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2004 Beginner’s Autocross School 18

Cover: New Autocrosser Petra Ossing is all smiles as she waits for another run during February’s Beginners Autocross School. See more photos and read student John Celona’s article on page 18.

Cover Photo by Jim Bauman

The opinions are those of the authors and probably don’t represent those of the Golden Gate Region PCA. The Editors reserve the right to edit all contributions. Business and classified ads are provided for the convenience of the membership and are not an endorsement from GGR. GGR cannot take any responsibility for the quality of the products or services provided. In addition, there are some people who like to find mistakes. In this newsletter, we try to have something for everyone.

Nugget Advertising Rates: 5 or 10 printed issues and 12 online issues (monthly):

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<th>Price</th>
<th>6 Months</th>
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<td>1/8 Page</td>
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<td>Back Cover (4-color)</td>
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For more information, see http://pca-ggr.org/pdf/adguidelines.pdf
"Back to Normal, or Super or even Super 90" After our character-building January, February was fabulous and back to normal. GGR’s membership put on four great events. Howard Yao hosted a fun and highly caloric Friday night social. It drew over twenty enthusiastic members including time-trialers, tourers, concours folk and autocrossers. Thank you Howard!

Howard wasn’t finished. With John Seidel he put on GGR’s beginner’s autocross school at 3-Com Park. The school sold out quickly and provided tons of seat time and runs, runs and more runs to the appreciative students and their instructors. It was fun to see the number of father-son, father-daughter and mother-son student-student pairings at the event. Team Leglise, directed by father Claude doing his best Alfred Neubauer or was it Jean Todt imitation, showed up with not one but two initially-intimidated teenage son drivers in a newly-purchased 1965 911. The look on the boys’ faces after a few minutes reminded me of something that we all know in our hearts - while some adults find fast cars stimulating and possibly, at times even invigorating, kids can go bonkers with delight!

As so often happens at these events there were several 914-related incidents of questionable taste. Many of us felt that John Seidel’s repeated attempts to disqualify all of the 911s and Boxters during the tech inspection sent a confusing message to the students. On the other hand, most felt that his pre-event lecture entitled "The 914 - Dr. Porsche’s Masterpiece" and the multiple-choice quiz which followed were well received, even if the overheads and Powerpoint materials were difficult to read in the morning sunlight. Seriously, John and Howard, it was a great event.

Ken Park and Harold Williams with lots of support from Dan Thompson, Chet Martin and a host of others then treated the Time Trail gang to a safe, fast and fun weekend at Infineon Raceway at Sears point. To those of us revisiting this track for the first time in a few years, Infineon’s money is certainly being put to good use. The track surface is sticky and drag strip-free, whole hills have disappeared and minor mountains have moved over a few feet here and there. The track staff was accommodating and happy to have us visit! Ken and Harold (and Pam Park and Susan Angebranndt) outdid themselves. Thank you from all of us who had such a good time.

Finally, the Ambriscos pulled off a dead on, full bore, 100% successful start to our Autocross Series at 3-Com Park. Dana ran the event with authority and Doug overcame the few technical issues that arose with casual ease. We got close to a thousand runs! Who can believe that this was their first event for GGR.

Steve Nieslony, visiting from Sacramento was a less than courteous guest, leading the event from his first run by multiple seconds in his immaculate and obviously now-thoroughly-debugged 914. (And this was on a wide open “911 and 930-friendly” long course. Not one of those little weasel courses designed for 914s. A bunch of other 914s did well, too. This could be a long summer for the rest of us.) Eventually, Hank Watts in his twin turbo rocket got close. But when I left with an hour to go, Steve was happily in the lead and John Seidel was happily basking in 914-reflected glory. Thank you Dana! Thank you Doug! It was great month.
Regular readers of this column (latest count - 34!) will recall that several months ago I raided the GGR archives and walked off with a stack of old Nuggets dating back to 1967.

One thing that stands out as I travel through the years is the number of events that GGR used to hold to benefit a charity or other worthy cause - the 1976 pop-top drive being an example (see page 14).

GGR still manages to contribute to worthwhile organizations with money collected at our events, but I don’t recall seeing too many events that are held with a specific beneficiary in mind.

On a related matter, GGR member Jim McClelland is driving One Lap of America to raise money for an aquatic center for Northgate High School in Walnut Creek (see the ad on this page or go to www.findthehat.com). Now, Jim’s event is not a GGR event, but we’re still behind him! He’ll be driving out at Infineon Raceway on Monday May 3rd - why not go on out to the track and cheer him on?

If you are a GGR member and passionate about a charity or other worthwhile cause, and want to plan a GGR fund raising event involving your Porsche friends, contact any member of the GGR Board of Directors!

The board can walk you through the process of organizing and sponsoring an event of your choosing. A charity autocross, driver’s ed event, rally, and tour are just some examples - use your imagination and come up with something unique!

---

Two for the road...  

Jim Bauman  
Tom Pickett  

GGR Racing  
Gary Dielacher  
1168 Montgomery Ave  
San Bruno, CA 94066  
Tel: 650-742-9322 FAX 650-742-0869  
http://www.gdracing.com

The Nugget 5
What Was Happening in GGR in 1976?

Well, probably a lot. Those of you who were around then might recall a very important ecological event that took place - the GGR Pop Top Drive.

In all, GGR members collected about 4800 pop tops... the money earned allowed 80 people to each have a free hour on a kidney machine.

Dyno Day is Coming!

Watch this space for more information on Dyno Day, scheduled for May 29th at Dyno Labs in San Ramon, CA. Can’t wait to find out more? Call Ray Razon at 925.831.8240 or email rayrazon@pacbell.net.
Our competition season is now in full swing. Our first auto cross of the season at Candlestick saw 120+ drivers competing on a very long and wide open course. Times were in the 50+ second range and there was a fierce battle at the top for TTOD. Doug and Dana Ambrisko are off the a great start for their inaugural season as AX Chairs. We are looking forward to a great season of Cone Crushing!

Our second Time Trial of the season was held on March 13-14 at Buttonwillow. We ran the course counterclockwise for the first time in many seasons, and the first time in this direction with the Star Mazda turn, so everyone that won their class is now the owner of a track record. Only 64 folks ran for time so we had a 30 minute DE session at the end of the day with time to spare. Just about everyone was packed up and heading home by 4:30pm. The weather couldn't have been better. Mid 80s for the entire weekend. Who would have thought that we would have that kind of excellent weather in mid March?

We now have been informed that we will have a date for Laguna Seca this spring. In May we will be at Laguna on the Sunday and Monday of Memorial Day Weekend. Everyone will be looking forward to 2 great days at this world famous track. This time of the year should yield some great weather for fast driving.

Start considering any rules proposals you have been thinking about and plan on forwarding them to me as soon as possible...it is never too early to start thinking about next season!

See you at the next GGR competition event.
Porsches were made for driving...do it.

Kristy Soo-Hoo, Clio, and Greg Chioco

TT#2:

Dan Thompson
Competition Director
### GGR Event Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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<td><strong>April</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GGR Board Meeting 7:00 PM</td>
<td>The Benz’s, 2360 Webster St. Palo Alto</td>
<td>Bill Benz</td>
<td>650.328.4221</td>
<td><a href="mailto:WMHBENZ@aol.com">WMHBENZ@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>GGR Time Trial #3</td>
<td>Thunderhill</td>
<td>Ken Park</td>
<td>510.414.8004</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kenp911@aol.com">kenp911@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>GGR Autocross #2 Alameda Point</td>
<td>Doug Ambrisko</td>
<td>650.903.0652</td>
<td><a href="mailto:autox@ambrisko.com">autox@ambrisko.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Friday Night Social</td>
<td>Harry’s Hofbrau/Carvery, 1297 Chess Drive, Foster City, CA</td>
<td>Bill Benz</td>
<td>650.328.4221</td>
<td><a href="mailto:WMHBENZ@aol.com">WMHBENZ@aol.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Zone 7 Concours Judging School</td>
<td>Sonnen Porsche, Mill Valley, CA</td>
<td>Dean Tanaka</td>
<td>650.638.9270</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dgtanaka@aol.com">dgtanaka@aol.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Carlsen Porsche Service Clinic</td>
<td>Carlsen Porsche, Redwood City, CA</td>
<td>Rick Pasquali</td>
<td>650.701.9200 ext. 366</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rpasquali@aol.com">rpasquali@aol.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>May</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GGR Autocross #3</td>
<td>Golden Gate Fields</td>
<td>Doug Ambrisko</td>
<td>650.903.0652</td>
<td><a href="mailto:autox@ambrisko.com">autox@ambrisko.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>GGR Board Meeting 7:00 PM</td>
<td>The Benz’s, 2360 Webster St. Palo Alto</td>
<td>Bill Benz</td>
<td>650.328.4221</td>
<td><a href="mailto:WMHBENZ@aol.com">WMHBENZ@aol.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>May Madness Rally</td>
<td>Stockton at the Marina Center on Benjamin Holt Drive,</td>
<td>Bud Behrens</td>
<td>209.477.6496</td>
<td><a href="mailto:budmaryann@cs.com">budmaryann@cs.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Zone 7 Autocrosses 3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>Stead Airport, Reno, NV</td>
<td>Pat Costin</td>
<td>775.348.6177</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pcostin@attglobal.net">pcostin@attglobal.net</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Zone 7 Concours #1</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Rocky Taylor</td>
<td>559.658.2175</td>
<td><a href="mailto:taylor@sierratel.com">taylor@sierratel.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Friday Night Social</td>
<td>Harry’s Hofbrau/Carvery, 1297 Chess Drive, Foster City, CA</td>
<td>Bill Benz</td>
<td>650.328.4221</td>
<td><a href="mailto:WMHBENZ@aol.com">WMHBENZ@aol.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Dyno Day!</td>
<td>Dyno Labs, San Ramon, CA</td>
<td>Ray Razon</td>
<td>925.831.8240</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rayrazon@pacbell.net">rayrazon@pacbell.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-31</td>
<td>GGR Time Trial #4 (or possibly a High Speed Driving School/Driver’s Education event)</td>
<td>Laguna Seca</td>
<td>Ken Park</td>
<td>510.414.8004</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kenp911@aol.com">kenp911@aol.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>June</strong></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>GGR Board Meeting 7:00 PM</td>
<td>The Benz’s, 2360 Webster St. Palo Alto</td>
<td>Bill Benz</td>
<td>650.328.4221</td>
<td><a href="mailto:WMHBENZ@aol.com">WMHBENZ@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GGR Autocross #2</td>
<td>Candlestick Park</td>
<td>Doug Ambrisko</td>
<td>650.903.0652</td>
<td><a href="mailto:autox@ambrisko.com">autox@ambrisko.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PCA Hospitality Infineon Raceway - Vintage Races</td>
<td>Kurt Fischer</td>
<td>415.883.4900</td>
<td><a href="mailto:truk50@ix.netcom.com">truk50@ix.netcom.com</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Zone 7 Concours #2</td>
<td>Parts Heaven, Hayward, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Zone 7 Concours #3</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>Kent Brandon</td>
<td>916.652.4406</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Contact Information**

- **Time Trial Chair, Ken Park**
  510.414.8004
  kenp911@aol.com

- **Autocross Chair, Doug Ambrisko**
  650-903-0652
  autox@ambrisko.com

- **Time Trial Registrar, Lori Hageman**
  2723 Hillcrest Ave.
  Antioch, CA 94509
  925.252.0206
  GGRRegistrar@aol.com

- **Goodie Store, Bob Peterson**
  5323 Cribari Glen
  San Jose, CA 95135
  408.528.9284
  bps944@aol.com

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TT#2: Cam Carrington getting his car ready for the timed runs at Buttonwillow.
The competition driving season is officially in full swing now that the Ambriskos successfully pulled off a fantastic autocross under equally wonderful skies at 3Com this month. Boris Teksler laid out what can only be described as “a 993 course”. There were two features in this course that were very tricky, so to follow along with our recent theme on course analysis, we’re going to examine them in more detail.

The first turn we’re going to analyze is the right hand near-180 at the far end of the lot. I spent most of the second run group watching cars drive through this turn, nearly all of them taking a line close to the dotted line in the figure below. They were carrying a lot of speed off of a straight, setting up along the right side of the course, braking late and deep, and then turning sharply. I can understand why cars would naturally follow this line, but I don’t believe it is the fastest line through this type of turn. I think the fastest line (represented by the solid line) required braking earlier, moving the car purposely to the left, then turning in earlier and accelerating through the turn towards the exit.

The dotted line allows you to carry more speed INTO the turn, so you’ll be faster from points A to B. However, you then have to slow WAY DOWN to make the turn at B, and with a bogged engine, you’ll accelerate very slowly from B to C. In comparison, by braking earlier, you can move the car to the left slightly. So, you’ll give up a tenth or two by going slower from point A to B. However, since you don’t have to turn the steering wheel as much to turn toward the exit, you don’t have to slow the car as much, resulting in a better run OUT of the turn. I’d argue that the time you give up between A and B on the solid line is a fraction of the time you’d save between B and C. Remember -- slow in, FAST OUT!

The second feature we’ll analyze is the evil chicane along the back stretch. The variance of speed between drivers through this section was staggering! Many cars approached the chicane, hit the brakes hard and basically made a severe lane change. This is the dotted line. Other cars moved way over to the driver’s right to set up for this turn, barely braked or maybe just lifted (or maybe not!) and flew through this section at full throttle. This approach is represented by the solid line. Since there was a long straight following this chicane, being just a couple mph slower at C could cost you a second or more.

The big difference here is where the car is on entry to the turn and the angle at which it approaches the feature. This is one of those configurations which, with experience, allows you to see a mostly-straight line through what visually looks like a really sharp turn. A key to this section is to realize that when the course is marked by widely spaced gates instead of being lined solidly with cones, you can often use the space outside the “suggest boundaries” of the course to set up for a turn and to exit a turn with a lot of speed.

While the lines on these figures are exaggerated to make a point, the differences on the course are often more subtle. However, to compete at the top of a competitive class, this is the type of analysis that you’re going to need to go through and execute on at speed to bring home the gold! Small differences in line, angle and exit speed turn into tenths, and over the entire course, add up to seconds.
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CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order at 7:11 PM on Thursday March 4th, 2004 at the residence of the President, Palo Alto.

Board members present were Bill Benz, Jeff Williams, Andrew Forrest, Chet Bottone, Dan Thompson, Claude Leglise, past president James Ohl, Nugget Editor Tom Pickett and Webmeister Susan Angebranndt. Also present were Ken Park, Harold Williams, Doug Ambrisko, Jim McClelland and Larry Sharp.

A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
The Minutes from the Board of Directors Meeting February of 2004 were unanimously approved as written.

B. POSTMORTEM OF EVENTS
1. Autocross school was popular and well received.
2. First time trial was excellent; extremely well attended (121 net participants)

C. DIRECTORS REPORTS
PRESIDENT, Bill Benz
1. Howard Yao has resigned.

VICE PRESIDENT, Jeff Williams
1. Next board meeting postponed one week to Thursday, April 8th, 2004; July 1st, 2004 meeting moved to June 30th, 2004.
2. Insurance ordered for events in March.

TREASURER, Claude Leglise
1. Goodie store budget revised to cover setup and purchase costs for ceramic car badges.
2. Treasurer's report approved unanimously.

MEMBERSHIP, Chet Bottone
1. February's new members approved unanimously.

COMPETITION, Dan Thompson
1. Time Trial #1 (see above).
2. Mention of the Coastal Driving School, an LPR/MBR venture.

SECRETARY, Andrew Forrest
1. Found volunteer for position of Nugget Advertising Manager.

SOCIAL, Vacant
1. Nothing to report.

PAST PRESIDENT, James Ohl
1. Nothing to report.

NUGGET EDITORS, Jim Bauman & Tom Pickett
1. Nothing to report.

WEBMEISTER, Susan Angebranndt
1. New look & feel of web site well received.

D. OLD BUSINESS
1. New Nugget Advertising Manager found.

E. NEW BUSINESS
1. Board members to seek new Social Director.
2. Thunderhill track rights: Claude and Ken to talk to Thunderhill management together to explore options in renewing these.

ADJOURNMENT
There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion to adjourn was approved at 9:28 PM. The next Board of Directors meeting will be held Thursday, April 8, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. at the residence of the President, Palo Alto, Calif. Call President at 650.328.4221 to add items to agenda.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Forrest, GGR Secretary 2004
What do all these fine companies have in common?

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(Chuck Davis, Agent)
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DAVID LOOP EUROPEAN
DEVEK
GD RACING
INTERNATIONAL AUTO BODY
PAINT & DETAILING
JERRY WOODS ENTERPRISES
KAHLER’S WERKSTATT
PORBOYS

PARTSHEAVEN
PRUDENTIAL CALIFORNIA REALTY
REITMEIR’S WERKSTATT
RENNWERKS
RICHARD PETTY ELECTRIC
S-CAR-GO RACING
SMART RACING PRODUCTS
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T & D PERFORMANCE
THE RACERS GROUP
WHITMAN’S AUTOBODY

They are proud sponsors of the GGR 2004 Time Trial Series!!

Time Trial #3: Thunderhill
April 3-4, 2004

Time Trial #4: Laguna Seca
May 30 - 31, 2004
TT#2 - Backwards at Buttonwillow

Stewart the Guard Dog

Enjoying the Porsches and the warm weather

Shane Campbell (at his first time trial), and his dad Gary

The Eye of the Nugget

---

Have you always wanted to drive your Porsche on a real race track? Want track experience but don’t have all the expensive safety gear?

The PCA Coastal Driving School

Invites you to attend the inaugural Drivers Education Event on Easter Sunday April 11th at Thunderhill

Safety is our primary concern but roll bars in hard tops, harnesses, fire extinguishers and driving suits are optional. Nearly two hours of track time planned for everyone. All suitable males of cars are welcome so apply early.

The Coastal Driving School is a joint venture between the Monterey Bay and the Loma Prieta Regions of the PCA.

Applications are online at www.CoastalDriving.org
Drivers’ Education
by Tim Fleming, Zone 7 Representative

PCA recently completed a survey of its members, which yielded some very interesting data. In addition to the usual demographic questions, there were a number of questions relating to the value that members receive from the club. In addition, the data reflected the priorities of the club members, specifically relating to what they hoped to get from PCA. The highest ranking items were access to technical information, and Panorama Magazine. Coming in at #4, ahead of tours, rallies, concours, etc. was drivers’ education, namely the opportunities to drive our Porsches safely at speed on a controlled course, usually a race track. Fully 75% of the respondents indicated that they participated in PCA driving events, or were contemplating doing so.

Well, for you 75%, we’ve got a few events coming up for you.

In Zone 7, Golden Gate Region has held a very successful big track series for a number of years. It is called a “time trial” series, but essentially it consists of 1-1/2 days of drivers’ education (driving at speed in a controlled environment, on a race track), followed by an afternoon of timed runs with only a few cars on course at any one time. These events are very fun, and safely run. The range of participants runs from beginners to very serious drivers indeed. With the higher speed time trial elements, GGR has commensurate higher car preparation and driver safety standards. See www.pca-ggr.org for more details.

In addition to the GGR series, there are now other opportunities within PCA for Zone 7 PCA members to try out the big track experience. Loma Prieta and Monterey Bay Regions have teamed up to host a drivers’ education series; Sacramento Valley Region also will hold a very similar series. These events will be low key events, no time trials, with plenty of track time involved. Run groups will be organized for levels of driving experience and lap speed. Instruction (classroom instruction and on-track in-car instruction) will be provided for those needing or desiring it. Of course, instruction is always provided at no charge. Both groups are being run by very experienced teams (organization and instructors), in conformance with PCA Standards for Drivers Education events. All of these events will be open to all PCA members.

The first two events will be held at Thunderhill Raceway in Willows, a very fun track with plenty of run-off room; it’s a very safe, non-threatening, facility to learn.

LPR/MBR Regions’ First DE Event
If you want to give these events a try (or just come out to watch), the LPR/MBR initial event will be on April 11 at Thunderhill, and the first SVR event will be held on June 4, also at Thunderhill. For more information, please be sure to check the LPR website at http://lpr.pca.org/ and the SVR website at www.derporsche.net. Or you can contact me at 916.985.4142.

Want to Be a Concours Judge?
Attend the Zone 7 Concours Judging School on April 18, 2004 (11am to 3pm)! The school, to be held at Sonnen Porsche in MILL VALLEY, will teach you about concours judging, car preparation, concours rules and procedures. Learn the difference between the different concours classes, mistakes made by competitors, “unwritten” rules, and a whole lot more!

Cost of the school is only $15.00, and includes lunch and refreshments. Contact Dean Tanaka at 650.638.9270 or email dgtanaka@aol.com. Please RSVP by April 5th.

Zone 7 Autocrossing in Reno!
When? Mark your calendars! On May 15th and 16th you want to be in Reno for a little slot pulling, card sharking, and autocrossing!
Where? Stead Airport. From I-80 take Highway 395 North; turn right on Stead Boulevard; bear right at “Y” intersection; continue around the curve and bear right at next “Y” intersection. Continue straight toward the airport control tower and grandstands.
Accommodation? Sands Regency Hotel, located at 345 N. Arlington Avenue, has rooms available at $89.00 plus tax per night for May 15 and 16. Call (775) 348-2200 for reservations and reference Sierra Nevada Region/Porsche Club.
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Chet Bottone, Membership Director

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**Report for March**

New members: 21 + 6 Transfers In

Transfers Out: 7

Total Membership: 1677

**New Members**

- James G Cullen: Burlingame, 1973, 914
- Scott R & Christina Seaman: San Jose, 1997, Boxster
- Aleksander R Tan: San Jose, 1989, 944
- Chuck M & Gwendolyn Metoyer: Menlo Park, 1997, 911
- Graham J Day: San Francisco, 1987, 944s
- Paul Narcisse: Oakland, 1986, 911
- Alexander C & Candice Ako: Redwood City, 1986, 911
- Patrick M & Katie Stanton: Los Altos, 1991, 911
- Shyam Lal: San Francisco, 2002, 996
- Norman R Sanders: Hillsborough, 2001, 911
- Robert Craig & Julia Woods: San Jose, 2001, 911
- Nelson & Myra Owyang: Oakland, 1983, 911
- Joseph A Osha & Stephanie Oana: Oakland, 1988, 911
- Steven Searles & Paul Perry: San Jose, 1971, 911s
- Michael J Leon-guerrero & Sharon Soditus: San Mateo, 1990, 928
- Fadhly A Bey: San Francisco, 2000, Boxster S
- Johan Baeck & Isabelle Nicolas: Palo Alto, 1986, 911
- Frederic & Frederique Garderes: Palo Alto, 1969, 911 T

**Transfers In**

- William & Carol Fergus: Carson City NV, 1976, 911s
- Gordon M & Megan Sparkes: Newark, 1981, 928
- Kris & Angela Rausch: Menlo Park, 1996, 993
- Jan B & Guillaume Hedquist: San Francisco, 2002, 911

**Anniversaries**

- Jon & Vicki Milledge: Marshfield MA, 30 Years
- David L & Jane E Croom: Los Altos, 20 Years

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For more information, go to the GGR web site (www.pca-ggr.org) or contact Doug or Dana Ambrisko, Autocross co-chairs. autox@ambrisko.com or 650-903-0652

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The Nugget  
17
I Left My Autocross in San Francisco
by John Celona, GGR Member

Saturday February 21st dawned cool, overcast, and threatening. After a week of watching the forecast remain stubbornly fixed at a 40% chance of rain. I wondered if this meant I would only be standing in the rain 40% of the time, or if the 40% of the time it rained would correspond exactly to my stints working the course. But as the event Co-Chairs, Howard Yao and John Seidell, had called the event a "go," I loaded up my best Gore-Tex and headed north on 101.

The car was as ready as I knew how to make it from the pre-school emails: tires inflated 5 p.s.i. over the sticker (putting them at 34 in the front and 41 in the back), oil and brake fluids were at the top, loose items stowed, stock seat belts and roll hoops at the ready. Plus fingers crossed and spouse worrying the next call to home would be from the paramedics.

I turned into what was the parking lot at Candlestick, only it had been transformed into a vast, open-air paddock for a herd of highly modified machines. Fender flares and wider tires. Racing seats with five-point harnesses. Numbers and sponsors painted on the cars. Carbon fiber air dams. Lowered suspensions. Oh, my.

I signed in, parked, and wandered off to the table near the trailer. Everyone else seemed to know what they were doing. I was given a green card indicating I was in group B, which I placed under the wiper on my car because that's what others seemed to be doing. The card was picked up before I realized I was supposed to remember what my number was, and someone was supposed to write it on my windshield, which also didn't happen. So I drove the day as Number Yellow.

First official result of the day: the motorcycle helmet borrowed from my brother was too old. It would be allowed for today, but I'd have to get a newer one for the next event. Oh, dear.

Then, as I waited for what came next, I had a chance to look around and realize how utterly cheery the folks were. They loved this stuff, lived for it, and could never tire talking about it. Spouses either understood or came along. Every event was like having your wedding night all over again. I wondered if, at the end, everyone would have a cigarette. Naw: this is still California.

I debated removing my spare tire. I finally decided that the odds of the extra twenty pounds being crucial in my performance that day were about zero. And I knew I'd have the hardest time getting the ballistic nylon cover off.

I found my morning instructor. He was extremely patient with what turned out to be a very difficult task. It was his job to describe verbally what turned out to be an entirely non-verbal experience. It
seems you have to get the feel of getting your car at its limits, keeping it there, and controlling it around the course to get a decent time. Words cannot really convey how it all should feel, but all the instructors were there to give it their best shot.

First stop was the skidpad. Sounds simple: just drive around the circle of cones. What you're supposed to do is get the feel of using the throttle to steer the car by bringing the back end out (more throttle) or in (less throttle)-all with minimal steering. Sort of like saying butterfly is just double-arm freestyle with a two-beat dolphin kick.

Then came time for the "Worker B's" to work the course while the A group drove. I opted for cone duty so I could work on memorizing the course and see where everyone else messed up. Unfortunately, I did not wear running shoes for what turned out to be an hour's worth of cone aerobics: run like mad to put the cone back, then run away because the next car was coming. While following Rule #1: never turn your back to the oncoming cars.

I stayed really warm, and indeed saw exactly where people were having trouble, and which choices of line through the course seemed to work best.

Finally, it was time for me to drive. "B Group: Grid your car!" (This means go use the Porta-Potty, find your instructor, put your helmet on, get in your car and get in one of the lines of people waiting to go.)

While easing my way up, my instructor gave me a stream of advice and instructions. I figured if I could make a discernible pass at doing half of it while not flagrantly violating the other half, I'd be doing well.

I was at the green flag. Engine idling at 1,000 rpm. Heart doing about the same. "Okay, now turn the wheel and give it the gas. Move over more. Now brake."

A 914 gets towed away for minor maintenance, but returned later for more runs.

My instructor tried to be helpful as I made a total hash of the course in what seemed like a blink of an eye. Only it actually took 44.527 seconds. That's about 90 blinks.

As I tried to repeat the things I did passably and correct the big blunders, I got down to a 43.993, then actually hit a 41.252. Then I was in my 41-rut and couldn't go any faster. Two more runs and it was lunchtime.

Obviously, the car was much faster than I was. I thanked it for indulging me and not breaking.

Poor-boy sandwiches were kindly provided by Porboys German Automotive Service. Although I greatly appreciated that they had bought more than enough to feed everyone, one look at the white buns, mayonnaise, iceberg lettuce and cold cuts made me secretly glad I had brought some of Semi-freddi's sliced Odessa rye with ginger-roasted ham, avocado, extra sharp cheddar, and Dijon mustard. Yes, I am a total food snob.

For the afternoon work session, I tried to pick a quieter section of the course. Wrong! A slightly modi-
fied course layout changed the slalom from a sleeper to busy section of flying cones. I debated for an hour about which side to take the first slalom cone, while dodging spinning cars as they ate cones. My internal debate was complicated by people recommending taking the cone on the "inside" or "outside." Inside of what? Many drivers seemed to think that meant taking the cone inside your wheel well and dragging it along the course.

About halfway through, someone pulled up outside the fence in a 1980-something Buick and drove doughnuts on the street for several minutes. We smirked, but otherwise ignored the clouds of black tire smoke. I'm not sure if we were supposed to envy his car, his technique, his rate of tire consumption, or all three.

After burning about 400 calories working, it was time to drive again. Chatting with my new instructor, I went over my pre-event preparations. He said "Since you're running on street tires, you should actually let some air out before autocrossing." Go figure.

Thankfully, his direct approach also seemed better at controlling my flailing.

"Hard right! Gas! Get over close to the cones! Now the other side! Hard Brake! Now steer! Gas! MORE GAS!"

We clocked a 39.958 on the first lap. I attributed this entirely to my improved skill and resolutely ignored indications that the changed afternoon course was actually faster.

Way too few laps (for me, anyway), and it was time to work again. This time, I decided to avoid cone aerobics altogether and got a spot running the grid. I was informed this gave me absolute power to let cars go or hold them as long as I liked. Remembering the implicit guarantee of fundamental fairness in the Due Process amendment, I nonetheless elected roughly to keep track of approximately when cars arrived and let people go who had been waiting the longest.

Wrong. I was chastised for not simply letting all of line 1 go, then 2, then 3, then starting over. I pointed out that this would allow people who had just pulled in to the moving line to go ahead. The response was that this would require everyone to keep their engine running, and everyone would be moving. I guess my power wasn't absolute after all. Oh, well.

For my third and last stint driving, I took my instructor's suggestion that we do a few laps in his car. Ohmygawd. I still don't understand how he got through the first corner without taking out at least six cones. And did it while shifting (my car is a Tiptronic). Obviously, wherever he might be, Juan Manuel Fangio has not been reincarnated into me.

A few more runs and I got fast enough to start getting queasy. On my last run I too became a Monster Cone Eater. And tired enough to call it a day.

On the way home, it was so nice to drive the car gently, minimizing the g-forces in any direction. But, by the time I headed over my sister-in-law's for dinner later that evening, I found myself already eyeing various corners, picking lines, and thinking about where I would be standing on which pedal.

Damn. They may be right. This stuff just may be addicting!
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