



Learn a New Track

You are going to a new track, and it's one you've never driven before. How do you learn the new track without "writing checks which your skills can't cash"? Here are some tips gleaned over the years from study and from our own experiences driving tracks for the first time.

Do your homework

Find videos of the correct configuration and direction you will be driving on YouTube, Vimeo, or the track's website. Print out a track map and study the videos while referring to the map. Use slow motion and stop action to study the details. Be aware of some limitations: video is good at showing the lefts-and-rights but not very good at showing elevation changes; and just because a video is posted online doesn't necessarily mean it's a good example to follow! So, keep an open mind!

Ask for help

Find a driver who is experienced at that track who will give you a ride in their car and/or will let you follow them in your car for a couple of laps. See if you can visit the track before your event as a guest to watch the action and ask for rides.

Take it Easy

Drive those first laps at 5/10ths max. Keep your brain clear-of-fear so you can focus on learning the flow of the track. Speed without Drama equals Fun!

Leave shifting out of it

Leave the car in third gear for those first laps. Not shifting is one less thing to distract you from the primary learning task at hand.

Stay off the Brakes

Going brakeless as much as reasonably possible during those initial very slow laps will force you to look for the wide, flowing lines that will make you a much smoother driver as you learn the track and gain confidence and speed.

Start in the middle

We all know the best line through most corners involves starting at the outside edge of the track on corner entry, cutting across the very inside of the corner at the apex, and then drifting right back to the outside on corner exit. But when you don't know those points on a new track, by starting out in the middle of the track and gradually increasing your speed you'll let the layout and your momentum show you the best line.

Be late everywhere

As a "newcomer" to a track, you should late-apex every corner. The extra foot or three of road on every corner exit will cost you some speed — but will help ensure you stay on the pavement



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until you learn the track. Move your apex up as you gain speed and confidence, rather than trying to use absolutely all the asphalt on the corner exit before you're completely familiar with the track. Just like on the street (think mountain roads) it is best to initially take this to extremes and stay wide on corner entry until you can see your exit before you fully commit to the turn. This means using far less of the road than you could safely use — but you won't be surprised by decreasing-radius bends... or forced across the centerline into oncoming traffic. View this Randy Pobst video for an actual example by a sports car legend. <https://youtu.be/O2o0qozkzak?t=13>

Keep an eye on the exit

Whether you're in a dive bar or trying to master a new corner, the first thing you need to know is the location of the exit. Rushing into corners too fast forces you to brake too late, too hard, and often run wide. The best way to avoid this is to learn each corner from back to front. First, figure out where you want to be on the exit. Then, figure out where you need to apex in order to hit that exit marker. Then, figure out where you need to turn in, in order to hit that apex. Last, identify the brake point you need in order to scrub enough speed to before turning in. View this Dion Von Moltke coaching video at <https://blayze.io/blog/car-racing/how-to-learn-a-race-track-part-1>

Let others pass

You learn by letting faster drivers through, not by keeping them behind you. If you're driving a fast car in a group with a quick driver although in a slow car, don't use your hundred-plus horsepower advantage to pass on the front straight. Stay behind that driver and learn their lines through the bends.

Take Notes

Write notes on a track map after each session. Really! You might even try drawing your own map as that can work better than annotating one that's been provided. If you check your map against an accurate one, it's not important to have the proportions and straightaway lengths accurate, as long as you've got the corners, crests and dips, shift points, passing zones, and landmarks like brake markers and curbs clear in your own mind. Audi Club SoCal has track maps designed for notetaking on the chapter website www.audiclubsocal.org.

Pick the right references

Speaking of landmarks, you need to find proper reference points for braking, corner entries, apexes, and exits. Pick landmarks that won't move on you between sessions. Cones or the corner worker's parked scooter are bad landmarks. Reference marks on or adjacent to the driving surface are usually better than distant buildings, trees, and towers; this avoids repeatedly shifting your focus from near to distant, and back again.

Track Maps for note-taking, this Handout, and links to sample in-car videos are at <https://audiclubna.org/southern-california/spring-mountain/>

This handout is based on the motorcyclist's guide at <https://www.revzilla.com/common-tread/10-tips-for-learning-a-new-track-or-road>