



Chapterfest HPDE

By Marc Caden

Photos by Marc Caden and Ty Joseph

Ever wonder what it would be like to drive your car on the track?



Our chapter kicked off the season with its first HPDE event and it was timed to coincide with Chapterfest at Summit Point's Main Circuit on May 10-12. If you don't already know what the acronym "HPDE" stands for, it means High Performance Driver Education. The "High Performance" part means that you drive on a closed circuit or race track in your own car where there are no posted speed limits, constables, speed cameras, pedestrians, or stop lights. However, you are not racing other cars and participants are divided up into four run groups based on experience ranging from novice to advanced. While passing is allowed, a pass is only permitted upon first receiving a "point-by" hand gesture that is provided on your terms and in a controlled manner.

The "Driver Education" part of these events is perhaps the most important aspect. HPDE events will help teach you about your car and its potential in a safe and controlled environment. You will learn some of the technical aspects of driving, such as threshold braking, proper throttle

application, driving the fastest line, and improving car control skills. There are classroom sessions where skilled instructors will reinforce the concepts you are learning on the track. I can say without hesitation that every participant leaves an HPDE a better driver than when they arrived. Should you ever be presented with a real-world road predicament, you may find yourself better equipped to manage or completely avoid it. The skills you learn could literally save your life one day should a deer decide to jump out in front of your car! Because you are driving on a closed course with a skilled instructor by your side, you may also find that you feel safer driving on the track than you would during a hectic, rush hour Beltway commute.

Summit Point's Main Circuit has long been a popular destination for our Chapter's HPDE events. Located in West Virginia just 90 minutes away from the DC area, it is the oldest and most

historic of the three circuits located on site. It opened in 1969 and has played host to many professional SCCA and IMSA races over the years.



(Above) Matt Curry's Craftsman Auto Care was the named sponsor for Chapterfest and HPDE events. Besides homemade soft taco lunch, tech support, and door prizes, Matt served as a driving instructor. From left are Asha Saeed, Matt Curry, and Judy Curry.



Even some celebrities have raced on Summit Point Main like Paul Newman (for Datsun) and Tom Cruise (for Nissan). It is a very challenging track that combines the thrill of a long straight with 10 turns that range from high-speed sweepers to slower more technical turns. The chapter's first event of the season at Summit Point's Main Circuit was a huge success with 85 participants and 50 instructors in attendance.

Our HPDE program's instructors are probably the best and most qualified of any chapter. This is because NCC has some of the strictest instructor requirements of any HPDE organization. To become an instructor, you must first pass a lengthy training program that includes skills in communication and driving ability on both the track and the skid pad. Participants are assigned an instructor to accompany them for all of the on-track sessions. Your instructor is present to help you to achieve your goals and improve your driving skills.

If you are thinking to yourself that because you don't own an M-powered BMW or another high-horsepower car that you probably shouldn't attend an HPDE, you can dispel that notion. Many instructors believe that when starting out you can learn much more from driving a stock,

(Above) This E36 M3 nearly lifts its inside front wheel while negotiating turn 5. (Below) Craftsman Auto Care provided technical support to drivers in the paddock, like helping this Z3 Coupe driver check his brakes before going back on the track.





base model BMW on the track than its "M" powered counterpart. A base model BMW will help you learn the finesse and smoothness necessary on the track while also allowing you to extract more overall performance out of the car. And, let's not forget that every BMW is itself a performance-oriented

vehicle, engineered to be able to cruise the autobahn at speeds of 100 mph. In fact, a recent *Road & Track* article rated the base BMW E36 (1992-99) and E46 (1999-2006) 3 Series models as among the best for a first-time track participant. Why? Because these cars are affordable, fast enough, and

(Above) Turn 5 provided a good place to view several cars on track. (Left) No car goes on track before Tommy Ivec from Tier Car Care gives it a thorough on-grid tech inspection. (Below Left) Charity hot laps with Mike Renner in the new M5 Competition Package were a hot item.

handle very well straight out of the box. I attended my first HPDE in a 30-year-old 1987 BMW 325is, and found it to be the ultimate learning machine. While it may not have been the fastest car in a straight line, in the corners it out-handled just about everyone else in my run group.

You also don't need to make any special modifications to your current BMW to attend an HPDE event. You just need fresh brake fluid, which you should be doing anyway, and a tech inspection completed in advance (note: a downloadable version of the tech inspection form is available on the HPDE page at <http://www.nccbmw-cca.org>). Craftsman Autocare (five locations in Virginia) and Tommy Ivec's Tier Car Care (in Maryland), will perform the HPDE tech inspection at no charge.

Every HPDE event includes a daily session of driving on the skid pad. The skid pad is a huge circular piece of pavement essentially in the shape of a giant doughnut. Once the skid pad is soaked by a sprinkler system, it becomes very

slick and provides much less grip. Your skid pad instructor will guide you through a series of exercises designed to show you how to induce, manage, and correct oversteer (when the rear tires lose grip) and understeer (when the front tires lose grip). Again, the benefit of a HPDE is developing these skills in a safe and controlled environment so that should you ever encounter these situations in the real world or on track, you know just how to react and correct them. I have heard people comment that they learned more about car control in a single session on the skid pad than they had previously in a whole lifetime of driving experience.

At every HPDE there are also on-track exercises designed to help you improve and practice specific skills. For example, at our Chapterfest event drivers played the leapfrog game – where two cars paired off and practiced how to properly give and receive passes back and forth for an entire on track session. Another exercise encouraged participants to drive "off-line" or off the track's normal fastest line,



(Above) A 1980's E30 leads a group of BMWs down the pit lane to get ready for their next track session. Many instructors believe a novice student can learn more in a low-powered or momentum car. (Below) Chapter President Paul Seto spoke at the barbecue dinner thanking Mike Renner, the volunteers and our sponsors for their continuous support while he gave out nice awards and raffle prizes.

which helps drivers explore places of the track they might not otherwise experience during a normal session. The off-line exercise is very helpful because you can easily find yourself on unfamiliar parts of the track when either passing another car or when driving in the rain.

Sponsors help make these events possible and deserve special thanks for their support! Craftsman Autocare was the named sponsor for both our Chapterfest and HPDE

events. Matt and Judy Curry have been long-time NCC and HPDE supporters. They showed up in full force with a huge trailer, tent, door prizes, snacks, and even a tasty lunch of homemade soft tacos. They also brought two technicians to help participants with mechanical support and repairs. Craftsman Autocare just opened their fifth Virginia store in Merrifield and they provide a discount on service to all club members.

Radial Tire and Michelin are devoted sponsors of our HPDE. Radial Tire's owner Paul Moorcones is a veteran racer, knows his tires, and may be the longest running sponsor of our club (they have been in business since 1976). They are conveniently located in Silver Spring and offer prices that are lower than Tire Rack. Radial Tire offers some of the best and most unique tire services in the area such as free tire rotations, free tire plugs, spin balancing for vin-

tage cars, and tire shaving for racers.

BMW of Fairfax is another long time NCC supporter. They are known for both for both their great service in sales and service. GM Mike Walker does a great job with customer satisfaction. James Duerbeck is a knowledgeable sales professional who is also a track guy that drives a M4. Rick Eccard is an excellent service tech, who fixes mechanical problems that frequently stump others.

Tier Car Care is owned by





(Above) Road & Track recently listed the E36 3 Series base model as one of the best for a first time track participant because it is quick, affordable, and handles well. Plenty of E36s were in attendance, including these two chasing each other in the carousel.

Tommy Ivic, NCC's Instructor Representative. Tommy was in charge of on-track inspections and caught several mechanical issues that could have been problems on track. Tier is a favorite repair shop for many performance drivers, many who live in Virginia but still travel to Maryland for Tommy's expertise.

Spec R53 provides parts for

Mini's and is owned by George Hovis. George is a superb driving instructor, and he knows how to make a Mini run fast and reliably. He is currently NCC's Director of Training.

At the end of the day on Saturday there was a nice barbeque dinner provided by the sponsors and served by Jordan Springs BBQ.

It was a really nice way to unwind with friends after a fun day on the track. Over 200 people were served and it also included many folks who had attended some of the other Chapterfest events.

Special thanks go out to Dennis Pippy, NCC's Chief Instructor, who organized instruction for this event. Dennis coordi-

nated the instructors, students, schedule, and volunteers and he made sure the whole weekend ran smoothly and without incident. We hope to see you at one of the upcoming HPDE events scheduled for later this summer.

HPDE schedule for 2019

*June 28-30 NCC HPDE Summit Point Jefferson Circuit

*September 6-8 NCC HPDE Summit Point Shenandoah Circuit

Thank You to Our Sponsors!

