

Evo School Followup

By Paula Loftin

Success on every level! That's how the EESCC sponsored Evolution High Performance Driving School could be described. From the surprisingly easy way we were able to secure a date and venue, to the overwhelmingly positive response we received when we surveyed autocross clubs in the Pacific Northwest area about their interest. In a few short weeks, we had enough folks ready to sign up and Mike Johnson of Evolution started the process of setting up the event on MSR.

Once all of our members who wanted to attend had registered, we opened it to the public and it was done! We had 24 participants for both days, and had to cap it there, as Mike was unable to secure a fifth instructor, which would have enabled us to have the maximum number of 30 participants. In the end, I learned that we had a very long list of folks who wanted to attend. Enough that we could have filled another school!

This difficulty was due to the fact that Evo instructors are drawn from a group of drivers who compete at the national level, and Spring Nationals were so close to our dates, many would-be instructors just weren't available. I have been advised to keep a close eye on the SCCA schedule for next year when thinking about running another Evo school. Since I'm hoping our club would once again be willing to sponsor the event, I plan to do just that!

Before I share some of the highlights of the school, I want to thank several of our members who were especially helpful to me in setting up and running the school. The entire Board, who gave the idea its blessing; Peggy and Tim Steck, who created and distributed the interest survey that allowed us to feel confident that we could fill the school; John Schmidt, who handled communication and technical issues; Ryan LeBlanc, who stepped up to be our timing guy ... there would have been no school without him; Doug Drouet, who helped with the equipment, hauled up the timing trailer, did the morning tech inspections, was our safety steward, and worked in the timing trailer; Clay Hoffman and Tony Gonzales who provided support setting up timing and being available for whatever other tasks needed to be handled, and last but not least, Chris Fudge who took fantastic photos throughout the weekend. I also personally want to say thanks to all our club members who participated in the school... you made it possible for me to FINALLY get to take part in an Evo School!

In our first driver's meeting we met the four instructors and learned a little about their experience as drivers and as Evo instructors. They each had their own ways of teaching and communicating, but they were unified in their desire and ability to teach the Evo curriculum, the basis of which is to look WAY ahead, and focus on the basics of car placement and control. I think all of the participants would agree that they had no idea how far ahead they could actually look.

We got the opportunity to work with all four instructors over the course of the two days, which was beneficial. In retrospect, I realize that each instructor was giving me the same information,

just in different ways, and that many times I HEARD what they were saying, but was still unable to really DO what they wanted me to... in the moment! By hearing the same basic instruction in different ways, I was able to finally come to that 'Ah-ha' moment! One other very important skill that the instructors employed was to meet each student where they were in their development as drivers, and give just the right advice to allow us to improve. Someone who was a very accomplished driver was challenged just as much as those who were pretty new to the game.

Day one was designed to allow students to meet the instructors and demonstrate current skill levels. The course was a fairly typical autocross course consisting of slaloms, Chicago boxes, some offset gates, a sweeper, and one not-so-typical element, a small circle that we were to drive around. I found it unsettling to realize how little car control I had, either not getting close enough, or getting WAY too close to the cones! I heard lots of folks had that same realization. On that first day, we were allowed one course walk. After that, we were just to visualize the course, and work from memory!

The second day, we didn't walk the course at all! It was changed up and reversed from day one, but we were required to either look at the map that the head instructor showed us as a group while he talked us through each element, or not look at all, close our eyes, and just visualize the course as he described it. Amazingly, this was not as difficult as it sounds!

By the end of day two, we were using our new skills to improve not only our times, but more importantly, our smooth and efficient use of our vehicles. Regardless of where you were in your driving development when you started the school, you found ways to improve that made the experience extremely worthwhile. For the more experienced drivers, I know their learning curves were different, and certainly more subtle and complex than mine, but the overall consensus was the same, if you want to improve, you have to be willing to open yourself up to new ways of doing things.

In closing, I will say that at the end of the weekend I was tired, and not altogether sure I was driving that much better. Then, two weeks later, I went to our Roseburg event, and using a different car than I had used at the school, drove better than I have ever driven! Speaking from the perspective of a fairly inexperienced driver, it was a startling revelation. For the first time, I ACTUALLY looked way ahead, knew exactly where I was going, and could focus on how the car felt, which allowed me to respond quickly and efficiently. I felt competent and confident, and had that nearly mystical experience of 'being one with the car'! When you get results like that, you know you have had a life altering educational experience.