and when to be passed so you can continue to drive at your limit. Passing on the track is very different than on the street; rules and responsibilities apply on the track that can be confusing, especially for those drivers with lesser amounts of track experience. During the driving season, many Mustang owners will be enjoying their cars in open track events, so here are a few points that can improve the experience.

First, understand an open track event is not road racing. An open track event provides an "open track" opportunity to legally drive your car at any speed, provided certain rules are followed, those primarily related to passing. In an open track environment you are allowed to drive as aggressively as you want—provided it does not affect other drivers. The first priority is to not adversely affect other drivers, then go fast. This is precisely the opposite of racing where the objective is to place the other driver in a disadvantageous position so you can make the pass. In road racing, making the other guy drive where he doesn't want to be is the key. It's not about driving the fastest line, it's about racing, which means using all the track plus two wheels in the grass.

In open track events the most common rule is no passing allowed in corners. Passing is normally only allowed on designated straightaways and sometimes requires a point-by indicating the overtaken car sees you. Sometimes passing is only allowed on the left and the driver being passed is instructed to breathe off the throttle to help the passing car get around. Be aware there are some shortcomings in these rules, which create a bad situation for well-handling cars with smaller engines. Heavier cars with big motors are usually poorer handling and must go more slowly around corners while lighter cars with smaller engines follow, unable to pass because of open track rules. Then, on corner exit the larger engine is unleashed and a drag race ensues until the next corner where the lighter car catches back up during braking and must then again follow the heavier car around the corner at a slower speed than it is capable of. In a race situation, the better handling car will pass the slower in the corner and then quickly leave the heavier car behind as the lap progresses. Open track is not road racing, you guys with big motors need to check the rearview. If that Mustang is right on your tail in the corners for more than half a lap, check the ego and let it pass then see if you can keep up. The new BOSS 302 Mustang is a great example of this, I recently had the chance to be around a few in my race car in an open track situation and the car is very good.

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OK, now how to make the pass. First, make sure the other driver sees you. Second, check your mirrors and make sure you're not about to be passed yourself. Third, give yourself the best possible chance to pass by taking a line through the corner that allows you to close on the car ahead and carry some momentum into the straightaway as you pull out to pass. It's poor form in an open track situation to complete the pass under braking, so make sure to get it done early on the straightaway. Acknowledge the other driver by waving as you go by and wave again in appreciation after you complete the pass. When racing, we wave at each other all the time but the gestures used are probably different than those you'll be seeing during an open track event. Now, watch the car behind you for the next lap and make sure you're putting distance on it. If you're not, then why not have some fun and let them pass you back?

How do you let someone pass? First, don't change your line. Second, don't slow down. Third, acknowledge the overtaking car, preferably with a point-by given with your right hand held up in front of the rear view mirror where it can be seen. I said don't slow down, but what you can do is don't speed up as much on corner exit thus helping the passing car get a good launch to get around you. Don't be tempted to then roll onto the gas and drag race down the straightaway. This is open track, not racing, remember?

It surprises me how often this is forgotten. Recently, during an open track session late in the day where an exhibition race was held during lunch break I had a driver point me by and then proceed to lay down the power and race me down into the next corner. I completed the pass, but we both got black flagged due to entering the corner side by side. I figure the massive size of the tire smoke cloud that was created probably contributed to the call on the flag. So remember to use your head out there and have a great time on the track!

Have fun, next lap!

Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

