



SURVIVING the DRIVING

Performance Driving Centre

EVEN UNCONTROLLABLE SLIDES DON'T HAVE TO BE
LIFE-THREATENING...

It was back to school for me... at a driver training centre using luxury Mercedes-Benz (C200 and C240 saloons) and it was one of the best educational fun days I've had in years.

Bright and early I arrived at the Mercedes-Benz Performance Driving Centre and Motorsport Gallery at Norwell, located thirty minutes from Surfers Paradise. I spent a few tentative moments meeting the instructors and fellow 'students' (from all walks of life) before watching a video, listening to formal lectures, then heading track-side. Our instructors had the happy knack of making everyone feel at ease and realising there was no need to be nervous or apprehensive. The aim of the exercise was not to teach us to drive fast, but rather to teach correct driving techniques and 'to promote the joy of driving, not the joy of taking risks'.

There may be two or three people in each group, but driver safety training is all done on an individual basis. I soon realised there was nothing to worry about...I was in good hands, with thoroughly professional instructors, but some of my so-called techniques' left a lot to be desired!

It took some patience, perseverance and practice, but at the end of the day I came away a much more confident (and hopefully more

capable!) driver. The purpose-built track and 'Driver Safety Training' was the brain-child of Managing Director Frank Gardner, who needs no introduction to anyone associated with motor racing. His passion for the sport, as a former bike and car racing champion, development engineer, team manager, and test driver, later extended to driver training and safety.

Facilities include a two kilometre track with hairpins, sweeping curves and tight bends, plus a skid pan and turnable (revolving turn-table) all designed to teach various aspects of driver control and recovery from potentially dangerous situations. I won't give away all of their training methods and philosophies, but emphasis is placed on correct seating; balancing and bracing yourself in the car at the same time being relaxed and comfortable; learning to scan ahead for problems and knowing how to brake correctly.

This was a very interesting aspect of the day. We were taught how to react to different types of braking situations on the skid pan, on grass and on bitumen, using advanced ABS braking and older, more conventional systems. Once again, it was re-assuring to know that even uncontrollable slides don't have to be life-threatening... the skid pan was great fun! Despite some initial mistakes' (on my part) I was able to rectify bad habits, improve my reflexes and gain confidence in normal every-

day driving situations. Morning tea and lunch (buffet-style salads and meats with lashings of tropical fruit) are provided, but the nice thing is the instructor sits with his group and of course the talk is all about cars, driving and funny experiences.

At the end of the day each participant receives an Advanced Driving Training certificate and a copy of Frank Gardner's book Drive to Survive which apart from being very informative, is interesting to read. Free admission is also given to the Motorsport Gallery, another Frank Gardner initiative.

Gardner, a motor racing legend in his own right, wanted to share his love of cars with fellow enthusiasts and what better way than to open a museum of motor sport and classic cars.

More than 40 cars, many on loan from personal friends, including a Brabham BT28, 1936 Rolls Royce Phantom and Allan Moffat's famous Mustang are displayed in three showrooms which are open to the public Monday to Friday (9am to 4pm). Admission prices are \$10 adults, students/pensioners \$5 and children accompanied by an adult are free.

All-inclusive Driver Safety Training courses are available for one day (\$295) or two days (\$595) with corporate rates for bookings of 10 and over.

My special thanks goes to John Moroney, senior driving instructor, for his understanding and encouragement throughout the day... My only regret was that it wasn't for two days! ☺

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