

From Joan Thomas
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While searching for Corvette events happening during our visit to the Vancouver, British Columbia area in Canada I came across the Web Site of the [British Columbia Corvette Club](#) and learned of their upcoming Autocross Events. Let's hear it for Web Sites!! So on June 20, 2004, my husband Jim and I had the pleasure of competing in their Events held at the Guildford Mall parking lot in Surrey, British Columbia. We had a wonderful time and it was a great course and a great experience. Jim was born in Vancouver, BC just down the road so this was like a homecoming for him. What a way to celebrate. We met some marvelous Corvette enthusiasts and Autocross lovers who made our visit a lasting memory.

In the Newsletters posted on their Web Site I also came across a five part guide to Auto-X written by Vic Nightscales. It is a delightful look at the sport and I think you may enjoy it as much as I did. We met Vic at Surrey and he gave me permission to post his article on our NCCC Web Site. We even made their Newsletter! Ray Miller, Editor of the Newsletter, also gave me permission to post his *From the Driver's Seat* article below.

The Newsletter of the British Columbia Corvette Club



From the Driver's Seat

article and photo by Ray Miller, Editor



The 14 Corvette owners who attended the kick-off game for the BC Lions season and participated in the half-time show thank Roy Drewitt for coordinat-

ing the event with the BC Lions Football Club.

We drove a number of dignitaries onto the field at half time, where new Wall of Fame inductees were being recognized. Drivers and their guests received tickets to the game, a ball cap, a buffet dinner, tickets to a future Lions game, and tickets to the Specialty Car Show in October. What a deal!

When I stopped by Guildford to watch Nigel Wheway and his team put on a first class Auto-x in June I met an interesting couple from Rockford, Illinois.

Jim and Joan Thomas, who belong to the Northern Illinois Corvette Club, have been travelling across the U.S. and Canada. They checked out our website for



news of local events and decided to take in the Auto-x.

The owner of the now demolished Hillcrest Drive-In hopes to have the new Starlight Drive-In Theatre in Aldergrove ready to open by the end of August.

Have a great summer. ■

Try Auto-X; your `Vette will love you for it.

by Vic Nightscales

About a year ago, when I first tried auto-x (called slalom racing in the US) I discovered a cheap, fun, and thrilling experience. Not unlike sex, this sport is best shared – so here is part one of a five-part guide to auto-x to spark your interest.

Part 1: Why You Should Try Auto-X

You have a Corvette and it was built to perform, but how do you get to know its limits – and yours – in a safe and fun environment?

Try auto-x!

An auto-x course is laid out over a large paved area,

with soft plastic cones to guide you in the right direction. Speeds are kept low because of the numerous sharp turns, so drivers are limited to using only first or possibly second gear. With little need for shifting, automatic and manual transmissions are on equal footing in this sport.

Nowhere else save a race track can you legally explore the limits of car and driver. In auto-x, unlike on a race track, it's one car at a time, so no one is going to hit you, and you won't reach speeds that can carry you off the track into solid objects. Thus you can safely experience the

thrill and challenge of launching your car from a standing start and negotiating through the cones as fast as your abilities and your car allow.

Auto-x requires you to focus on the course, eliminating the cares of this world for at least a moment. Your heart rate increases, giving you an aerobic workout while sitting down. Best of all, you can take a series of identical runs to improve your performance.

The intent is to improve your own times, not to beat the next person – and the satisfaction of meeting a personal challenge will make your day. Those of us who

are driven to win can compare our times with the other cars in equivalent classes. [See the BCCC Member Handbook for full auto-x rules and classes.]

Then there is the social side. Not only do you get to mingle with other Corvette nuts, you get to help pick up cones and support the volunteer organizers so that we can have more auto-x events, and even more fun.

Remember, your Corvette was designed for this. It is your duty to treat your car to auto-x so that it can enjoy its heritage. That would make Zora proud! ■

Making the most of Auto-X

by Vic Nightscales

Here is the second installment of a five part guide to Auto-X by Vic Nightscales. See the Nov/Dec '03 issue for Part I.

Part II: Preparing the Car and Yourself for Auto-X.

The wonderful thing about auto-x is that you can drive to the course and home again in your auto-x vehicle.

All you have to do is remove all moveable objects from your car before running the course. You will be turning rapidly back and forth, accelerating quickly and braking hard, so anything loose can become airborne and pose a hazard. Even the floor mats should be removed, as you will be tap dancing on the pedals, and we don't want you to trip.

Bring a helmet if you have one, but there are hel-

metts that you can borrow, so you don't have to worry about that expense until you decide you want your own personal hardhat.

If purchasing a helmet, ensure that it has a SNELL rating of SA2000 or SM2000. That is the safety rating that gives you confidence that the helmet meets the latest specifications. Do not purchase an old helmet! If a helmet has ever been dropped, small hairline cracks can develop that render it useless. Throw away any helmet that is more than 10 years old – your head is worth the best.

Wear a comfortable pair of running or driving shoes. You do not want to wear sandals, or have big floppy laces that can get caught on the pedals when your brain goes into thrill overload.

Here is a simple checklist to conduct on your car before arriving at the slalom:

- Check the pressure in your tires to ensure they meet the specifications for your car.
- Check the oil and other fluid levels and ensure they are to specification.
- Ensure that you have at least a quarter tank of gas upon arrival.
- Ensure that you have followed the maintenance guidelines in your car's manual, and replace any belts or hoses that are worn or rotting.
- Check that your brake pads have at least 1/3 life left in them.

For your own creature comfort, bring a folding chair and umbrella. Rain or shine, they'll add to your comfort level.

Also bring some bottled water to keep your fluids up. Remember that your body is a simple electric cell. Nerve impulses do not process as efficiently when your body

is low on fluids, which means that messages take a little longer to travel from your brain to your hand or foot. Whoops! There goes another cone!

Physical fitness is also an advantage, as you need to walk the course several times in order to commit the path to memory. The more times you can walk it before the race, the clearer and quicker will be your decisions in the car.

If you have active handling or adjustable suspension, ensure it is set to performance mode before driving the auto-x, as firm suspension and the ability to spin your tires is good for the process.

Finally, take a couple of deep breaths to relax at the start line. The auto-x experience will make you smile!

Watch for Part III: *Walking the Auto-X Course.* ■

Making the most of Auto-X

by Vic Nightscales

Here is the third installment of a five part guide to Auto-X by Vic Nightscales. See the Jan/Feb. '04 issue for Part II.

Part III: Walking the Auto-X Course.

Walking the Auto-X Course is key to becoming fast in auto-x.

That's because walking the course allows you to memorize the route and visualize the fastest line through the course.

You will be driving the course in approximately a minute, and if you must focus on deciding which way to turn after the next cone, you will be slower than if you already have that sorted out in your mind through your walking efforts.

John Ames, who has eight SCCA Solo II National Championships in four different classes, says, "My goal from walking is to

memorize the course and create a plan for the car's path, so I can close my eyes and mentally drive it. During the course walk I am learning the sequence of turns ... I look ahead and visualize where I will drive the car and which cones are key for being close to." (As quoted in "Solo Speed" by Rocky Entriken, *SportsCar* Aug.03). [Note: Solo is another name for auto-x and John Ames currently drives a Corvette.]

Walk the course in the path where you think the driver's seat will be when in the car. Keep in mind that whenever the steering wheel is turned the car loses speed, and the further it is turned the more speed is lost. The trick is to pick the path that minimizes the number of times and the degrees you must turn the steering wheel to complete the course. (Read those last two sentences again, they

are the key to speed.)

Plan out the path in terms of the gear you will be in, the points of acceleration and the places for braking. In the case of speed vs. distance, choose the path of less distance.

The first time walking the course you are finding the general direction, so minor distractions and conversation are not of great concern. Be sure to cover any gossip about other club members at this point so that on your next walk through you can fully concentrate on the course.

During your next walks through you need to concentrate on the details of car placement and possible shifting or braking points. Sometimes it helps to walk through with another member and talk over your plan of running the course. This can help both of you.

Sometimes it helps to

break the course up into a handful of sections rather than trying to remember every gate, wall, or cone. Sometimes it helps to stop numerous times during the walk to conduct a mental review of the course to that point in order to brand that section into your memory.

If you have done your homework well, you should be able to sit down, away from the course, and draw a fairly detailed map of the course.

Finally, sit in your car, close your eyes, and mentally travel the course to confirm your memorization process. This is the Zen of Corvette auto-x. But try to avoid nodding off and snoring.

Now get out there and have some fun!

Watch for Part IV:

Improve your Auto-X times with Vision. ■



Starter Tim Pepper checking over Jim's Run Card before Jim takes the Course

Making the most of Auto-X

by Vic Nightscales

Here is the fourth installment of a five part guide to Auto-X by Vic Nightscales.

See the Mar / Apr '04 issue for Part III.

Part IV: Improve your auto-x times with vision.

“We all know that you want to be looking where you want the car to go. But there is more to it than that. You need to look ahead – far ahead.” (Carroll Smith, *Driven to Win*, 1996).

As a result of walking the track, you should be able to visualize the slalom course. You should understand your opportunities to accelerate or brake between gates. Your visual focus should be on the fastest line or path through the cones, but not on the cones.

There is a theory called “Potholism”, if you look at

a pothole in the road, your car will hit it. Subconsciously, your vision tells you to aim at where your eyes are looking; your hands will actually move the steering wheel without your conscious knowledge.

The golf example is that if you look at the water hazard when teeing off, the ball will go in the water (no matter that your conscious mind is saying “don’t hit the water”). In slalom, if you look directly at the cone, you will hit it. You need to focus your vision on the path through the cones (look ahead), and the line of travel that permits the fastest completion of the course. Your peripheral vision can tell you to adjust the placement of the car as it relates to the cones.

Ross Bentley (professional driver and coach to up and coming new drivers) in the June, 2003, *SportsCar* magazine, carries

the concept of visualization further. He talks of MI or mental imagery, which uses more of your senses – visual, kinesthetic (feel, balance and motion) and auditory (hearing), and he believes it is more effective because of this. He further adds the important term of AWARENESS, in order to focus you on how close your actual performance is to the Mental Image.

“This technique especially applies to Solo,” says Bentley. “Say you’ve completed your first run of a Solo event. You know you are giving up time in the far hairpin. If you could carry a bit more speed into the corner, get the car to rotate using heavy trail braking, and then stand on the throttle once the car is pointed out of the turn, you know you would find at least another three-tenths of a second.

“Start again with getting a clear mental image of the

procedure – brake late, trail off the brakes as you turn crisply into the corner, pause for a fraction of a second while the car rotates around its nose, and then control the car’s rotation by squeezing hard on the throttle. Then, as you line up to begin your next runs, focus entirely on simply being aware of how close to this mental image you perform this turn.

“My bet is with this approach you will find your three-tenths, and maybe more.”

Now remember that Rome was not built in a day. Slalom drivers, like race-car drivers, get better with more seat time. Just try to work on the theory a little during each event and your improvements will increase your smiles. ■

Watch for Part V: *Cornering theory for Auto-X.*



Joan maneuvers through the sea of cones spread over a large Course

Making the most of Auto-X

by Vic Nightscales



Karen Knibb takes a corner

This is the final installment in our five-part guide to Auto-X.

Part V: Cornering Theory for Auto-X.

There are many excellent books on cornering and tire-traction theory, one of the best being the late Carroll Smith's "Drive to Win", published in 1996.

In the foreword, Danny Ongais says it all, "I knew how to race. Carroll Smith taught me how to drive race cars."

It's going to be a chal-

lenge without a drawing board, but I will try to summarize what I believe are the basics for auto-x. Use all the pavement allowed by the cones. Don't take the exact line of the cones, but

try to smooth out the path if it provides a shorter line through the course. Your car's track is less than 6 feet wide and a typical lane might be 10 feet wide, so use the extra room to improve your car's path through the course.

Where a gate allows you to accelerate, focus on trying to accelerate at the earliest possible point. Don't jump on the gas, but press the gas pedal progressively as you unwind the steering wheel. Jumping hard on the gas while the wheel is turned can cause your car to spin, so smoothness is worthwhile

— even though spins really impress the spectators.

Where you need to brake into a gate, get the bulk of the braking done while traveling in a straight line before gradually releasing the brake pedal while winding the steering wheel into the gate. By maintaining some braking pressure, you maintain more load on the front wheels, and this helps the car turn. If you release the brakes suddenly, the front end of the car bounces up, unloads the front wheels, and you lose grip into the turn. Thus smoothness in releasing the braking pressure helps your car go faster into the turn.

Driving at the limit requires you to smooth out the transitions from braking to cornering to acceleration. Think of the brake pedal and gas pedal as being tied to the steering wheel. Maximum braking and acceleration can be done when the wheels are

in a straight line. As braking pressure is gradually released the steering wheel can be gradually turned. As the steering wheel is gradually unwound, the gas pedal can be gradually pressed, until you have full acceleration with the steering wheel completely unwound.

Whenever you are not on the track, observe your fellow competitors' lines and techniques and compare them with your own. Where are they gaining time on you? What changes in your line or technique can you try?

If you understand the basic dynamics of the car, you will be able to analyze these factors better.

Practice makes perfect. Seat time at auto-x will allow you to improve your technique at the wheel. Have fun with a personal contest to improve your times at auto-x. ■



We posed for a group picture with our new friends