

PORSCHE

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# PANORAMA

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# Try it. You'll Like it.

TRACK DAYS CAN BE EXHILARATING, REWARDING, AND, MOST OF ALL, FUN.

STORY BY **FRED PACK** AND **MIA WALSH** PHOTOS BY **DAMON LOWNEY**

**BECAUSE YOU'RE READING** this in *Panorama*, you likely are a PCA member and own a Porsche. Many PCA members participate in the club's Driver Education (DE) track events, but there is a larger portion who don't. Please join the fun at a PCA Driver Education event at a track near you.

Mia Walsh, PCA National Driver Education Chair, and I have been involved in the DE program for five decades, and we tend to focus mostly on the drivers and volunteers at the events. That means we have overlooked the neglected, much

larger group—those who have never taken their Porsche to a DE day.

If you haven't brought your Porsche to a racetrack, you have been missing one of life's great joys—the fun, excitement of the day, the thrill of driving your wonderful Porsche in this environment, learning about the vehicle dynamics of your car on course, and starting to learn the craft of track driving. Porsche engineers spent years designing these very capable cars; your car was built for track use. Your car wants to be on track. Your

car needs to be on track. You need to be on track.

All types of people can enjoy track driving and have a great time. It's understandable that you're nervous when considering taking your precious Porsche (and yourself) onto the track. The DE program is designed to make you comfortable, safe, and happy.

Because it's the off-season for most of North America, now is the time to get yourself and your Porsche ready. Here are some guidelines and advice to create an excellent experience.



### **DE events are non-competitive**

You go at your own pace; no one will pass you unless you give them a signal that you are comfortable being passed at that moment. You will be on the track with novices like yourself, some with zero experience, and some with a few more days.

On-track driving is enhanced with in-classroom instruction. You will attend classroom sessions that will educate you on the basics of track driving. The mantra of every Driver Education event is: “Be Safe. Have Fun. And Learn Something New.” We make sure that each of these three areas is fulfilled—you can’t do two without the other.

### **You will not be alone**

At all times, you will have a trained instructor in the car with you to guide you throughout the event. The instructor will be equipped with a two-way communicator, giv-



ing you guidance and verbal cues, and listening to any questions you may have. Yes, you can talk to one another while the roar of the engine reverberates down the track. The

instructor also will engage with you off-track in a more relaxed setting to help build your skill set and provide feedback and explanations of the track and your driving skills.

### **When are DE events and how do you sign up?**

Each PCA region maintains its own track schedule on its website with information on how to register. You also can find many events listed on the PCA.org website on the Events page as well as in each issue of *Panorama* (see page 116). In all regions, you must register in advance to participate; note that some regions have a prerequisite for participating in a DE event, like a one-day driving clinic or experience in autocrosses or other motorsport education events. Each event has a registration closing day. Events often sell out, so don’t wait too long to register.

Most PCA regions use either MotorsportReg (<https://www.motorsportreg.com/>) or ClubRegistration.Net (<https://clubregistration.net/>) for their registration platforms. You will need to create an account, including your car information, to register. You also can search these sites for available PCA DE events across North America. Once you have attended PCA track events, when you register for out-of-region events, your track experience will be available for officials to review so they can assign you to an appropriate run group.

### **Your car**

Your Porsche is ready to hit the track if it has been properly maintained. Convertibles have additional rules, which are outlined below.

PCA requires that all DE entrants get their cars “teched” within 30 days of the event. This is a minimal-cost technical inspection provided by local Porsche dealers, or you can have it done by your region’s approved independent mechanics. Some regions even hold a free inspection day at a local shop and make a social event out of it.

PCA National hosted a Tech Tactics Live called “Driving Your Porsche on a Racetrack with PCA.” It’s available on YouTube and is full of great information.



Bring a blank printed copy of your region’s Tech Form (available on the region’s website or in its confirmation email) to the inspection and be sure to have the shop fill it out and put its stamp on it. If you haven’t had your car recently serviced, items that may require attention include a brake-fluid flush (required at least annually), replacement of brake pads, and possibly an oil change. The shop also will check the wheel bearings and tire tread depth, identify rotor cracks, and inspect various other items detailed specifically for each region.

Your Porsche does not need any special parts or alignment or anything else to give you a wonderful track experience. If it’s in good shape, it is ready to go.

The exception to your Porsche being track-ready relates to convertibles: Cabrios of 993 or earlier vintage must have a rollbar installed. The 996 and later models have acceptable rollbars, but tall drivers must apply the “broomstick” test to see if their heads stick out above the height of the rollbar. All cabrio drivers must check the rules of the track they are planning to drive on—some tracks don’t allow convertibles.

### **All are welcome**

About 10% of our PCA DE drivers are women. The fun and thrill of track driving is equally appropriate for everyone, and you will come across female track enthusiasts and instructors wherever you choose to drive. Some regions also host female-only DE events and clinics. Simply put, if you are female and love your Porsche, attend a DE event. We predict that you will get hooked immediately.

### **Insurance**

DE events are very safe and take place in a controlled environment, but sometimes stuff does happen. Your regular auto insurance typically will not cover damage incurred at a racetrack, even at a non-competition event like a DE. Fortunately, special DE insurance is available. Do a web search on “HPDE track insurance” (HPDE stands for High Performance Driver Education) to see a number of providers, some of which provide coverage for one-day events, weekends, multiple events, or an entire driving season. Shop around to see what works best for your car and your driving commit-



ment. PCA is sponsored by Lockton Motorsports and Hagerty, and has information on the PCA website regarding their insurance programs.

### What to bring

You will need a helmet. Your region may have loaners, so if you don't want to buy one yet, contact the DE/Track Chair, who can be found on the Region's website, before the event for details. Race sup-

pliers, like OG Racing, also rent new helmets and will ship them directly to your home and provide a return address label.

Helmets must be "Snell approved," meaning that the sticker inside the helmet says "Snell" and either "SA" or "M," and 2015 or 2020. (Note: some regions may require the "SA"-type helmet.) 2010 helmets are no longer permitted. We recommend the full-face type helmet, but

this is not always required. Prices start at about \$250, and be sure to look online or in shops for sales on new helmets that are one or two years old.

Other than the helmet, you don't need anything special. You'll have to wear long pants and a long-sleeve shirt; all-natural fibers are recommended. Sometimes if it is hot, short sleeves are permitted, depending on the region. But always have a long-



sleeved shirt available. Sunglasses, a folding chair, and a tarp or a plastic tub for your belongings are suggested as well.

Track events start early each day—usually 7 a.m.—so it may be quite cold. Depending upon the season, it may get very hot or very cold, or even both. Be prepared for rain with suitable hats, coats, etc. Bring a towel, too, just in case.

Most tracks have food stands. Others do not, but there should be lunch places in town nearby. Bring water. Nothing is more important than staying hydrated, even if it isn't hot. Your adrenaline will be through the roof, and you will need to replenish those fluids.

### How the day unfolds

A few days before the event, you'll get a confirmation email from your region telling you important event-specific information and what time the track gate opens. It's a good idea to be there when the gates open because there's quite a lot to do before the event, and you'll want to be ready to go when it's your session on track or in the classroom. At the gate you'll have to sign the track's liability waiver.

After you have made your way to the paddock area, you must go to Registration, where you'll sign your region's liability waiver (yes, you must sign both of them) and be assigned to a "run group." Run groups are assigned based on your amount of track experience, and you'll be given a colored wristband corresponding to your group. As a beginner, you'll be in the novice group. You may be given a work assignment as well.

Next, go back to your car and empty out EVERYTHING from the cabin and trunk—you don't want anything flying around while you're on the track. Be sure your driver-side floor mats are out as well—you don't want anything getting stuck in the pedals on track. Take your car, helmet, and pre-event inspection tech form to the Tech Line,

# Understanding the flags

**ONE OF the topics at the drivers meeting is a review of the flags. When you are out on track, the only way the track officials and corner workers who are observing the track from stations located around the course can communicate with you is by use of these colored flags. It is vital that you understand the meanings of the flags, and that when you are on track you look for any flags being displayed at the corner worker stations, which your instructor should point out to you during the first few sessions.**

The drivers meeting is conducted at a fast pace, so our explanation about the flags and the images should help you understand them in advance of the event. (Please keep in mind the meanings of the flags may be somewhat different from one track to another.)



### Green

The track is clear; you can move at speed. At some events, the absence of any flag being displayed means the same thing. This will be explained at the drivers meeting.



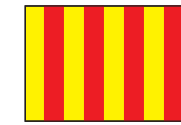
### Yellow

No passing is permitted. Be cautious. If the yellow is displayed stationary (motionless), there is a car or other impediment off the track. If it is being waved, the impediment is on track. In either case, check your mirrors, slow down, and pay extra attention. You may resume passing and your regular pace when you have passed a flag station not displaying the yellow flag.



### Blue

This is the passing warning flag, meaning a faster car is approaching you. Let it pass at your next convenient moment. This flag may or may not have a yellow diagonal stripe on it. Read the **PASSING** section on the next page.



### Yellow and red

This is the debris flag, signifying that there is an object (or liquid, such as oil) on the track—you should slow down and avoid the object. It is typically withdrawn after a lap or two even if the object is still on the track—the presumption is that you know about the issue by that time.



### Black

Check your mirrors, slow your pace, and pull into the pits as soon as you get to the pit entry. If it is displayed at one flag station only and is pointed at your car (and no other), either you or your car has a problem. The black flag may have an orange circle (the "meatball") inside the black area, which means there is a mechanical issue. When you get to the pits, an official will explain the reason you have been called off the track. If all the flag stations are displaying the black flag, all cars are required to pull into the pits as soon as they get to the pit entry. This "Black Flag All" is usually displayed when a car has gone off-track, and the officials need a quiet track in order to send out a tow truck to bring it in.



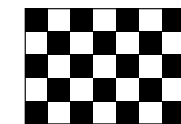
### White

There is a slower-moving vehicle such as a tow truck on the track. Be aware, check your mirrors, and cautiously pass it.



### Red

This flag is used only on very rare occasions, such as when the track is blocked by a stopped car. Check your mirrors and pull over to the side of the track and come to a safe, controlled stop in view of a flag station as soon as you see this flag. Do NOT do a panic stop—you might get hit from behind by another car! The red flag means there is an incident on course that requires emergency vehicles.



### Checkered

The track session is finished. Pass the checkered flag line, slowly decrease your speed by 20% to finish this lap (with minimal brake application to let them cool down) and pull into the pits.



## Understanding how to pass

THE MAIN reason DE events are safe is that there are strict passing rules that help prevent car-to-car contact. The Prime Directive is that a slower car must let an approaching car pass it—you must not hold up faster traffic. A key point about track driving is that you **MUST** check your mirrors often. It is essential that you know if a faster car is approaching so you can let it pass.

### Here are the rules:

- ▶ No passing is permitted unless the car being passed gives a passing signal.
- ▶ No passing is ever permitted in corners, except for instructors/drivers in advanced-solo run groups and only if this “extended passing” has been put into effect at the drivers meeting.
- ▶ Drivers are sometimes nervous about “where is that car that was just behind me? Maybe he’s going to bang into me during the turn.” This is not going to happen during a DE event, as a “passing contract” must be made before a driver overtakes another driver.
- ▶ All drivers are obligated to look in their rearview mirrors often, and to give a passing signal to cars that have caught up with them. If a corner is approaching soon, it is OK to delay giving the passing signal until just after the corner. As a courtesy, the car being passed should make it easy for the passing car by releasing the throttle momentarily and not crowding it as the next corner approaches. This courtesy rule is very important.
- ▶ The driver of the car being passed gives the passing signal by extending their left arm fully out the window and pointing with the second finger to the left, meaning “pass me on the left,” or bending the left arm and pointing over the roof to the right, meaning “pass me on the right.” Never rest the arm on the roof; rather, it should be a few inches above the roof so that the passing driver sees it clearly. A passing signal must be given for EACH CAR behind which will be given a pass—don’t just keep your arm out the window. Do the arm movement for each car that needs to get by you. Sometimes there may be cars at an event with window nets (used by race cars) that prevent the driver from extending a hand out the window. Such cars use their blinkers to provide the passing signal: left blinker means “pass me on the left;” right blinker means “pass me on the right.”
- ▶ The car being passed stays on the racing line. Accordingly, the passing car goes off-line. Restating this, the car being passed stays on the racing line and does not move to the right or the left. Do not do that; it is very dangerous. You might collide with the passing car, who quite appropriately expected you to stay on the racing line.
- ▶ The driver of the passing car is not obligated to accept a pass invitation. A very visible “wave-off” signal can be given by waving a hand inside the car to let the driver giving the pass signal know that you aren’t going to accept it at that time.
- ▶ At any given event there may be minor deviations from the above—they will be explained at the drivers meeting, so pay attention.



whose location will be announced on the PA, where your car will get a quick safety check. Some regions require you to go through the Tech Line BEFORE you go to registration, so be sure to pay attention to the details in the long emails you will be receiving from the region. Since COVID-19, many regions hold pre-event Zoom/Microsoft Teams calls to review the protocols, which may soon make the long emails a thing of the past.

If you’ve been told the name of your instructor, try to find him/her and introduce yourself. If not, your instructor will find you after the mandatory drivers meeting. Many regions are now providing the instructor/student pairings to the instructors in advance, so you may get an email or phone call from your instructor before you arrive on track.

### Drivers meeting

Every day of every DE event starts with a drivers meeting. It is conducted by the PCA Region’s Chief Instructor and Track Chair. Topics include track-specific information, the flags in use at the event, reminders of standard track rules

and etiquette, and more. Attendance is mandatory, so be on time.

### Sessions

You likely will be on track four or five times each day in the Green run group, and each run group session lasts between 20 and 30 minutes. As a novice, you will attend one or more mandatory classroom periods when you are not on track, during which a high-performance driving instructor will explain the basics of track driving. These sessions are very informative and worthwhile. Even experienced drivers and instructors sometimes drop in on them to pick up useful tidbits.

### The most important thing

The most important thing is to relax and let yourself have fun. There is a lot going on at a track day and the track experience is very intense, so it’s easy to get stressed. We’ve been doing track events for decades, but we can well remember sleeping poorly the night before an event and being nervous when we got there. The “data input rate” is very high on track, but you should consciously try

to focus on being relaxed so that you can soak it all in and enjoy your day. Your instructor and the class sessions you attend will give you what you need to know out on the track so you can have a safe and fun time.

Like all PCA events, the Driver Education events are fueled by volunteers. It takes a myriad of positions in the DE world to run an event. From the online registrar, to the at-track registration, to the Tech Inspection team, the Driver Education chairs, Chief Instructors, the grid team and the instructors in the car beside you—each person with whom you interact is a volunteer who wants to make this day special for you and make you feel comfortable. Feel free to ask questions to anyone along the way—no question is ever too silly to ask. We are eager to help you make one of the best decisions of your life, as we have all been in the same position you will be in soon—your first day on the racetrack in your Porsche.

We know you will have a great time at your first DE—you can thank us later for encouraging you to take the first step! 🌀

## About the Authors

### Fred Pack, Metro NY Region Co-Chief Instructor

FRED BECAME interested in racing in the mid-1960s. He went to boarding school three miles from Lime Rock and spent as much time as possible there. Along the way he met John Fitch, a famed international racer who lived on the Lime Rock property. Fitch was a Porsche factory driver, and before long, Fred talked



his way into an invite to the Porsche pits for the 1965 Sebring race.

Fred bought his first Porsche, a 944, in 1984 and immediately joined PCA. He has owned a total of 10 Porsches and has been attending DE events ever since that 944. He became a DE instructor in 1995 and a nationally-trained PCA instructor in 2007.

Over the years Fred has driven the Nürburgring, met Colin Chapman, Jimmy Clark, and Graham Hill

there, has driven the Zandvoort, Spa, and Monza tracks and attended F1 races in Canada, the United States, England, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as walking the Monaco track. One particular thrill was spending a great deal of time with five-time Le Mans winner Derek Bell and writing an article about his career for *Panorama*.

### Mia Walsh, DE Committee Chair

MIA WALSH is PCA’s Driver Education Committee Chair, in charge of the club’s DE activities in the United States and Canada. Having begun PCA DE programs in 2008, she progressed through PCA Potomac’s five run groups, reaching the top group (Red) in 2013, the same year she became a PCA nationally trained instructor. In 2015, she began racing in PCA Club Racing and scored a few podiums.

After teaching herself off-roading, Mia was introduced to circuit driving through her husband, Brian, in 2007. She enjoyed the in-class and on-track instruction, learning about car control, and



navigating the fastest and safest way around a racetrack.

Mia wants to see more women participate in track events.

“The skills you learn on the track are 100% useful for daily street driving, making you a more focused, safe, and adaptive driver,” she said. Also, the community at a track event is full of knowledgeable people eager to offer advice and help. This all combines to create a welcoming, family atmosphere.