



AHEAD OF THE CURVE

In this month's coaching article, Porsche Driving Consultant, Neil Furber, discusses vision and planning in readiness for cornering...

Those of you who have been following my *GT Porsche* driver coaching series may have noticed a few teasers eluding to future articles. One of the biggies was in my piece focusing on gear shifting and braking finesse. Published in the August 2019 issue of the magazine (order a copy at bit.ly/issuesgtp), it glossed over vision and planning upon approach to a corner. Let's take a close look at this key feature of effective driving.



DRIVING FORCE

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LOOKING, BUT NOT 'SEEING'

There's a lot more to cornering than simply arriving at the bend, braking, shifting down gears and steering. Even with excellent core technique and a layer of smoothness, it's the planning from well ahead that unlocks the artistry (in some cases, even whilst accelerating out of the previous bend!). Planning, however, is nothing without effective vision. This is the cornerstone of good driving. Without it, almost everything else will be compromised.

Effective vision is not just about eyesight. Your depth (distance) and field (range from centre) of view is extremely important. Moreover, your ability to 'dance' the eyes from one point of interest to another quickly and effectively is crucial.

Many commuters fall into the habit of 'auto-pilot' with a near-blank stare set to the car in front or a limited distance ahead of the bonnet. Interestingly, the adopted gap to the car in front often corresponds to this distance, which helps explain why so much of the traffic we see is all too close for comfort. One can



observe a sort of 'latch-on' from a driver to the car in front. Dropping back and increasing your depth of view to accommodate a range from just outside your Porsche to as far as the horizon — and everywhere in between — will give you more opportunity to look for useful information when driving. Increasing your field to accommodate much more width (as well as height and more regular use of the mirrors) will enrich things still further. After all, there are

often clues behind hedges or deep in side roads that can make all the difference.

Yet even this is only the half of it. Looking from point to point is all very well, but it's the 'seeing' that counts. What you see tells the story of what has happened or, more importantly, what will happen. Of course, what you 'see' is dependent on what you 'look' for. Hazards and essential information will vary depending on environment.

VISUAL LINK CASCADE

This brings us nicely to what I like to call the Visual Link Cascade. Simply put, this is the process of using vision and planning to prepare the next few steps of your drive. It's the essence of what's known as 'Advanced' driving, but I prefer to think of it as essential for good driving.

Let's take an example. Perhaps we're driving down a rural road for the first time. It's a cool, early autumn Saturday morning and it rained heavily overnight, but the sun is out. There are plenty of young trees and light vegetation lining the road, which is fairly dry. As we accelerate away from the previous bend, we can see a sign with black and white chevrons in the far distance. They point right and there's a wall of dense, mature trees ahead. Working the eyes back towards us in a side-to-side sweeping motion, we observe a short narrow brick-lined bridge, and closer still, a signpost with two red-bounded triangular signs: road narrows (above) and double bend, first to the right (below).

Already, we've used our full depth of view by looking as far ahead as the eye can see and 'looked' for specific signage to identify more of what's to come. Now we know the bridge is the narrowing referred to by the sign. Afterwards, there will be a very tight right-hand bend (the combination of the bend

sign and the chevrons is significant). More importantly, we can deduce there's a second tight bend to the left a short distance later. This is a great start, but there's plenty more to do before we arrive at the next corner.

Starting another scan from the (now closer) distance back towards us, and this time with a much wider field of view, when looking through gaps in the vegetation, we can see

ploughed open fields to the left of the trees ahead and bushes forming a sparse hedgerow for a short distance ahead to our right. The length of this hedgerow is likely to indicate the length of intermediate straight between the two bends.

But wait! There's a red tractor not far from where the second bend appears to be in what looks like a partially ploughed field...



NEXT MONTH

Walking the tightrope: the famous 'limit'



I LOVE IT WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER!

So far, we've used effective vision to gather the majority of available information, not only on the road itself, but also in the immediate surroundings. This is where the cascading starts. We'll link the various visual clues to potential outcomes ahead via a series of appropriate questions and likely answers.

- Since it was wet overnight and the sun isn't that strong, could it be wet and slippery once in the shade of the trees in the double bend?
- If the tractor finished ploughing the other field before switching to the right side of the road, could there be (wet!) mud on the road ahead on the next longer straight?
- Being a Saturday, could there be slow-moving cyclists or a faster-moving sports car on the road ahead and coming towards us as the road narrowing and (potentially wet) curves make things a little more complex? Fresh horse poop in our lane?!
- Is there a sight line through the vegetation to gauge the second curve position and shape?
- What lateral position should we adopt for the bridge and just before the corner?

- What sort of speed and gear is most appropriate for each feature?
- Are there any potholes we should avoid, or could there be fallen branches in the road from the mature trees after last night's heavy rain and wind?
- How much grip do the tyres have for normal braking (and a potential emergency stop) in the potentially wet area of the bends?
- Which steering method is best (see the July 2019 issue of *GT Porsche* for the expected radius of the two bends)?

This list certainly isn't exhaustive, but it serves to give an idea of how much can be done on the approach to what, at first glance, looks like a fairly simple straight and tight bend scenario. Clearly, the speed with which you can see and process information is crucial, and learning to prioritise and form short-cuts for regular scenarios is also helpful.

Finally, we need to turn the visual information and appropriate questions into a plan of action (and perhaps a plan B in some cases). Even then, as things unfold, there

could be extra information or an unexpected occurrence. And, of course, we need to keep speed appropriate and the chassis balanced during cornering.

Although this is a road-focused scenario, the Visual Link Cascade can be a useful tool on the track, too. The information and questions can vary, but the vision, processing of information and final decision making is much the same.

FURTHER READING

If the above scenario has been of interest, you may wish to hit Amazon or your local book shop for a copy of *Roadcraft*. Used by the police to train police, it's the recognised bible for 'Advanced' and emergency response driver training and is good reading for those who wish to push their road skills to a more advanced level.

