



PORSCHE PERFORMANCE UNLOCKED

The secret to success ...is you.
Editor Lee Sibley discovers the
merits of performance driver
tuition with Total Car Control

Photography by **Alisdair Cusick**

So you think you can drive? Let's face it, we all like to believe we're a dab hand behind the wheel, able to unlock – at the very least – a significant proportion of our Porsche's performance potential.

Yet the reality is, there's always room for improvement – and as racing great Nigel Mansell once said, you can never have too much tuition. What's more, undertaking performance driver training is a genuine investment in yourself. You'll learn skills that are transferable to any vehicle, and many different driving environments, for the rest of your life.

With that in mind, I signed up for a two-day Total Car Control Masterclass with Ivan Thompsett at Total Car Control, a specialist in one-to-one performance driving tuition. Ivan has been operating in this sphere for decades, and is one of the pre-eminent figures in



the field of performance driving. It's a career that's been rich with experience, including a five-year spell working with Porsche, which means Ivan's uniquely qualified to offer genuine and relevant insight into getting the most out of a 911, with the car's unique weight distribution and dynamics. As a 911 owner and evangelist, this struck a chord: Ivan has a deep understanding of how these cars operate. It's something that clearly would be to my benefit, as all courses are undertaken in your own car which, in my case, would be my 1998 Carrera.

The two-day course involves a day at Millbrook's famed proving ground in Bedfordshire, before moving out onto the public road for day two. There are longer courses available (and some of Ivan's clients have gone on to book regularly with him for years) but, in the interests of fair journalism – not to mention Ivan's time – a two-day booking was decided upon, to get a flavour of both road and track. Document signed and date set, I could look forward to the opportunity of unlocking the performance potential of myself and my Porsche, in a safe and controlled setting.

I was impressed even before I'd left for Millbrook's proving ground, having received an email from Ivan in the days prior, advising on how to properly prepare for the day. Type of footwear needed to be considered: comfortable enough, sure, but also light enough to be able to really feel the car's pedals. Bringing plenty of water was essential, too, accompanied by a reminder as to how important hydration is for maintaining concentration levels.



Attention, too, was needed for your own car being used on the day. Are the tyres in date? Are they from a reputable brand? Are they matching on all four corners? Do the brakes have plenty of life in them? Clearly, looking after the small details is imperative, which together add up to significant margins. Fail to prepare, prepare to fail, as the saying goes.

Arriving at Millbrook on the day of my training, Ivan quickly proves himself to be a likeable, affable chap – crucial, when you're spending such prolonged periods together in your own car. A long-time petrolhead, Ivan has had Porsche in his own garage previously, and we swap tales of the joys of Porsche ownership while he cross-checks the tyres and

ABOVE Even before Editor Lee gets behind the wheel, Ivan's passing on his in-depth driving knowledge

RIGHT Out on Millbrook's handling circuit, Lee puts newly learned theory into practice with his 911



brakes. He's pleased to see new Pilot Sport 5 tyres under the arches of my 911, and plenty of life still in the discs and pads. It's a vote of confidence for both car and driver. Ivan says the majority of his clients arrive in newer metal, though the age of Porsche is immaterial. It's all about condition.

We head inside for a coffee and chat in a briefing room on the Millbrook complex, where Ivan asks me, "What would you like to achieve?" This highlights Ivan's unique approach, as each course is bespoke and tailored for the individual. This is invaluable; what I need to learn may not appeal to you, and vice versa!

After discussing my requirements, Ivan gives a short talk on the basics of car dynamics, using visuals on an iPad for clarity. The exercise proves useful: even for the stuff I do know, the science behind it is explained, which offers further moments of clarity.

As an example, the iPad shows a right-hand bend, illustrated with the apex and correct line through the turn, as well as the required inputs. We then discuss why the inputs are where they are: what are we trying to achieve through the corner? This feeds into Ivan's theme that all actions behind the wheel should be deliberate, precise, timely and smooth.

Personal briefing over, we head out in my Carrera into the playground that is Millbrook, which boasts a handling circuit, high-speed bowl and famous alpine course. All would be used throughout the day.

We head to the handling circuit first and, after a few sighting laps to get myself settled and for Ivan to see what he's working with, he begins diving into the technicalities of my approach to driving. The first observation is a small detail, yet a crucial one. "When you steer, do you push the wheel most, or pull?" Ivan asks. I know full well he already had the answer.

Then comes the detail that crystallises my thinking – a seminal moment which I'll forever remember when engaged in performance driving. "Try emphasising pushing up on the wheel through a turn, rather than pulling down so much. A bit of both is good, but with more of a 70/30 split," Ivan says. "It makes the steering inputs significantly smoother, more precise and finessed, plus you're fed much more information as to what the tyres beneath you are doing."

"For example, the slight resistance or weight you're feeling through your thumb and fingertips as you push – that's a great indication as to your outer front tyre's grip through a bend. If you feel that resistance diminish mid-bend, it's an early warning of understeer, in which case ease either the throttle and/or the steering angle to regain total control." And this is just one tiny detail from an entire day of driving gems that come my way.

In the end, we spend a great deal of time on the handling circuit. Ivan shows the ideal line – and why – then we work on steering inputs followed by throttle inputs. Speed isn't targeted in any way, although as the laps go by it increases noticeably as my technique improves and the car is able to, naturally, carry more of it through the turns. The feeling is incredible: small, detail changes quickly add up to a positive, tangible improvement.

The high speed bowl is a real thrill, too. Taking my 26-year-old 911 well into triple figures is a mere side-



note to what I learn from Ivan about vision, and the tools used to affect it to not only be faster, but safer.

The jewel in Millbrook's crown is the alpine course, offering a genuine roller coaster ride of extreme climbs, cambers and curves. A test bed for pre-production manufacturer metal, today both car and driver are put on trial, and it's an enthralling experience to piece together the many lessons Ivan has unflinchingly passed my way.

Photographer Alisdair joins us on-board for a few laps to get photographs. Ali's sat alongside me in many a Porsche over the years, including my own, on road tests and trips all over Europe. Never has he remarked on my driving... until today. "That was awesome," he says. "You could really feel the 911 moving around beneath us, and it felt fast."

The drive isn't perfect, though. Small mistakes are made, and I realise consistency really is an art, especially at the wheel of a sports car. In Ivan's company, though, I feel comfortable enough to make them, knowing next time I'll likely get it right, particularly with such astute guidance by my side.

All too soon, the day is over. I'm exhausted yet enthralled in equal measure. So much has been learned on the asphalt at Millbrook in just a few short hours, and my driving style has been transformed. I like Ivan's approach to tuition: it's technical and detailed, delivered in a relatable and manageable way. At no point did I feel lost in a sea of jargon.

My subsequent, solo drives have been used to put what I've learned into practice, enriching my Porsche driving experience. My 911 talks to me in new ways – a thrilling experience considering I've now owned the car for five years and 80,000 miles.

It brings me back to my earlier point, on the merits of tuition. Never mind modifying your Porsche to go faster: if you wish to extract more from your 911 experience, the best upgrade lies with yourself. Next issue, Ivan and I will explore how these newly acquired skills are applied to the road. I can't wait. **911**

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Thanks

For more information on Ivan's services at Total Car Control, visit total-car-control.co.uk or call +44 (0) 1953 459565.