

The Very Last Drivers' School of the Year

By Tom Fielitz, Instructor, RSP

Most RSR members had already enjoyed their last RSR drivers' school and started their wish list for car improvements for next season. The truly fanatical RSR members were enjoying one last school on the first weekend of November at Mid Ohio in Lexington, Ohio. Contrary to good common sense, the weather for this event has always been unseasonably good. This year was no exception with very mild temperatures and lots of sunshine. Mid Ohio is located in the beautiful rolling hills of Ohio farm country. The buildings and grounds areas are maintained like a state park. It is even more enhanced with the fall colors on the trees that line the track. It all combines to make this event the best school of the whole summer.

Before dawn on Saturday most of the entrants had already staked out their pit spot in the sprawling paved pit area. The bark of a racing Porsche exhaust sound split the silence as car after car was backed off their trailers and rolled into the brightly lit garage areas. Shadowy figures scurried back and forth to move tool boxes and spares into the garages. Gradually the sky lightened into hues of orange and pink. On track the sweeper tractor did slow laps and the safety trucks circled with red flashing lights adding to the drama and anticipation of driving on one of the premier tracks in the world.

After brief introductions and instructions it was already time to get reacquainted with this challenging and fast track. Mid Ohio is a dynamic combination of high speed corners and elevation changes. It is smooth and wide plus safe with ample run off areas protected with deep gravel traps and tire lined walls. Running at tracks such as Waterford are great preparation to move up to a professional track such as Mid Ohio. The same driving skills apply but most of the corners have a unique signature of turn in and apex point. The big adjustment is to find the optimum entry and cornering speed which is higher than the shorter tracks we normally use. An experienced instructor can quickly bring the student up to speed in a confident manner. The track sessions are a long thirty minutes which allow nearly twenty laps. Long periods between runs allow for reflection and conferences about what has been learned and what challenges need to be worked out.

This event had over 80 cars of all types but a majority of Porsches. There were even some unique pieces such as a mid engine 911 with a tall rear wing. There was also a race prepared Cobra replica and a slope nosed replica of a 935 race car. Christian Maloof was a very popular entrant in his race 993 RSCS and set the pace of each of his sessions. Mike Wachmenko was not far behind in his very rapid 944 Turbo. Will Page-Echols was sneaky fast in his blue BMW coupe. There were several GT3s and many other race cars from 944 to vintage 911.

The pride of RSR as always is Valerie Roedenbeck and Jennifer McNalley in their immaculate Caymans. From their first laps they were up to speed and showing the men how it should be done. Christian instructed Valerie and reported how Valerie put so much pressure on a woman driving the race prepared Cobra that the Cobra spun off track. Jennifer was very excited to be back at Mid Ohio and found her car on high performance track tires was well suited to the track. Both ladies have amazing composure and concentration and made steady improvements in their lap times. Valerie finally had the opportunity to bolt on Michelin Sport Cup race tires and her lap times dropped an immediate three

seconds. As Jennifer explained, track tires are a big boost in confidence but it takes time to learn the new cornering speeds possible with the added grip.

For many drivers the end of the day on Sunday was dictated by worn out tires or just empty gas tanks. One by one the cars were hauled back home and the pit area emptied. The highlight for the RSR group was a big birthday bash for Christian who turned the big 33! Valerie baked a special cake and Christian's trailer was decorated in the Cars movie theme. It was the envy of the whole school. RSR members can party as well as they drive. Now we can really say the drivers school season is over; but what a great season it was and it brings such excitement for an even better season next year.

(Editor's note: a big 'thanks' to Tom for reporting on the weekend at MidOhio!)