



# SAME OR DIFFERENT?

If you think improving skill behind the wheel can only be achieved at the track, Porsche Driving Consultant, Neil Furber, encourages you to guess again...

I'm not a pigeon, yet it's amazing how often my role as a performance driver coach leads many to assume the race track is my figurative pigeon-hole of choice. You see, when I meet a new Porsche owner wishing to learn more about the capability and limits of their sports car, they often start talking about time at the track. The assumption is there's little to be learned on the road and that I spend the majority of my time coaching at circuits. The truth of the matter is that the road and race track are not as different as they may first appear to the untrained eye.



## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Granted, if we're talking motorsport, the race track is the ideal venue. Closed-road racing still has a role to play, but safety and atmosphere make the 'arena' format much better for spectator enjoyment. As far as celebrating driver skill is concerned, however, there is a downside: ignoring racecraft for a moment, it's an intimate knowledge of a track that plays the greatest part of raw lap time, which often settles position and bragging rights. Spending hours getting to grips with each circuit in a simulator is now the norm for any driver wishing to compete at a high level.

I'm very much in support of the tremendous work Formula One veteran, Jackie Stewart, has carried out in the interests of furthering safety in motorsport over the years. And yet, as a driving purist, there's something I find special about the racing drivers of yesteryear dicing with death whilst competing for pleasure and a love of the craft, rather than the promise of fame and sponsorship. Those heroes-of-old would drive the 'track' as they would drive the road, albeit with some constraints lifted. But, as most of you will already know, the 'tracks' were often road courses anyway!



A road is a drivable surface following a series of straights and curves with some undulation and elevation along its course. This sounds like my favourite local haunt as much as it does your commute to work, but how does it differ to the race circuit? Put simply, it doesn't! The road has a series of performance-related restrictions, traffic and white lines painted on its surface, just like a race track!

Kerbs are present to prevent corner cutting and rules are in force to dictate exactly how much cutting is allowed when bounded only by the white lines on the ground. Oh, and racecraft is all about mastering traffic. And there are rules for overtaking! As you can see, similarities between driving on the road and track are far greater than many might believe to be the case.

## THE ART OF THE CRAFT

Working on the assumption you'd like to learn about the capability and limits of your Porsche, if we break it down, you're probably asking for the chance to feel and understand the acceleration, braking and maximum grip of your Stuttgart-crested high-performance machine. Adrenaline. Excitement! What can it do? A blend of specially prepared training areas and a full race track (such as Porsche Experience Centres) are ideal places to get to know your car. I encourage you to visit them.

Just for a minute, however, let's go back to the skateboard I described in my 'mid-engined versus rear-engined' driver coaching article, as published in the Autumn 2019 edition of *GT Porsche* (get hold of a back issue by visiting [bit.ly/issuesgtp](http://bit.ly/issuesgtp)). That devastatingly cool deck could do amazing things. Popping an 'ollie', sliding down handrails or getting 'air' in the local skatepark's halfpipe. I'll let you into a secret: my childhood skateboard didn't perform any of these tricks. I rode it down the hill in my mum and dad's garden and did my best to jump off before I hit the cluster of nearby bushes! Even so, I had fabulous fun. As for the skateboard I bought in my teens, I

spent three days straight learning to 'ollie' and then, finally, progressed to the skatepark.

Why am I sharing these memories with you? Well, in many respects, sports cars are expensive skateboards for grown-ups, with Porsches being some of the very best available. Perhaps you can identify with my story? After all, you haven't got to be the world's greatest driver to enjoy seat time in a Porsche. For some of you, a 911, 924, 968, Boxster or 944 (or whatever else takes pride of place in your garage or on your driveway) is simply a lovely

place to sit, even when traffic lights burn red. For others, only the rush of a GT3 performing at full chat at the track will do. I love both experiences and everything in between.

No matter what Porsche you're in possession of, your car should always bring you pleasure. It's the continued desire to improve your skillset that ensures you'll continue to enjoy driving for years to come. With this in mind, try to consider driving as an art, rather than just a skill — the art is choosing which skill to use, when to use it and doing so with finesse.







## NEXT MONTH

Extracting performance from rear and four-wheel drive layouts

## RACING TO WORK

Now for the fun bit. I'm certainly *not* going to encourage you to 'race' to work. That said, almost every skill you'd use in a racing environment can be tuned and perfected on the public road without breaking any rules. Steering, changing gear, braking, weight transfer, vision, lines and position. It's easy to see how these can be tuned and practised until you approach perfection. For those of you who have engaged in 'advanced' road driving over the years, you'll be familiar with vision and planning, observation and preparation. Perhaps you've even learned about defensive driving: space management and escape routes? The best racing drivers are masters of these disciplines, too. In my opinion, the greatest artists are not measured simply by the stopwatch, but in their adaptability to all situations, be it competition, winter conditions, making smooth progress in traffic or minimising wear and tear whilst providing a safe, comfortable ride for passengers.

In his book, *The Racing Driver*, motorsport journalist, Denis Jenkinson, told the wonderful story of Fangio's win at the 1950 Monaco Grand Prix. On the first lap, where much of the field was caught up in a multi-car incident, the Argentinian speed merchant — at this point, leading the second lap — arrived at the entry to the blind corner hiding the accident. Rather than turn in at full entry speed, he rapidly slowed his Alfa Romeo and was able to navigate through the wreckage. Making the difference was his clever observation of the crowd's reaction to what was happening further up the road, as well as his ability to anticipate what stunned spectators might be focusing on. In other words, he wasn't concerning himself with only the racing line.

Your adrenaline 'fix' and earning reward from learning to walk the tightrope of grip are best suited to the track. Again, we come back to the Porsche Experience Centres and their outstanding facilities (PEC Silverstone

is a particularly excellent venue), but try not to forget that it's the wealth of experience available from each centre's highly skilled coaches that'll help ensure you continue to gain skills and finesse en-route to the ultimate goal of driving artistry.

Many of my Drive 7Tenths driver coaching clients are most interested in driving on circuit or engaging in a bit of skid control when I first hear from them. The majority are pleasantly surprised by just how much can be learned safely on the public road. This is ideal, not least because the road is where they use their car most of the time. Plus, let's not forget the welcome lack of circuit hire cost! Naturally, we enjoy track time when looking for adrenaline and excitement, as well as when the driver is already deeply into the thrill of circuit driving, but don't dismiss just how good the public highway is for vastly improving your skill as a driver and for ensuring you get the maximum amount of enjoyment from your Porsche.



## DRIVING FORCE

Neil Furber is *GT Porsche's* resident driving expert. With a background as a mechanical engineer in Formula One, he brings a unique technical insight to driver coaching. Splitting his time between the French Alps and the UK, Neil coaches drivers through his brand, Drive 7Tenths ([drive7tenths.com](http://drive7tenths.com)) and is also a Porsche Driving Consultant at Porsche Experience Centre Silverstone. Have a question about coaching? Email him at [enquiries@drive7tenths.com](mailto:enquiries@drive7tenths.com).