Allen Berg Race School

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Christmas 2010, I was handed a flat gift from my wife a knew it was going to be something special. Low and behold, it was a reservation for a one day class at Allen Berg racing school, formula package. These are open wheel, carbon fiber monocoque chassis, 5 speed sequential gearbox, 160hp race cars .

Allen Berg offers this school at four different locations, Edmonton AB, Calgary AB, Willows CA, and Palm Springs CA. I chose the Willows CA location at the Thunderhill Raceway partially because I was worried about the weather in the other locations (Rain in Canada, and too hot in Palm Springs) but mainly because I found the track layout to be most appealing. Its a long track with high speed turns and some great elevation changes.

I found out that they offered a two day program a decided that if I was going to go all this way for a school I may as well go all out. I upgraded to the two day program and reserved my spot for the May 11, 12 school.

My wife and I flew in to Sacramento and drove up to Willows on May 10th. We arrived at the track at 8am the next morning to meet Allen Berg, his assistant Troy Castaneda , and the other students. After being fitted into a race suit and helmet the first classroom session started where we were informed of a very pleasant surprise. Normally the school has 10 students but this weekend we were supposed to be sharing the track with another group so Allen cut his school down to 5 students. However, the other group never showed up so with only 5 students and the facility all to ourselves we ended up getting twice the track time as what we normally would.

From reading the school's website I was expecting to spend quite some time in the classroom and not get to the track until the afternoon. Well, I was again pleasantly surprised that this was not the case. After spending a short time going over the car's controls, and another short session on heal toe shifting we immediately headed out to the cars. We were fitted into our assigned rides and shown how the safety harnesses work.

First Time Out

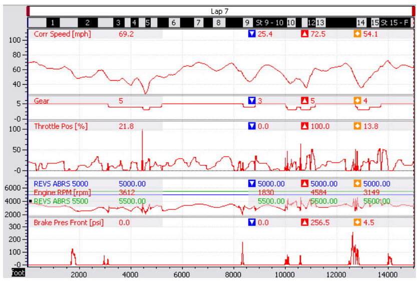
The first experience on the track was in rental cars. We all hopped in a couple cars where Allen and Troy drove us down the track showing the proper lines to take. They had added pylons on the track to indicate turn in points and turn apex points. This really helped us who were new to this track. After three circuits around Thunderhill, we returned to the pit area where we strapped ourselves into the cars for the first of a few lead follow sessions. We were all lead back out onto the course where we played follow the leader with Allen in the pace car and us all following in single file. This was done at moderate speed and really helped get accustomed to the track lines at the very low viewing position in these cars. It was also the first time getting used to the vehicles gearbox and try out heal toe shifting. During this session we were limited to 3500 RPM.

After this session we went back to the classroom for a short debrief. We then went back to the track for another lead follow session. This time we took turns being behind the lead car. Every two laps we switched position to allow every one a chance to follow directly behind Allen and see the lines he took. The RPMs were also increased and thus speed. After 10 laps of this we returned to the pit area for a short break but then were immediately back out for a third lead follow with yet higher speeds following the same format.

Open Lapping

Just before lunch we started our first open lapping session. We headed out on the course in a staggered arrangement. We were only allowed to pass in one area so the driving was very safe. Even during passes flag men on the track let us know wen there was someone behind us so we could move over and let them by. The lapping session lasted 30 minutes and was the first time we tackled the driving line on our own. After a few laps I started getting comfortable with most of the sections and my speeds slowly crept up. After being shown the checkered flag it was time for a cool down lap and a debrief session back in the classroom. Allen and Troy were camped out at a few different turns around the course and took notes of all our driving. During the debrief they gave us some pointers on ways to improve our driving line.

After lunch we then met we Stephen Dwornik who was managing the telemetry from the vehicle. These cars had a Motec telemetry system that captures vehicle parameters that were downloaded after each lapping session. Stephen was able to use the Motec software to display our driving habits and also compare them with the fastest student, Kyle Stevens . Below is a sample of the data provided.

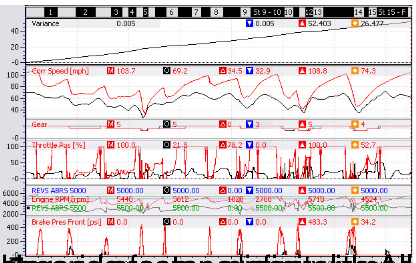


After the lunch break we headed out for two more open lapping sessions each followed by a debrief and telemetry analysis. Each session we were allowed to increase the RPMs be 500 and my times got faster each session. My best laps were as follows, session 1: 3:10, session 2: 2:31, session 3: 2:27. After the last open lapping session we were all pretty tired and we called it a wrap. We were all looking forward to the next day.

Day 2

We started the second day my walking to track. We drove to each turn and then go out of the rental cars to get a detailed review of the turn and techniques needed to tackle them. It was very interesting listening to both Allen and Troy discuss the lines they take through each corners. Each had a slightly different approach.

After the walk through we strapped ourselves back into our cars for the days first of five open lapping session. The RPMs were further increased to the maximum of 5000. Throughout the day we noticed that the pylons placed on that track started to disappear. By the last session all the pylons were gone and we had to rely on our experience to negotiate the turns. I managed my fastest lap on the second session. I managed a 2:18 lap time. I was pretty consistent, however, lapping between 2:21 and 2:18. Below is a comparison on my first lapping session to my best session. The most interesting is the throttle position . On my best lap I had the throttle pinned a lot whereas my first session you can tell I was very tentative on the throttle.



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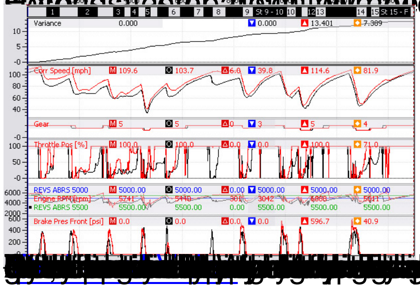

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