

People often ask me what I do for fun, and I get excited by the opportunity to tell them about my hobby. But as I try to describe “track days”, or “high-performance driver education” (HPDE), I get a lot of confused looks and follow-up questions:

So, wait...is it racing, or isn't it?
Do people crash a lot?
Do you rub bumpers with other cars?
Where do you go to do that?
It's all on oval tracks, right?
How fast do you go?
Did you win?

People aren't sure what I'm talking about, and even after some description there's still a sense that HPDE is this mysterious, incredibly prohibitive unknown world.

If you consult the internet, you'll find plenty of videos on high-performance driving. Everything from how to hold the wheel, to perfect techniques for matched-speed downshifts and trail braking, to flag rules and procedures, along with endless descriptions of how to manage understeer and oversteer. You'll also find specific notes for attacking each corner at various racetracks, exactly where to place your car on particular patches of pavement, specific visual references, suggestions on tire pressures and suspension settings for different types of cars, and so on. These are all useful **once you're in the sport**. But for those people giving me the blank stares and wondering what in the world this HPDE thing is that I'm talking about, all that information is unhelpful, and even overwhelming. It's hard for people to gauge what would be involved to get started in this sport. They need help answering the simple question:

Do I want to try this?

How much does it cost? How risky is it? What kind of car do I need? Do I have to buy a bunch of safety gear? Do I need some kind of special credentials? A lot of people interested in cars are detail-oriented types who really like to **plan** before trying something new. The huge number of unknowns, and the relatively small group of people out there with the answers, can make it **intimidating** to get started in track driving. I've met so many people who hear about HPDE and say “WOW, that sounds so cool, I'd love to try that!” ...But then they never do try it, which makes me sad! This brief guide is intended to be a resource for those looking for that little boost of confidence to give the sport a try. Hopefully you'll read this and decide that HPDE is for you, and you'll find a nearby event and give it a shot. Or, just as valuably, maybe you'll read this and decide it's **not** for you, in which case I just saved you a lot of money and time! Good luck with your decision, and regardless of what route you pick, I wish you many happy and safe miles of driving.

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Beginner FAQ

What is HPDE?

High Performance Driver Education (HPDE). Casually known as “track days”, or just “DE”. HPDE is the unbelievably fun and rewarding act of driving your car on a racetrack with no speed limit, but under strict rules to prevent the kinds of accidents that happen in racing. The key word is EDUCATION, both legally and practically. The purpose is to learn how to drive your car safely and properly at race-track speeds. To do this, you’ll receive expert instruction both in your car and in a classroom setting. HPDE is NOT competitive; no centralized timing is performed; and no awards are given. This also means there are no limits on car modifications, as long as your car is safe. The tracks are closed, smooth, paved road courses, anywhere from 1.5 to 4 miles in length, typically with 10-20 turns, going both left and right.



HPDE is NOT:

It is NOT a race. There is no competitive aspect. Passing is only done by agreement (point-by) between the driver passing, and the driver being passed. The faster car is pointed by on the side of the slower car’s choice, normally letting the slower car stay on the preferred (“racing”) line. There is no victimization of other drivers like there is in a race, although you may still learn and practice some “race-craft” (setting up a pass, passing off-line, etc.). Although HPDE is demanding and intense, it is a casual, friendly environment, not an aggressive or adversarial one.

What is the closest comparison to HPDE?

HPDE is similar to golf. The course is there for everybody to use as casually or seriously as they desire. You may just play for your own pleasure. You can relax and play at 50% of your ability, or you can test your limits. You may interact with other players, or you may keep to yourself (aside from having an instructor until you are deemed safe to “solo”). You might have fun, or you might dislike it. In the end, no prize money will be given, you will still be an amateur, and people will only notice you if you’re super friendly or if you’re a complete jerk.

What is the benefit?

You’ll learn to use your car at a much higher level than you ever knew possible, and you’ll have a ton of fun! You’ll also meet like-minded new people! You’ll experience speed, acceleration, cornering, and braking that are simply not possible to attempt on the street. Your driving skills will improve and your comfort and ability on the street will increase. I compare it to swinging the heavy baseball bat in the on-deck circle; it makes swinging the regular bat suddenly feel easy. The lanes on the highway feel wider, you’re more aware of traffic. In an emergency, if necessary, you’ll be more comfortable using your car’s potential, having become more familiar with its limits.

What is the cost? What do I need to buy?

Entry fees are typically \$200 to \$250 per day. Most events are run as a weekend event where you can drive Saturday and Sunday for \$400 - \$500. **The only things you MUST have are a mechanically-sound car and a helmet.** A good new helmet can be had for roughly \$250. Check with the event organizers/track; loaner/rental helmets MAY be available, but it’s unlikely. Some tracks, like Pitt Race, rent helmets. Buying used safety equipment is not recommended. Depending on how, and what, you drive, there are many variables that will affect cost. Some of these costs include fuel, food, overnight accommodations, and to some extent wear on tires/brakes.

How much time will I get on track?

Normally 1.5 to 2 hours per day, broken into 20-to-30-minute sessions.

How fast will I go?

It depends on a variety of factors including your car, the track, your comfort level, the weather. After you’re in the sport for a while you’ll find that maximum straight-line speed isn’t that interesting. Driving a corner well and quickly is a lot more exciting and rewarding than going straight at 150 mph. But you came here looking for a number! On most tracks you could reach over 100 mph at least once or twice per lap.

Is it bad for my car?

No. Especially in your first few events, where you are only beginning to explore the capabilities of you and your car.

Will I hit/contact anything (wall, another car, etc.)?

Extremely unlikely. Does it happen? Yes. Usually in the faster groups, with more experienced drivers. Rarely with novice/newer drivers. Why is this? The more experienced drivers are going at much higher speeds, and taking more risks because they are driving closer to their maximum skill level, and their car's limit of performance.

Seriously, will I crash?

It's mostly up to you and your maturity level (and your instructor). This sport is meant to be predictable in a controlled environment, so if you do something to upset that predictability, you are in the wrong. Your instructor will guide you on when to "push" your comfort zone. Any incident, including just going off the track surface, endangers you, other drivers, course workers, and emergency personnel. It also costs other drivers in lost track time. If you are careful and responsible (and listen to your instructor), you should never come close to crashing. HOWEVER, we do have to consider that mechanical failures are possible, as are health emergencies. You could cut a tire or lose your brakes, or have a heart attack. Is it likely? No. But **it is possible**, and you should consider it; just as it's possible in street driving.

Does my auto insurance include coverage for HPDE events?

NO! You should assume you do not have coverage. Read and understand your policy. You may purchase insurance that is specific to HPDE event coverage. Track event insurance is optional, but not required, to participate, and up to each individual. It depends on your tolerance for risk, and your ability to recover financially if damage occurs. Some vendors include: ontrackinsurance.com, Hagerty, Lockton, OpenTrack and others. You can purchase insurance for a single event, multiple event packages or annual policies. The cost depends on your declared value of your car and how many events are included. The deductibles can vary. Be sure to understand what is covered (physical damage) and what is not covered (liability), and the deductible.

Do I need a really fast car?

No. Remember, it is High Performance *DRIVER* Education (HPDE). Some cars are better suited for track driving than others. Almost all cars will be fine for your first track event. If you have questions about driving your specific car on track, we'd be happy to discuss it with you! Contact chief.instructor@arpca.com.

Do I need special tires or brakes?

No. It's best to get educated on the equipment you drive every day. This means street tires and street brakes on a normal street car. Everything just needs to be in good working order.

Do I need to have my car inspected?

Yes. You are required by the Porsche Club of America (PCA) to have your car inspected before the event. The inspection must take place no more than 30 days prior to the event; and be performed by an independent third-party automotive dealer or repair facility.

Do I need special safety equipment other than a helmet?

No. As a beginner there's no need for roll cages, harnesses, race seats, special clothing, etc.

Will other people touch or drive my car?

Not likely. Your instructor may offer to take you out in his/her car to show you the driving or school line around the racetrack. They USUALLY will not ask to drive your car, and if they do ask, you may say "NO". Even if you ask them to drive your car, they may decline.

Will I have an instructor?

Yes. Your instructor will ride in the passenger seat and give you as much feedback as you need. Eventually you'll graduate to not needing an instructor, if you want. Advancing to driving without an instructor varies, depending on many factors. Try to enjoy sharing the car with your instructor and take advantage of the opportunity to go for a ride in your instructor's car to learn more about what's possible. Frequently your instructor will be somebody who drives a similar car, so they will have good insight about how to drive it properly.

Do I have to go to a class?

Yes. In between your driving sessions, you will attend required classroom sessions where you discuss track rules, proper etiquette, and performance driving techniques. Pay attention to the schedule! It is critical that you attend class. Frequently attendance is taken, and truants may lose track time. Plus, you're paying for this instruction; take advantage of it! There is always something to learn or re-learn. It's also nice to meet the other drivers in your group.

Are the windows up or down while driving on track?

Driver's window is down (open). Passenger window is the instructor's choice: up or down.

What if it rains?

Our events continue rain or shine. It is possible (but highly unlikely) that track management closes the track for severe conditions.

Will my exterior be damaged? Stone chips, etc?

Not likely. Especially in the novice group. Some people put painters tape across vulnerable areas (headlights, front bumper, hood). There are other options depending on your concern and tolerance for stone chips.

Can I drive a convertible?

Maybe. Check with the ARPCA HPDE Committee (track@arpca.com). Typically, modern Porsches with built-in rollover protection are allowed. Older cars may not meet requirements.

Do I need to be a member of some club or organization? Do I need a racing license?

No. ARPCA does not require that you own a Porsche, and you don't need a Porsche Club of America membership to participate in our track events. As far as credentials, all you need is a valid driver's license and be at least 18 years of age.

Is HPDE physically demanding?

Not particularly although there are some physical efforts involved. It's much more mental, and you need to be mindful of fatigue. There are some excellent drivers of all ages (including "seniors"); you certainly don't need to be an athlete in your prime. Arrive at the track well rested, and drink lots of water during the day. Fuel yourself with wholesome and healthy meals and snacks.

What is the typical daily schedule like?

- Registration is normally around 6:30 or 7:00 AM. Most new participants arrive a little early to find a place to park, and to allow time to unload all their stuff from the car before proceeding to registration.
- There will be a required driver's meeting after registration, usually around 8:00 AM.
- You will have 2 sessions on-track before lunch, and 2 sessions on-track after lunch. Normally you'll have an hour or more of downtime between your sessions; in some cases, you'll have a required classroom session. When you're not in class, it's a good time to relax, check your car over, get to know other drivers, and take a look at all the cool cars; some of which may be quite interesting and unique.
- There is a lunch break during which no activities are scheduled.
- Normally you will be done by 5:30 PM.
- There's no requirement to do every session. If you are tired, feel free to skip a session, or leave early.

What if I have questions and want to talk to someone and learn more?

We enjoy talking to people about our favorite pastime! If you are considering a track event, we encourage you to send an email to track@arpca.com or chief.instructor@arpca.com and we will set up a good time to talk.

How do I find an ARPCA event?

www.ARPCA.com

or

<https://www.motorsportreg.com>



Packing and Prep Lists

What is critical to bring with me?

Here is a packing list we suggest for new drivers. Lots of people will loan you their stuff if needed, and it's unlikely you'll need all of these items, but it's good to be prepared as possible.

- Helmet
- Vehicle inspection sheet completed by authorized third party (ARPCA VSI form = Vehicle Safety Inspection form)
- Water (plenty to stay hydrated throughout the day)
- Means to insure you aren't late for your track or classroom sessions
- Comfortable clothing; planning for all weather possibilities including rain. Many drivers prefer natural fiber long sleeve shirts and long pants, but these are not required by ARPCA.
- Sunglasses
- Hat and sun-block (you're outside many hours)
- Portable chair
- Umbrella (for rain or shade)
- Comfortable driving shoes. They must be closed-toe, and it is strongly recommended that they have a firm, smooth sole (non-lugged sole).
- ARPCA does not provide printed materials. An email with documents is provided in advance. We suggest you print the schedule, track map and any other materials you'll need (the email will suggest what to print).
- Tire pressure gauge

- Paper towels
- Glass cleaner (you're going to kill a lot of bugs!)
- Torque wrench and wheel bolt socket that fits the wheel bolt/lug nut for your car
- Work gloves
- Waterproof enclosure for everything in case it does rain, since you will have to empty your car of everything and leave it in the parking lot. Garbage bags or tarps are a cheap-o option.

What should I check before leaving home?

- Tire pressures
- Wheel bolt or lug nut torque
- Fluid levels
- Clear out your interior except for items needed at the event

What should I study before I go?

Read all emails and attachments received prior to the event. Take care of all the practical stuff so you can put it out of your mind (directions, parking, schedule, etc.). Becoming familiar with the layout of Pitt Race would be a valuable head-start. Watching in-car videos can be helpful. You can find a recent Pitt Race in-car video driven by an ARPCA instructor at https://youtu.be/RFd_Yn8l69E

How should I look after my car throughout the day?

Your instructor will be glad to help with these items:

- Periodically check that wheel bolts/lugs are properly torqued
- Periodically check fluid levels
- Periodically check your brake pad wear
- Check tire pressures after each track session
- If in doubt, check it out - weird noises, smells, vibrations, etc. do not fix themselves.

Legal Stuff

Everything presented here is for informational purposes only. **You're entirely responsible for yourself, and everything you do is at your own risk. PCA requires a signed waiver from all participants. Pitt Race also requires a signed waiver from all who enter the facility.**

Remember: **BE SAFE and HAVE FUN!**