

## **Auto sports and Life Long Learning A Heartfelt Thank-you to Lorin Mueller**

An experience at this year's Larison Rock Hillclimb made it possible for me to finally make some progress towards learning the hill and improving my performance, and I'd like to share the story with you.

Because Larison is my "home" hill, I am committed to running it every year, but I have to admit, I've never really felt like I was improving from year to year... And while I am not competitive in the sense that I am closing in on the magic two-minute run, I DO feel a strong desire to drive it well. That is why, after my first run of this year, I knew something was going to have to change!

All season prior to Larison, I had been working hard, getting instruction in autocross through the Evo School, and taking track instruction through Hooked on Driving, and of course getting as much seat time as I could at every autocross. And I was getting more comfortable and confident with the Mustang. So ending up with a time that was the same as the previous year did NOT make me happy.

For the rest of my runs that day I pushed hard and gained a little ground, but I was not satisfied. My major problem was that I didn't have a clear strategy for approaching the hill, but I didn't know what to do about it.

Later in the day Saturday, I was whining to Bonnie Mueller about my lousy performance that morning, and she said I should ask Lorin or Alan to coach me on the lines and strategy for getting a better time. I didn't know I could get help like that on a hill climb!

I know and admire both of those gentlemen, so I decided I would be bold, and ask whichever one I saw first if they would be willing to help. As it turned out, Lorin walked by just then, and I wasted no time explaining my dilemma. He said he would be happy to give me some pointers.

The next morning, Lorin was there bright and early. He drove my car up the hill and narrated what his approach was as I took notes. Then I took a couple of slow runs up as he coached me on the proper lines and strategy for each corner. It was a daunting task to take in all that information and try to keep it straight, but I felt encouraged. At least I had a plan! I knew it was unlikely that I would remember everything he told me, but at least some of it would stick!

As we all know, even a little knowledge can result in improved performance, and I was thrilled and amazed with the result. My times got increasingly better as the day progressed, and I ended up with my best time ever on the hill! Wow, what a great feeling! And it happened because Lorin so generously shared his time and expertise. THANK YOU, LORIN!  
I came away from the event with a sense of accomplishment AND with confidence that I could continue to improve next year!

In addition to thanking Lorin, I'm also telling this story to illustrate a larger point. It's kind of a theme in my life that comes from my background in education. It's the premise that we all are, or CAN be, life-long learners.

As a teacher, I always tried to encourage my students to challenge themselves, to take on tasks they weren't sure they could accomplish, and to find value in striving to improve, because that in itself brings pleasure and self-confidence.

When I got involved with autocross, and other auto sports, I found it allowed me to continue this theme, and that is because of all the wonderful, generous folks like Lorin, who are always ready to help, support, and encourage their fellow car enthusiasts! It's a pretty darned sweet community we enjoy, and I look forward to continuing to learn and grow and have fun with all of you for many years to come!

By Paula Loftin