

Insult a man's choice of football team or call his car an expensive 'Beetle' and you will probably get away with it, but there are certain things that are taboo for all blokes; his manhood being one and worse still the questioning of his abilities as a 'Driving God'. Because that's what we all are... right?

I am no different. I have a sizeable, err, opinion about how good my own driving skills are and I think I am at the top of my game having spent over twenty years hooning around in some very fast cars on both tracks and roads alike and having some success competing at sprinting.

But cars are a strange phenomenon. We buy them with ever increasing levels of power, 500, 600, 700 bhp and levels of potential lethality and we think nothing of spending many thousands on carbon bits, paint protection and exhausts. Yet most of us spend nothing on upgrading ourselves. In other words driver training. Here at SCD we have long wanted to have a 'driver training' partner to help members of all abilities enhance their enjoyment and safe use of their supercar and we are delighted to announce our chosen partner for this very task: Total Car Control, headed up by owner and senior instructor Ivan Thompsett, who has a vast wealth of knowledge, skill and ability previously being the head of BMW's M Power Institute driver development programme and one of just twelve senior Porsche instructors. He is also a Grade 6 (A) qualified instructor!

So, what better way to find out just how good Total Car Control's courses are going to be for our members than sending one of SCD's test drivers as a Guinea Pig. That means its either Driving Oracle Jonty or me. I put my driving ego away and volunteer, as I really fancy finding out if I can extend my driving skills with some tuition and hopefully gain more pace safely as a result, whilst learning some over-the-limit techniques.

Dates are organized for a Total Car Control Masterclass, a two-day course of high performance driver training. Day One is to be at Millbrook Proving Ground, followed by a day driving on some challenging roads around Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. I can't wait.

I set off early to be at Millbrook to meet Ivan at 9.00am. Upon arrival Ivan greets me, he's clearly one of us and loves quick cars. My choice for the course is a DMS 997 Turbo, manual - a car Ivan is familiar with having worked with Porsche's own 997 driver programme since it was

first launched. A good start. We sign in at Millbrook but before we get stuck into driving Ivan wants to know what I hope to achieve from the experience. He explains each course is tailor made to individual requirements. Me? Well, I was hoping to do smoking power slides everywhere like Chris Harris by the end of the day!

Unflustered, Ivan suggests we start with the Outer Handling Circuit. It's a ribbon of undulating road with some interesting cambers and crests and some very technical corners that when driven properly become a high speed flowing test of ones ability to use correct throttle and braking input. Once mastered, we focus on how to economize steering inputs and, equally importantly, how to read what's up ahead long before your on top of it. The end result is swifter progress with finesse and fluidity. After a few laps Ivan parks us up and we discuss my current technique and he gives pointers where I can improve.

"Use all the front windows to look through not just the front screen," he tells me. "This gives better peripheral vision and early sighting of the next corners. Also try to use the brakes less as an on/off switch and more blended (transitioned) with the throttle to keep the car in optimal balance. Maximize the grip available by keeping the car more stable." Ivan goes on to explain that this is best achieved by using the left foot for breaking. We head back out and by just by applying these few techniques I am immediately both smoother and quicker. My steering inputs are minimized and my entry and exit lines optimized. Its great stuff and you just want to carry on lapping, but we have other disciplines to learn. "The Steering Pad is next!" Ivan says. Yes, sensei.

We take a drive over to the Steering Pad which, due to the constant rain today, already wet enough without need for the optional sprinkler. We turn off all the Porsche 'nanny' fail-safes and start doing a gentle figure of 8, gaining speed with each circuit. Eventually the back end of the 997 starts to become wayward requiring corrective action to stop it spinning out. Ivan teaches you how to predict the oversteer point just before or as it happens and hence you have the ability to pre-emptively deal with it rather than ending up facing the wrong way. This exercise alone is a must for anyone with anything vaguely powerful with RWD! I then start pushing it way too far and do a lovely 360 spin. Sorry Ivan. "Hey its ok Tim, this is what we are here for and better doing it here than on the road".

MASTERCLASS

Tim takes a few days out to further improve his driving skills, through a Total Car Control masterclass...





A spot of lunch and much needed coffee and Ivan says "Time for the high speed lane"! Basically this is a one mile straight used by manufacturers to test their newest cars for braking and steering competence and that's exactly what we are about to do. It's a worthwhile part of the training. Whilst we all know how to stop a car in the event of a problem in front of us, do we really know just how capable our ABS is at assisting with that stop from 100mph? Ivan does the run first. We are at 100mph heading for the back of an invisible bus when he jumps on the brakes and steers to avoid said bus. My roast beef sandwich does 5-G inside me as we come to a stop in such an incredibly short distance. So staggeringly good are the 997's massive ceramic brakes and ABS system. My turn next, I copy the exercise and second time around it's no less impressive - and it's still raining.



Now I'm sure you've all seen Casino Royale and the bit where that poor DBS gets rolled seven times was filmed on the Hill Route, our next calling point. It is an incredible creation. I can best describe it as a scale model of the Nurburgring - the gradients are rollercoaster alarming. Ivan takes me around first and points out the correct line. He signifies where you should be on a 1-5 scale; 1 being far left kerb to 5 being the other lane. He also notes which bits are tricky, mostly the brand shiny new Armco sections! This is a wonderful part of the training where you learn to look far ahead, reading the next bend and camber and perfecting that left foot braking technique. But it is also quite taxing on the brain as your taking in so much information, both from the circuit and from Ivan, so you need to take breathers to keep yourself fresh. I can feel the lessons from the morning really starting to pay dividends and the lines I would previously taken through the corners have changed as a result and thereby improving my pace. The car also feels less 'busy'.



I sleep like a log after day one and awake refreshed for day two: Fast road driving. It's raining so heavily the wipers aren't even clearing the screen and the roads are at best puddled and worst completely flooded. However, I enjoy wet weather driving (memories of the 2014 Scotland tour) and if we can make faster progress in the wet as a result of the training then dry pace will be equally enhanced.

We head off to the north and west of Cambridge towards some of Ivan's favourite training roads which have minimal traffic and great long stretches which are well sighted, travelling through small hamlets and villages. Ivan reinforces the safety message: "maximum 30 in a 30, 40 in a 40" and starts discussing traffic techniques following gaps, awareness and escape route strategy and how to control rear space. It's all well and good watching what's in front but you also don't want your pride and joy rear ended, which with a few tips the exposure can be greatly minimised.



We hit some fast flowing yet drenched roads and Ivan says "Do your normal thing, I will just observe." We achieve a good pace and it flows well, I use yesterday's lessons to good effect. After a few miles Ivan says "That's good but you can use more of the P1 and P5 positions to really open up your sight lines more. This will improve entry and exit speed and flow." We crack on and eat up some more miles. The 997 seems to revel in the conditions, finding grip most of the time and when it doesn't, on a really flooded road I feel confident at correcting swiftly and pressing on thanks to Ivan's tuition over the last few days.

So putting male ego aside, what do I think? Well, I think it's a must for all - even those reading this thinking "I don't need training, I'm a driving god". Trust me, whatever standard you are at - or think you are at - you will learn so much, and get so much more enjoyment out of your Supercar than you thought possible. Millbrook is an absolute treat, not to be missed and the fast road course deals with real life driving situations - particularly handy if you are going on a lengthy fast-pace driving tour. Ivan is a great guy and a brilliant instructor and really easy to get on with. He has a great manner of advising and guiding so you develop at your own pace and I have no doubt as a result of Masterclass I will be even smoother, faster and safer after taking this brilliant course, I would urge you all to give it a go. ■



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