

And I Thought I Was A GOOD DRIVER!

BY GARY WITZENBURG

Ask yourself an important question: Do you *really* know how to react in a sudden highway emergency? Most of us consider ourselves excellent drivers. I know I did. But most of us are wrong. Natural ability provides a head start, but expert driving is an art. As in acting or athletics, we need expert coaching. Without it, we learn by trial and error—so long as we survive our errors.

It's bad enough that most of us already plying the highways have little formal training, other than the sign-reading and parking lessons we received while practicing for our first licensing test. Think about how many totally inexperienced teen-agers we turn loose every year with shiny new licenses. Do we really know how to react in a sudden emergency or how to handle an unexpected skid? Do they?

I had my first and—so far—only serious auto accident not long after my 21st birthday. But I can think of numerous occasions before that when I narrowly missed destroying myself in a car—two particularly scary ones by the time I reached the tender age of 17. I learned a lot and somehow survived those early years. Would I want my kids out there learning the way I did? Would you? There must be a better way.

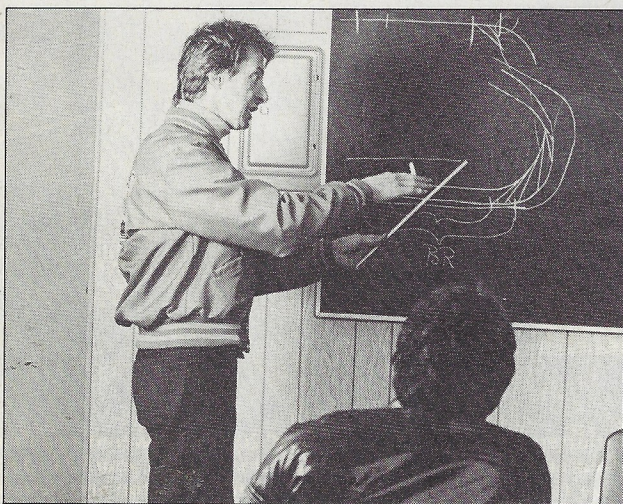
There is. It's called a professional driving school. It teaches advanced highway driving, high-performance driving, even competition driving. I don't mean some guy in a classroom telling you to "turn into a skid." I'm talking about serious, behind-the-wheel training by highly qualified instructors on a racetrack, skidpad or another place where you can actually *practice* all those

crucial, potentially lifesaving skills, that you only *hear* about in an ordinary driving "school."

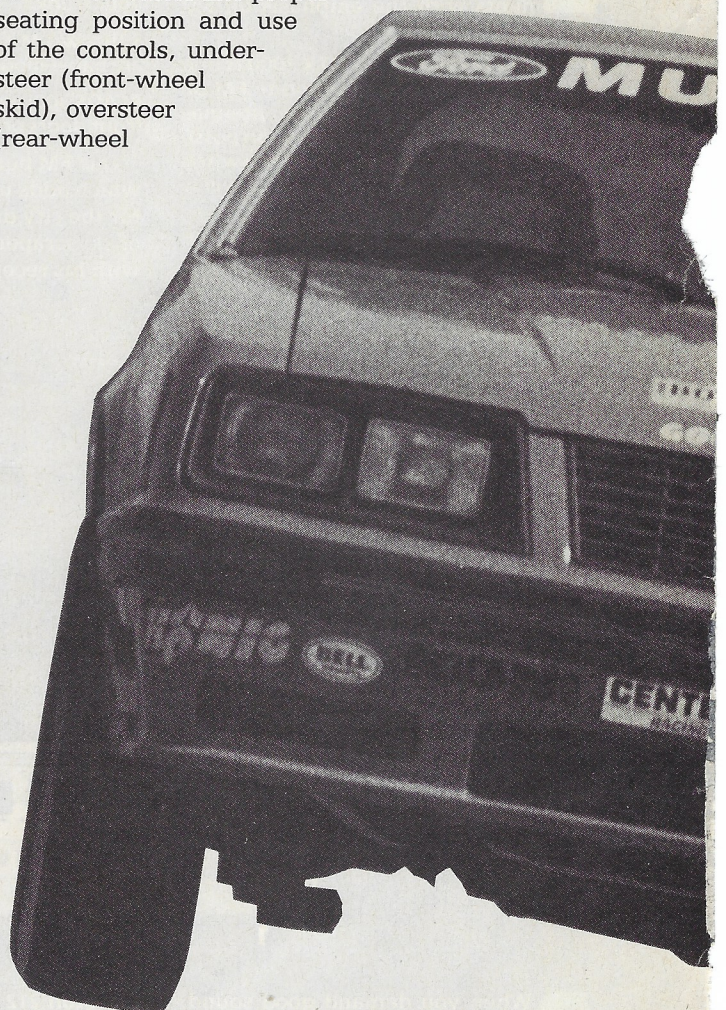
Professional schools I've known

Of the five major North American schools I've attended, the largest, best-known and most versatile is the Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving at Sears Point Raceway near Sonoma, Calif., northeast of San Francisco. A former top-ranked international racer, Bondurant offers one-, two- and three-day highway schools (in your car or theirs) as well as competition and other specialized courses. His method includes substantial dual instruction—the instructor rides with you to see how and what you're doing and you ride with him so he can demonstrate.

All Bondurant courses begin with a terrific "ground school" on basics like proper seating position and use of the controls, understeer (front-wheel skid), oversteer (rear-wheel



Road/rally/ice racing champion Bertil Roos gives chalk talks.



Car control is what you learn. Here, Bob Bondurant demonstrates the ragged edge.

Professional driving schools may be expensive, but they really teach you how to react to a highway emergency.

Some schools let you use your own car, which is the least expensive way to learn.

skid), shifting, cornering, braking and emergency maneuvers. You then progress through a trio of driving exercises—a two-turn oval, a greased-down skidpad and an Accident Simulator.

The oval, with a hairpin turn at one end and a faster sweeper at the other, gives repetitive braking, shifting and cornering practice. The icelike skidpad provides excellent skid-control training at low speeds as the instructor demonstrates and you practice various skids and spins. Skid correction is one of those things—like riding a bicycle—that you have to experience to master. Theory alone won't do the job.

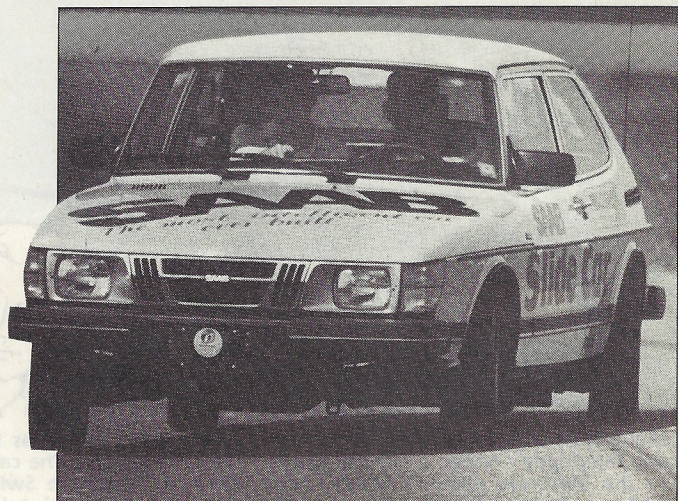
The Accident Simulator—sort of a pylon freeway with traffic lights over each of its three lanes—teaches you how to drive around a sudden obstruction instead of locking up the brakes and skidding into it. Here's how it works:

As I approach the pylons at low speed (about 20 mph), the instructor turns two of the lights red. My task is to dodge quickly into the "unobstructed" (green) lane without touching the brakes or any pylons. It's easy at first, but gets tougher as I repeat the exercise at progressively higher speeds up to 40 mph. Then, on one run, all three lights suddenly go red—the road is completely blocked. I try to stop in time—which usually can't be done—effectively demonstrating how much distance is required to stop a car even at moderate speeds.

All but the one-day course also include some time on the very challenging Sears Point racetrack, a genuinely thrilling experience that will give you a new perspective on what real racers are up against out there.

Another good bet for highway training is the

(Please turn to page 128)



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GOOD DRIVER

(Continued from page 91)

Bertil Roos School of Motor Racing at Pocono International Raceway in the hills of eastern Pennsylvania. Roos does most of the teaching himself and takes genuine interest in his students.

Most unique are the school's Slide Cars—stock Saab 900s with their rear suspensions modified to let the rear wheels steer outward whenever the fronts turn into a corner. The effect is like driving on glare ice, even at very low speeds, and Roos feels it's better than a greasy skidpad for learning smoothness, concentration, skid control and what he calls Ocular Driving Tactics (ODT) which is, essentially, looking where you are trying to go.

Think about it. If you're sliding off the road, where are you likely to be looking? Probably where you're heading and at what you may be about to hit—a guardrail, tree or ditch.

"Wrong!" says Roos. You should always be looking at, and pointing the front wheels, where you want to go. "Eye technique is what makes everything possible," Roos emphasizes. "It's the key to good, safe driving and car

control, whether on the track or on the road. Peripheral vision is good enough to see what's directly around you and to place the car where you want it."

Roos' curriculum also includes extensive classroom instruction and a very complete and well-written textbook.

Then there's the small but proficient Bill Scott Racing School at Summit Point Raceway in eastern West Virginia, about 70 miles northwest of the Baltimore/Washington, D.C., area. A two-time pro Formula Vee champion, Scott keeps busy building and campaigning race cars for clients in addition to running his competition and highway driving courses.

The highway school is short but broad in content and aimed at students' specific needs. It emphasizes smoothness, consistency, braking and cornering techniques and potentially lifesaving subjects like what to do if you go off the road (let off the gas and drive as straight as possible). Slippery-road and bad-weather driving are other Scott subjects. The on-track instruction is excellent and highly personalized; the instructors spent considerable time riding with me to correct any mistakes.

Still another former racer, three-time

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Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving Sears Point International Raceway Highways 37 and 121 Sonoma, Calif. (707) 938-4741	Competition road racing Adv. road racing High performance driving Adv. highway driving	4 3 or 2 3 or 2 1 1	Formula Fords and Mustangs Formula Fords and Mustangs Ford Mustangs or your car Ford Escorts or your car	1,500 1,350/900 825/550 250
Bertil Roos School of Motor Racing Box 221 Blakeslee, Pa. (717) 646-7227 Apr. to Oct.	Competition Highway driving Adv. competition Intro. to racing	3 2 1 1	Volvos, Formulas Saab Slide Cars, Volvos Saab Slide Cars Saab Slide Cars, Super Fords	995 450 350 325
Jim Russell British School of Motor Racing 22255 Eucalyptus Ave. Riverside, Calif. (408) 372-7223	United States Competition Championship Race weekend Adv. lapping days	3 4 2 2 2	Formula Fords Formula Russells Formula Russells Formula Russells Formula Russells	1,050 1,000 800 775
June to Nov. in Calif., May to Nov. in N.C., May to Nov. in Quebec	Quebec Competition Race weekend Adv. lapping days	3 2 2 2	Formula Fords Formula Fords Formula Fords Formula Fords	1,050* 850* 720*
Bill Scott Racing School Box 190 Summit Point, W.Va. (304) 725-6512 Feb. to Nov.	Adv. competition Highway safety Solo I Friday at the track	1 1 2 or 1 1	Your car Police Malibus Your car Your car	550 245 125/75 75

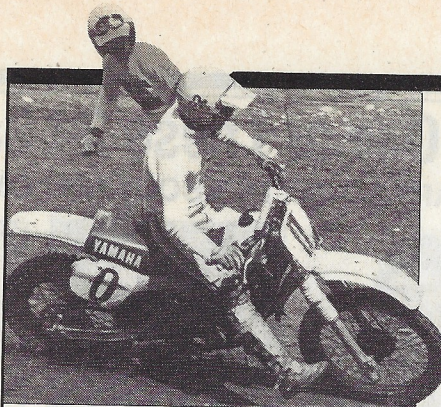
Individual instruction at various prices and duration.

Note: Many schools also offer corporate and chauffeur courses. Some schools charge an additional fee for the use of their cars.
*Canadian

Sports Car Club of America national champion Skip Barber, conducts a unique competition-only school that travels throughout the East, Midwest and South—plus two fantastic racing series for his graduates—all in Formula Ford racing cars. Right now, he offers no highway courses, but he does have a reasonably priced (\$325) one-day Introduction to Racing school.

The other outstanding racing-only school is Jacques Couture's Jim Russell British School of Motor Racing. A former Canadian national champion, Couture worked extensively in England under the notable Jim Russell before bringing Russell's name and methods across the Atlantic in 1969. The Canadian branch is at Mont Tremblant in Quebec, while two California branches operate at Riverside and Laguna Seca (near Monterey). Just last year a fourth location opened at North Carolina's Charlotte Motor Speedway. The curriculum includes the regular three-day school, a weekend race series and a season-ending four-day racing "festival" that pays real prize money and crowns an overall JRBSMR champion.

Any one of these schools can provide the sort of instruction that you and every driver in your family should have in order to become truly skilled and safe on the road. The full competition



Dirt Ridin' School

Motocross dirt bike racing is a form of madness that makes the mechanical bulls in saloons look tame. Several schools teach motocross riding. One of the oldest and best-known is run by former motocross champ Gary Bailey. Gary's best student is his son, 22-year-old David—a top competitor in the

AMA/Wrangler Super Series of motocross races.

It so happens that the same techniques needed to win on the track are also the best for fast, safe trail riding. I attended the Gary Bailey Motocross School, and it can make trail riding fun for a 50-year-old as well as for a 13-year-old.

Gary had us all figured out before we arrived: he knew that we'd all try to ride far faster than our abilities would allow. His motto is, "Slow down, and I'll teach you how to go faster." And his method is simple enough: He rides each obstacle on the trail or track first to show you how it's done. Then he watches each student ride (above), shouts and signals instruction, then stops the riding and tells each student what he did right and wrong. The four-day course costs \$200, plus track fees. Contact Bailey at Box 130, Axton, Va. 24054.—Robert Schleicher

courses are great fun and intense training for anyone who wants to become a real expert. But they're also pretty serious, expensive and time-consuming for the person with little or no interest in racing. The basic highway schools, on the other hand, start at less than \$250 (see the chart on page 128) and take just a day of your time, plus travel and lodging.

Still can't afford it, you say? Don't need it? Don't have the time? Compare the cost of the schools to that of one small accident at today's high body-shop prices. Professional training can help you avoid run-of-the-mill fender benders, as well as more serious smashups. Now ask yourself one more question: How much is your family's safety worth?

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