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## PUSHING YOUR ENVELOPE

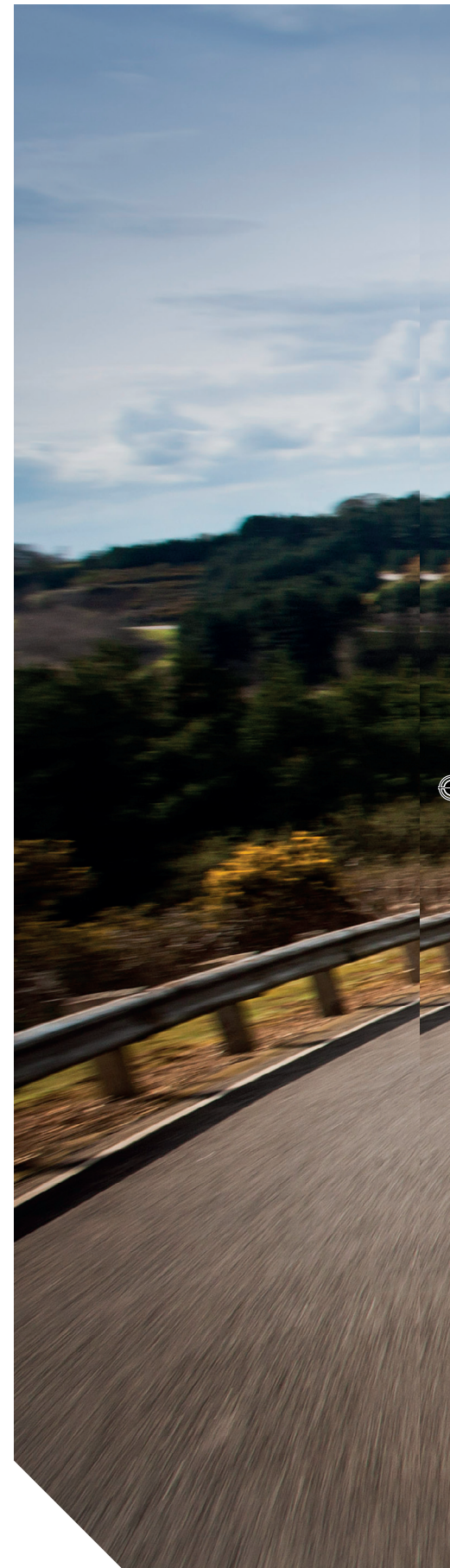
*Two days' intensive coaching with Total Car Control could be the most effective – not to mention cost-effective – performance upgrade for your car*

**F**or all its notoriety, there's one particular bit of the M25 that is genuinely fun. Admittedly, it is a bit of road that gets you off the M25: junction 27, exiting eastbound onto the southbound M11. The speed-limit signs recommend "40", and this seems ridiculous for a motorway, so you blithely plough on at around 60, until, suddenly, it catches you out. The road merges from two lanes to one with little warning, then twists even tighter to the right, with an adverse camber, on a downward slope.

In fact, it wasn't always so much fun as challenging – especially at rush hour with other cars jostling for that merge. But on the way home from Millbrook, after a full-on day in the company of Ivan Thompsett, this sweeping section of tarmac took on a completely new guise. It was a famous section of racetrack, whose combination of attitudes and sight lines were carefully plotted entry and exit points, joined up by a single, flowing line. I was instinctively sensing the roll of the chassis and tightening of grip on the outside front wheel, feeding throttle in as the steering straightened up, all with a broad grin plastered across my face.

In essence, I felt faster, more confident, better aware of my car's limits, and better connected to car and road. Which, in essence, is what Ivan's outfit, Total Car Control is all about.

The day didn't necessarily start with a broad grin, however. For all the magnanimity it takes to surrender yourself to coaching, with thousands of miles under your belt and hours glued to footage from the cockpit of F1 cars, it's still difficult coming to terms with your shortfalls.







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“What was quickly evident,” Ivan tells me from the passenger seat, after a few tentative laps of Millbrook’s Outer Handling Circuit in an Aston Martin DB9 GT Volante, “after looking at where your eyes are working, the detail you’re drinking in, how you’re using the road, your throttle input, is that you have a nice steering grip.”

My spirits lift. But then...

“However, your seating position isn’t right. You were constantly correcting your steering, and steering into bends too soon; only thinking about the corner entry when you need to be looking for the exit so as to determine the apex and correct turn-in point. Whilst it’s only natural to focus on the immediate situation, you need to deepen your vision, looking past the A-pillar, anticipating the road further ahead...”

I would go on, but my suitability writing for a car magazine might be at stake.

Needless to say, it was uphill all the way once Ivan’s coaching kicked in. Those first few laps were all he needed to judge what he had on his hands, and after extracting what exactly I wanted out of the whole experience, ensured that me and my Aston were left with an entirely new relationship. They always say the car should be an extension of yourself, but this went further – it was a melding of interaction with throttle, brakes, gears and steering, making the car glide more than drive.

In fact, for little over a thousand pounds, two days with TCC charging around the twists and turns of Millbrook’s much-loved Alpine Circuit seems like the most economical, let alone sensible performance upgrade you could afford your car.

It’s no wonder Total Car Control comes with H.R. Owen’s recommendation. With horsepower and braking capabilities growing with every model year, cars are becoming more and more capable than their owners. So it makes sense to “catch up”. And being fully bespoke, TCC Masterclasses are tailored to the existing ability and desires of each client. You may simply want to understand what your car is (or isn’t) capable of; maybe you’ve been “bitten”, and want to avoid a repeat; or perhaps you just want to get stuck into some track days without looking green.

For me, the biggest revelation was so basic it hurt: keep your hands at quarter-to-three, even at full lock, rather than constantly shuffling them around the steering wheel. My B-road driving has never felt so precise.

“There was a Ferrari F12 owner who, following his own course with us, bought his wife a session too,” Ivan recalls. “But when they arrived on the day, she looked like she’d rather have been anywhere other than Millbrook.

“So I sent the chap away and asked what exactly she wanted out of her day. She replied, ‘I just want to be able to position this thing on the road and park it.’ Turns out she found the car intimidating; she felt nervous driving a quarter-of-a-million-pound car and much preferred her horse transporter. So we spent our time together learning how to manoeuvre the F12 confidently.

“It was all she needed to get the most from it.”

Ivan and his TCC colleagues certainly have the qualifications. After running BMW’s M Power Institute back in the days of the E39 M5, he freelanced for numerous high-performance training teams, including AMG and Lotus, as well as being on Porsche’s “senior team” of 12 driving consultants. But working away from home so much wasn’t ideal with a young family, so the decision was taken to start his own business. Thus, All Road Training was launched in 2008, providing advanced driver training to employees of companies like H.R. Owen. With business flourishing and performance-driving courses being offered on the side, it was only a matter of time before Total Car Control came into its own in 2012. And it’s this business, with Millbrook serving as his office most days, that Ivan is tangibly passionate about.

“What really motivates me now is seeing those I coach developing a real connection with their cars, plus the confidence to enjoy them to the full in real-world conditions.”

Later that day, pinning my tyre to the left apex on that M11 sliproad, feeling the moment of inertia acting on all four corners of the car..? Well, it’s certainly no Eau Rouge, but if Ivan can show me how to enjoy driving the M25, then he must be doing something right. ♦

[total-car-control.co.uk](http://total-car-control.co.uk)