

Drag Racer Strays from the Straight and Narrow!

It was a welcome break from the cold snowy weather in late May when I got a call to participate in the Allen Berg racing school at Race City in Calgary. Although my experience and interests lie in straight line ¼ mile racing it was a desire of mine to try my hand at road racing. I have attended the Frank Hawley drag racing school in Gainesville, and I have always wanted to attend a road racing school. With Allen's racing school being based at race city it was even more of an interest for me. Allen Berg has a rich background in road racing and has raced with some of the best formula one racers in the world .It has been a great privilege for the local area of Calgary to have talented racer start a world class racing school in our back yard.

It was a nice bright sunny warm day when I drove through the Race City gates, when I saw the formula Renault race cars sitting ready to go I knew it was going to be a most enjoyable day. There is something that stirs the racers sole when a race car is seen sitting quiet and ready to race in the cool of the morning. The day course was a group of 10 students with five cars, and we were split into two groups so one group could be in the classroom while the other group would be out on the track. Much like the Hawley School the first hour or so was spent being issued with driving gear, and being fitted to the cars. I was surprised as to how tight the front foot well is, but when you drive the cars you see the reason for it being so tight. Allen has a nice set up with an on site garage and a nice clean classroom adjacent to the service area. All the cars at the school are equipped with GPS and a myriad of sensors to record every move and position on the track. Throttle position, brake usage, and engine data record every correct move as well as every dumb rookie move. With all the data that is collected it is easy for Allen to show you how and where you are over revving, braking too late or too soon, how much brake pressure you use, where these actions took place, as well they show which line you took around the course. All the class room time was handled in a very professional manner by Allen, and was very useful in correcting driver errors as well as enforcing proper driving habits.

With all the introductions and preliminary briefings the first group was sent out to have their first track session, and my group was ushered into the classroom to be taught some fine point of driving a formula race car. Our group was briefed on shifting and the trick heel and toe driving technique which proved to be one the more difficult tasks to gain some proficiency at.

Once the first group finished the first session it was our turn to go practice to get the feel of the cars where we went out on the track and ran the cars through a slalom course a number of times, and then practiced with shifting, up to fifth and then back down in a short distance . With these exercises it gave us a good feel of the handling, braking and shifting which would come in very handy in the on track sessions. Both groups did these exercises a number of times .Once the familiarization was done it was on to the late morning lead –follow sessions with Allen Berg driving a pace car to show the students the proper lines to drive . Prior to actually running on the course the entire group of 10 was taken out to be shown the lines to drive, where to brake and where to use the throttle. A familiar line was "In slow-Out

Fast". Not only were we shown how and where we walked a lot of the track to visualize the lines, this exercise added insight to the instruction.

The lead follow session consisted of Allen Berg driving a pace car followed by the formula cars with the formula cars changing position every lap so all the drivers gain experience in the lead and in the other positions. It really did give a good idea on what it would be like to actually participate in an actual race-very exhilarating! The rest of the morning consisted of one group in the formula cars with the other group in a SUV with Dave driving the course a ways behind the formula group. Again it was a good exercise to learn the nuances of road racing. Dave was constantly giving instructions on throttle, brake and apex lines while the group changed out the SUV driver so all could get a turn.

With the morning sessions completed it was time for a quick classroom session, and then lunch was served. Many race track meals consist of a greasy burger, fries and a soda pop, but the lunch provide by the school was very pleasing to the palette. Lunch consisted of a nice grilled chicken with a Greek salad, and Greek bread with a Taziki dip, very enjoyable, and appreciated. It is surprising how you forget your hunger until you stop and take a break; all of the students were starved!

After lunch it was time to get on the track with out a lead car. Strict instructions were conveyed to drive the cars to a rev limit of 4500 RPM. Later sessions of rev limits of 5000 and 5500 were to follow. I didn't get to the 5500 as one of the students got a in a little over his head, and went off course which put a car out of action. With that mishap I decided to step out and offer my car to one of the paying students.

During the open sessions it was literally a blast! I have driven a competitive go-kart at the old Calgary airport track, so I was somewhat familiar with high speed cornering .Towards the later laps in the open sessions you got a decent handle on what the cars were capable of, and was exhilarating to feel the car carve around the corners at near race speeds. Much like driving a fast drag race vehicle it takes your total attention to stay safe and keep the in sync with the car. In drag racing you get tired during the day with all the car prep and pit work, in road racing you get tired driving the car. Driving a road race car is way more physical that driving a drag race car. I can see how a driver of a road racer is exhausted after a race in one those vehicles, and how physically fit one has to be to drive competitively.

It is too bad that the Allen Berg Racing School is forced to move base operations to the Mission Race track in British Columbia. Calgary's loss is Mission's gain!

If you are interested in learning how to drive an actual race car, and being taught by a world class driver have a serious look at taking a course at the Allen Berg Racing School. If not in Calgary then do yourself a favour and go to Mission raceway to take the school. You will not be disappointed.

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