

THE ART OF DRIVING

The 911 may be an example of automotive perfection, but are you getting the best from it? Total 911 explores the merits of using advanced driver training

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The Porsche 911 has a long and illustrious history as perhaps the archetypal premium sports car, having twinned exceptional performance and refinement with an unrivalled everyday usability for the past 50 years. However, stepping into a Zuffenhausen-bred sportscar doesn't automatically elevate your own personal driving skills.

There's no question that cars have got safer as they've become faster during the 911's evolution, with more cutting-edge technology than ever ensuring optimum adhesion is maintained between your N-rated rubber and the asphalt. However, an advanced driver's skillset is still essential for getting the most from your flat six – after all, the 911 is the intelligent sportscar for the intelligent driver.

Porsche are aware of this, with the purchase of a new 911 from a UK OPC guaranteeing a half-day course to hone your talent in the world-class facilities of Silverstone's Porsche Experience Centre. However, stepping into a used 911 can leave you in the dark when it comes to the performance capabilities of both yourself and your newly acquired sportscar.

There is an answer though, with a variety of specialist driving instructors readily available for one-to-one tuition. One such consultant is Robert Colbourn, who calls on a wealth of experience with manufacturers such as Porsche, Mercedes, Jaguar and Lexus, specialising in high-performance car control, limit handling skills, skid detection and prevention, and advanced on-road driving skills.

Enlisting in Rob's expertise for a day course of advanced road training, I first asked what stimulates such a profession as we set off in our 430hp 991 Carrera 4S with Powerkit.

"I had been a driving instructor for around two months when I met Bernard Aubry (the famed Porsche driving instructor who helped set up driving tuition courses for AFN), who quite simply revolutionised my view of driving," Rob says. "Being taught can often feel laborious, but this felt effortless and enjoyable, yet I was acutely aware that my driving was significantly more skilful and rewarding on the way home – I was hooked."

Bernard himself is a famed advanced driving instructor who has coached across a wide spectrum of sports car owners for more than four decades. He was once described by Richard Attwood as "Simply the best road instructor in the country," and has been personally mentoring Rob for nearly 15 years.

Back on the road in our 991, and good practice is already being instilled as we head towards Zig-Zag Hill in Dorset, our Great Driving Road from issue 63. Invaluable techniques to improve vision, throttle application and steering are instilled to guarantee a beautifully smooth driving process, and before long we're looking into the finer intricacies of the 911's dynamics and how to get the best from it.

There is always much to be learnt, regardless of your level, as Rob readily appreciates that different driving applications are needed for different circumstances – his notion of speed being your saviour one day but your downfall the next is a particularly memorable anecdote. Moreover, I'm continually enlightened to a different way of doing things, which only adds to the enjoyment of expanding your driving knowledge and competency so rapidly. The thrill of continuously executing a new technique becomes addictive, and the excitement at implementing it on the road is prolonged. It's here where the experience of advanced driving tuition becomes invaluable, as

Rob confirms: "Everything I first learned from Bernard would have been redundant and short-lived if I hadn't been inspired to use them: for example, when he isn't in the car anymore. Imagine it's three years on, you're late, fed up and nobody is watching. This is when your own relationship with driving will dictate your style and choices."

It's a perfect synopsis that exemplifies what advanced driver training is all about: being better-informed to make the right choices at the wheel and adopting a better driving style. Rob continues: "The collective goal is to explore the art of driving high-performance vehicles, with the aim that you aspire to be the best, most accomplished driver that you can be, and really enjoy the benefits of the skills I impart to each and every one of my clients."

Of course, the race track is a different environment to the road, but I was enamoured to see that some skills honed on the road can be transferred to the circuit. After all, safe, smooth and swift driving are key essentials to a quick lap time.

So what did I learn? Well, chiefly, that regardless of how accomplished you think you are behind the wheel, enlisting the insight of a professional can be as beneficial to your technique as it is to your ego. As I steered the Carrera 4S back towards town, I realised that I've become galvanised by the view that driving is as much of a work of art as the car you're piloting – and when that car is a Porsche 911, only the best will do. **911**

Thanks

Thanks to Rob Colbourn for the comprehensive insight into advanced driving. Further information on the variety of high-performance driver training Rob offers can be found via telephone: 07939 268 688, or on the website: www.robertcolbourn.co.uk.