

## The Fun Factor

Here we are again, at that sad moment when we bid a fond farewell to the racing season, and begin the long, dark months of dreaming! Or working on our cars, or finding other car related activities to help maintain our sanity, or working and saving up our money so we can have a lovely, long racing season NEXT year! Anyway, while there are still a few events to go before it's all over, it's at this time of year that I realize how quickly time passes...at least as far as the racing season goes, and that all that fun is just about over for a while. The off season seems oh so much longer, doesn't it? Whatever else you may do at this time of the year, it is a great time to reflect on what car sports mean to us, and the biggest thing is FUN!

I can't count the number of times I've come off the autocross course/hill/track in past years and had a conversation something like this:

Observer: "How'd it go out there?"

Me: "Ok, I guess, but I could have gone faster..." (or made fewer mistakes, or blah, blah, blah...)

Observer: "Well, you had fun, didn't you?"

Me: "Of course! That's the name of the game!" (but it would be MORE fun if I was faster!)...

This past season I had to ask myself, REALLY??? And I began thinking about how lucky I am to be able to participate in such an incredible sport. And yes, it IS fun to go fast, but this year, I decided to focus on OTHER aspects of the sport that are also fun. For instance, it's incredibly fun to realize that I hardly get lost on course anymore like I used to. In my early years of auto-crossing, that was the major thing I thought about... just don't get lost! Now, when I walk the course, I can think about more than just the path I must follow. It is a much more engaging activity, and way more fun.

It's more fun now that I know my cars better, and can think ahead about what I might want to do at a specific point on the course. I have more of a "feel" that allows me to assess what's going on with the vehicle, and make appropriate adjustments on the fly to improve during the run, and from one run to the next. Just don't be too hung up not making mistakes... they WILL happen! Use them to improve your performance. Besides, playing it safe is definitely NOT fun...

Challenging yourself is fun! A few years ago, I decided that I had to be more aggressive and focused while driving. My motto then was "no Sunday driving" ... and it helped! But over time, the motto has morphed into a more driver-like mantra "all gas or all brake...NO coasting" ... and that really changed the way I felt behind the wheel. FUN!

At my level of driving, my ideas about fun are still pretty much on the rudiments of the sport... the folks who have had the good fortune to have ten or twenty years of experience behind them find fun in other ways, I am sure! But I think we all share the thrill of pushing ourselves and our machines to the limits, according to our skill level and nerve, so in that regard, we all find the sport great fun.

One of the most important factors that makes auto sports so much fun is the folks we do it with! It is a social sport. It is inclusive and supportive. When done right, it provides an opportunity for personal growth. Yes, it is competitive, but anyone can participate at whatever level they are comfortable, and they will find a community of people who will offer support, advice, and encouragement.

As we while away the hours between now and next season, I just want to say to you all, thanks for the FUN! Let's go after it again next year! -- Paula