



# ONE-TRACK MIND

## A ROOKIE'S GUIDE TO TRACK DAY TRAINING



Whether it's circuit racing, endurance, drag racing or rallying, motorsport of all strains inspires tremendous passion in millions of fans. But, as any competitive driver will agree, it's when you get behind the wheel and start racing that the real fun begins.

As the 2013 Morgan Aero Racing Challenge Series revs up for the new season, MOG launches the first of a short series on how to get started in racing, beginning with all you need to know about track days. Christian McCarty, an experienced racing driver, instructor and director of the Morgan Driving Experience, gives us the benefit of his knowledge.

Motor racing is without doubt one of the toughest sports in the world to participate in and can become an obsession that occupies the majority of your waking moments and even many of your sleeping ones. It's also one of the most exciting, exhilarating and rewarding sports that combines unique physical, mental and technical challenges for racers at all levels.

If you haven't been brought up on a diet of motor racing since an early age then a track day is a great place to start your journey. The industry has boomed in recent years despite the current economic climate and there are plenty of organisations that provide the opportunity to drive a car – yours or someone else's – on the UK's fantastic circuits in a controlled and, importantly, to begin with, non-competitive environment. So, here's a quick guide to the essentials in making that step. [➤](#)

**WHICH CIRCUIT?**

Finding an organiser is easy. The professional body, the Association of Track Day Organisers (ATDO), keeps a register of organising members. Two of the biggest organisations are Goldtrack and RMA, both of which produce high quality events that attract a good mix of professional and recreational drivers.

Sometimes availability and your preferred circuit may determine your choice. Location is often the motivating factor but it's important to take into account other factors, such as whether the circuit is regularly used for contemporary motor racing and therefore has up to date safety standards.

Also look at the length of the circuit – those with laps of over three miles mean you'll do fewer laps which, when you're starting out, can slow the learning process as it limits repetition. The Castle Combe circuit in Wiltshire offers a good selection of track days, including what is termed a Silenced Test Day, where there are only three cars out on the track at any one time, so it is a great place to get up to speed on a virtually empty track.

Many track sessions at the major circuits run to their maximum track limit, sometimes 40 cars, which, for the novice driver, keeping out of the way can sometimes occupy more thought time than seeking that correct line and learning race craft.

**WHAT CAR?**

The next decision is whether to use your own car or not. It's cheaper to use your own but at this stage along your road to motor racing you may not want to expose your pride and joy to the extra stresses and risks of being on track.

There are some companies offering track car hire such as Track-Club but they don't have any Morgans available. To use a Morgan on track that isn't yours then there are a few options. Many of the bigger dealers, including Richard Thorne Classic Cars, Phil Ledgerwood and Brands Hatch Morgan, often run track events and may have a car available for you try out in some kind of taster session. The Morgan Driving Experience is another option that guarantees you track time in a Morgan. In addition to experience sessions, it has a Masterclass event, which provides a Morgan and a professional instructor for the day or half day.

If you do use your own car then make sure you speak to your insurer and let them know – the majority will cover your car on track for free or for a small fee, but only if you tell them. Most policies come with the 'no racing, pace making...' exclusion that would apply in a track environment. If for some reason this option is unavailable then there are specialist insurers (e.g. MIS) who provide cover, although it can be expensive (approximately 1% of the sum insured).



**DO I NEED COACHING?**

Some peculiar quirk means that unlike most other sports where professionals have a coach, this is rare in motor racing. The value of driver coaches has started to be acknowledged and there are now driver development programmes and driving academies that fulfil this role.

It used to be something that no-one would admit to, but Formula One drivers with unmarked helmets have been spotted in nondescript hatchbacks receiving instruction at hardly used venues. The fact is it is cheaper and quicker to learn from someone else's experience. It won't replace your own, but it will complement it. With so much to learn at this stage, including a framework for approaching a circuit, analysing your own and the car's performance, an instructor or driver coach is invaluable.

There are a number of ways to find an instructor. Your track day organiser will have an Association of Racing Driving Schools (ARDS) instructor available for you to book on the day and they may even provide one session for free to novices who haven't used a circuit before. A good instructor will build up a relationship with you and will identify issues with your driving style that need adjusting. They will also introduce you to advanced concepts, such as heel and toe, the traction circle, trail braking and much more.

**WHAT KIT DO I NEED?**

Start by compiling a tool kit that covers at least a basic socket set and screwdrivers, whatever you need for your tightening your wheels depending on if you have bolts or spinners, a tyre pressure gauge and a tyre pump. Also spare fluids, oils and cleaning equipment for windscreens etc. It's a good idea to invest in an anti-fogging agent for either your visor or your windscreen depending on what you're running.



*"I remember being stopped from exiting the pit lane at Brands Hatch in Formula Renault for qualifying because I had an illegal steering wheel. My team spent the next 10 minutes of the 20-minute session trying to borrow a steering wheel from other teams! When we finally got one it was mounted upside down for my car and instead of spending the final moments of the session perfecting my pole position lap I spent it flustered, bouncing off every kerb in sight and generally over driving to qualify mid-grid and completely out of position, which that year was the front row!"*



How much you bring will be dependent on whether you have a support vehicle or not. It's possible to do it without but you won't be able to bring much in the way of fuel or spare tyres. They're not essential as most circuits will have an onsite fuel pump (normally very expensive) or a station nearby (it's worth knowing where that is) but all of these things maximise your track-time and help keep you running if you do have a problem.

You should cross reference with the organisers requirements, for example most will want you to tape your headlights if they are glass. Also there may be a noise limit, if your car doesn't have a sports exhaust then it shouldn't be a problem anywhere.

When it comes to preparation, the Morgan Driving Experience follows the acronym POWER: petrol, oil, water, electrics and rubber. In this case, wheels tight and correctly inflated. (Note - many people run higher tyre pressures than normally advised as they try to optimise them for a different environment).

These should all be checked a few days before. While you're doing that keep an eye out for leaks and any other unusual things, loose bolts etc. They also represent the quick and easy check before you go on track – you won't be popular if you run out of fuel half way round your first lap!



**HOW DO I PREPARE MYSELF?**

**Sleep** – drivers love their sleep. Make sure you get enough the night before the event. If you're travelling a distance then consider a generic hotel chain – it is worth every penny as you can arrive fresh and ready for the day ahead.

**Circuit maps** – download and print a few of these before heading to the circuit.

**Sustenance** – bring your own! Circuits will have a cafeteria, but use that as back up – it's cheaper and more nutritious to bring your own. Do not underestimate the amount of hydration you'll need – that means water not coffee and tea!

**Safety equipment** – do you have the appropriate clothing? Helmets are essential – you may be able to hire one from the organiser.

**THE BIG DAY**

It's at this stage that all the preparation coincides and you can go out on track and concentrate on the driving side of things. Arrive early – it gives you time to check POWER, get your paperwork verified, sign in and attend any briefings you might have to. If it's a sessioned event then find out which session you're in and make sure you know what the timings are.

If you haven't already done so, you'll have to learn the circuit and then it's time to get behind the wheel and put the theory to the test.

A natural phenomenon is for humans to follow humans. This holds true on track and is more likely when you're starting out – don't do it! The car in front is normally doing the wrong thing and unless you know who's driving it and it's worth following then it's better to plot your own course, even if you know who's driving it can be a mistake.

That's not to say you shouldn't be aware of what other people are doing. Essentially at this stage you will be realising that everyone has an opinion and plenty will share it with you, listen to all and make your own judgements as your experience builds up. There are plenty of stories of drivers telling other drivers they could take such and such a corner flat out only for them to go out and discover they couldn't do it themselves!

The road to racing can be an intensely fulfilling one so jump in with both feet and an open mind. Most importantly – motor racing is fun so don't be overcome by the bewildering amount of things you have to pay attention to, enjoy it! **MOG**

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*"Very early in my career I was testing at Snetterton in a Formula Renault and Matt Neal was doing some testing for his BTCC team. He passed me at one point and entering the esses I spotted that he was taking a different line, thinking this was some secret quick line I followed him. Only when he hit the kerbs and bounced onto two wheels did I realise this was a touring car only line but too late and I launched myself skyward across the kerbs and bounced back down bending some suspension components and losing a couple of sessions as a result!"*



Christian McCarty (left) with team mate Hunter Abbott (right) and a celebrating client!