



Ross Bentley's High Performance Driving Tips - #15

WINNING SLALOM STRATEGIES

In this issue I would like to discuss a few aspects of competition driving - and specifically slalom competition. At the same time, many of the lessons learned here can be applied to everyday street driving. I will also mention right now that I don't claim to be the greatest slalom driver - I have only competed in a few events, although I have been quite successful in these. But, I have probably learned more from instructing, watching, listening, and THINKING about this particular form of driving than I have from really doing it. Maybe that should be the first lesson!

I began this series of articles with a discussion of how vision is important for a reason. I feel the single biggest improvement in a driver's slalom results will not be achieved by learning things like left-foot-braking, the proper apex of a corner, when and how to heel and toe downshift, trail braking, or what the trick tire pressure setting is - although these are all very important. But the proper use of your vision and your mental approach to the sport are going to result in victories.

First, a review of a few basics. LOOK AND THINK FARTHER AHEAD. The better you know the course layout, the better prepared you will be. But always keep looking ahead, planning your route through the course. If you mess up a particular gate or turn, forget it, and keep looking ahead to the rest of the course. It takes practice to feel comfortable looking farther ahead than you do now, so begin practising it on the street. You will be amazed at how much it will help - and at how far ahead the winners are looking and thinking.

LOOK WHERE YOU WANT TO GO, NOT WHERE YOU DONT WANT TO GO. Far too many drivers consider a slalom course to be a bunch of pylons that you have to drive around - which forces you to focus on those dreaded pylons. Why not think of the slalom course simply as a curved path of roadway, which just happens to have a few pylons around the outside. In other words, focus on the route through the pylons, instead of on the pylons themselves. I'll guarantee you will hit less of them, and be better prepared for the correct line through the course if you do.

Again, as you drive through the course, KEEP YOUR HEAD UPRIGHT. Too many drivers feel they have to lean their head into the corner to be successful. Wrong! Watch the

best motorcycle racers - even as they lean their bodies into the corner, their heads are cocked as upright as possible. That's because they realise their brain is used to receiving information from their eyes in the normal upright position, not tipped at an angle.

Mental preparation for any event is a key element - slaloms are no different. In fact, the mental approach to your run may just have the single biggest effect on your time. What you do to mentally prepare, unfortunately, is something that no one can teach you. It is something that you have to find out for yourself what works, and what doesn't. For some drivers sitting alone, not talking with anyone is the trick. For others, that results in more nervousness, and possibly talking with friends will take your mind off of the pressure of the run. Either way, I strongly suggest giving yourself a few minutes immediately before each run to visually run through the course in your mind - mentally driving the course, successfully. It is amazing how often an error in a driver's mental visualisation of a run actually happens. So, visualise yourself doing it right!

One very important preparation technique is walking the course before hand. Most drivers do this, although they make the mistake of making it a major social event, walking amongst a large group of friends. Without wanting to make the sport less socially enjoyable, I would suggest you will learn and remember the course a lot better if you walk it by yourself, or possibly with one other driver who will give you a few tips or suggestions. As well, remember to walk the course exactly in line with where you are going to see it from - the driver's seat. Even squat down to see elevation and asphalt changes and how the course looks from the height of your driving position.

Finally, talk to and watch the successful drivers. Analyse what they are doing and saying. Obviously, you can't believe everything they'll say, but listen. Many times they are not intentionally trying to lead you astray with wrong advice, but may not actually know what it is that makes them successful. That's why it's important to watch for yourself, and really THINK about all the aspects that come into play. Good luck, and I hope you win!

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