



Ross Bentley's High Performance Driving Tips - #8

BEHIND THE WHEEL

The first and most important element in being able to drive effectively is to be in the correct driving position. You must be comfortable, relaxed, and be able to operate all the controls easily.

The correct seating position is extremely important. You gain a tremendous amount of feedback from the car through the seat. If you aren't seated properly you won't be sensitive to the various vibrations and g-forces you require to interpret what the car is doing. As well, make sure you are comfortable - it is much less tiring and easier to concentrate if you are.

Ideally, you want a seating position that puts as much of your body in contact with the seat as possible. Preferably, you want to sit *in* the seat, not *on* it. Push the small of your back into the seat. You also want to be sitting as upright as possible to help stay alert and allow good visibility.

You should be able to fully depress the pedals and still have a slight bend in the leg. This is the least tiring and permits the use of the balls of your feet on the pedals, which are the strongest and most sensitive part of the foot. And remember, if you are not de-clutching with the left foot, it should be on the dead pedal, not hovering above the clutch pedal!

Make sure before you start driving your car that both the pedals and the bottoms of your shoes are dry and clean. Imagine what would happen if your foot slipped off the brake as you approached your favourite hairpin turn!

Most people think race drivers sit leaning back in their seats with their arms straight. This is not true. You do not have the proper leverage to turn the steering wheel in this position. The seat should be adjusted so that you can reach the top of the steering wheel and still have your arm bent slightly at the elbow. Also, check to see if you can reach the shifter comfortably.

The position of your hands on the steering wheel should be at 3 and 9 o'clock, hooking the thumbs over the spokes if the wheel allows it. By always holding the wheel in the same position you'll always know how much steering you've put in and where straight ahead is. Grip the wheel firmly but not too tightly.

With this grip you should be able to make most turns without moving your hands all over the wheel. In fact, in most cars you may not have to move your hands from this position at all. For a very sharp turn, reposition your hands slightly before the corner.

In turning the wheel, allow both hands to do the work. While one pulls, the other pushes the wheel smoothly. Make small steering corrections with the wrist, not the arms. Every movement with the wheel must be made smoothly and progressively. Never jerk the steering into a turn - it should always be a gentle, smooth arc.

An important rule to remember is, the less you turn the steering wheel, the more traction you will have and the faster you can go. The front tires have all the traction you need going forward in a straight line. Every time you turn them there is a possibility of breaking traction as the tire scrubs sideways on the roadway (which also decreases your speed). So, for safety *and* speed, keep the front wheels pointing straight ahead as much as possible. Which means turning the steering wheel into a corner as little as possible (taking as straight a line as possible through the corner) and then straightening out as soon as you can - unwinding the wheel.

And since we're discussing what to do behind the wheel, remember one other thing - the mirrors are there as a driving tool. Use them! It's just as important to know what's behind and beside you as it is to know what's in front. Take time to adjust all your mirrors properly before you drive away.

Everything you do behind the wheel should be done smoothly, gently and with finesse. As successful race drivers say, "the slower you move behind the wheel, the faster you go".

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