

Instructor Development – Audi / BMW / PCA Northwest chapters

...none of <the> communications included a notion of the 'process' - "being a candidate means we want you to attend the Clinic where we'll put you through real world coaching situations (which by the way should maybe come later in the process) and help you develop your 'coaching vocabulary', during the next several events we'll expect you to shadow other instructors in car and quickly begin working as a right seat in our car control clinics and those of the other local clubs who always benefit from having additional bodies. The instructor group will then begin evaluating how soon you might be ready to take students on track. Achieving this goal can take anywhere from 1 to 3 years depending on your level of commitment and how quickly you progress..." etc... I think the Instructor path would benefit from the same matrix the drivers have - some sense of what is being asked and what the standards are.

The above was some feedback we got on our Instructor Development process. I think it's a pretty accurate take (for 2019), and I've been pondering what to do/write about it.

Setting Expectations

The Northwest instructor 'tribe' often says "Don't expect to be promoted in your first Instructor Clinic." This is admittedly demoralizing. In general, if you're already a practicing instructor from another region and just moved into our area, you are highly likely to be accepted as one of our instructors when you attend our clinic. If you don't have prior experience instructing, the role-playing that we do at the Clinic is how you develop those skills. I believe there are probably other clubs / chapters where simply being fast and personable is enough to turn you loose with a Novice as an 'Instructor'. We have higher standards.

We find that the vast majority of our instructor candidates need help developing a few key skills:

1. Finding the consistent 'words' that work well for you to teach others, from Novice to Intermediate, how to drive at speed, safely
2. Consistently teach 'ahead' of the car, and avoid discussing that which is behind you
3. Adjusting the vocal pace & approach to different levels of student and differing student needs
4. Confidence. Command presence. With the appropriate people skills.
5. Be willing to establish a relationship with their student for the day.

Teaching at a Driver Skills / Car Control Clinic is another great way to work on those skills. In Audi Club, we tend to use the Instructor Clinic as the 'gateway' to saying you are now qualified to teach at Driver Skills. The other clubs have slightly different processes, e.g. PCA may tap a frequent DS Volunteer on the shoulder and invite him/her to shadow an instructor until everyone feels they can Instruct DS solo.

Who Gets Invited to Instructor Clinic?

The "roughly right" answer (for Audi Club) is if you have one season of most of our events as a Solo Intermediate driver and seem to have decent communication skills and a solid safety attitude, you are likely to be asked if you're interested.

Because this seems to take a few years to complete, we have pivoted a little to inviting some 'early career' drivers who have those great communication skills with the intention that they will simply need two or more passes through the Instructor Clinic before they are likely to be promoted.

Ross Bentley has a great free E-book that all candidates should read: <https://speedsecrets.com/hpde-manifesto/> This really goes into more detail of the 'why' and the 'how' of instructing, and reading it before the clinic frees us up from a whole lot of "death by powerpoint."

Skills Grid for Instructors

It's useful to look at the skills grid for drivers 'backwards', as guidance for how you instruct.

<https://1drv.ms/b/s!AlhTuGANcmbOo0P6D1PWYrtTCn1y>

The six different skill levels are summarized below. See the following page for details.

Skill Level	Novice	High Novice	Low Intermediate	Intermediate
Summary (descriptor) for CircuitNotes and MotorsportReg.	Little track experience needing help to build skills, comfort and confidence.	Safe and making skills progress with more instruction required.	Ready for solo with emphasis on transition to a self-coaching driver.	Competent, consistently safe and self-aware solo-qualified driver.
Description	Little-to-no previous track experience. Requires continuous instruction. Little understanding of basic terms. Does not translate concepts to good execution. Does not have track memorized. May not remember flags or pit in/out procedures. May not see flags or other cars' signals.	Limited experience. May require nearly continuous instruction at first. Bad habits require frequent correction. Knows track and basic line. Understands basic commands: brake, turn-in, apex, track-out, etc. Solid safety procedures, including pit-in, pit-out, flag meaning, flag station location. Can initiate passes/lets other pass (signals, points-by) without prompting. May be fast but without corresponding recovery car control.	Solid basic driving skills and knowledge. Safe and consistent but may still lose focus at times. Working on advanced skills like balancing the car through the corner (e.g. trail-braking, throttle-steering). Sometimes incomplete self-analysis. Expected to have experience driving at more than one racetrack.	Safe and consistent. Trustworthy to run solo and deal with unexpected conditions, other drivers' mistakes, own mistakes, and new tracks. Continuing to learn with self-analysis and coaching from others. Expected to have experience driving at two or more racetracks.
Instruction Emphasis	Instruct basic commands and school line (brake, turn-in, apex, track-out). Teach seat position and mirror adjustments. Review paddock and release protocols. Emphasize vision, breathing, and smooth inputs. Instructor should manage traffic, flags, pace, pit in/out for this driver. Focus on safety first! Build confidence by insuring a rewarding and fun experience.	Build comfort at modest increased pace with other cars in proximity. Instruct good track etiquette (being passed/passing others, awareness, pace, line). Work on basic line and highlight developing smoothness and vision. As the driver is able, introduce concepts like trail braking, alternative lines, throttle steering, forward planning. Develop a more complete driver; keep it fun.	Vision, smoothness and consistent execution. For the proficient driver, consider solo session(s), with follow-up in-car after. Prepare for Intermediate (Solo) sign-off by identifying areas for development. Cultivate self-analysis skills. Evaluate closely. Sign-off only if safe and ready for self-coaching in Intermediate skill level.	Observe and prioritize weak areas that need fine-tuning. Coach rather than instruct.
Typical experience (# of racetracks)	0-1	1-2	2-4	3-5
Typical experience (# of event days)	0-5	2-15	10-15	10-40

Check out that first page. It has a paragraph on 'Instruction Emphasis' for each of our levels (I cut off High Intermediate and Advanced, as most of what we do at Instructor Clinic has to do with these lower levels).

Understanding these different levels and approaches is a key development milestone for a Candidate. Often, we get a candidate who has 2-3 days of DS teaching experience and can teach pretty well at the Novice level, but becomes overwhelmed at Low Intermediate level because the speeds are higher and they simply don't have enough experience 'vocalizing' in that situation.

To a lesser degree, we have also had some candidates who are quite comfortable teaching at the Low Intermediate / Intermediate margin, because they've spent some time in friend's cars sharing tips; but they lack the ability to break it down into simple Novice concepts.

When the instructors meet at the end of the day at Instructor Clinic, we talk about the candidate's ability to teach at these multiple levels.

SKILLS GRID		Novice		High Novice		Low Intermediate		Intermediate	
AREA	SKILL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Vision	Looks ahead with wide vision	Focused too close over the hood of vehicle, and displays "connect-the-dots" behavior.		Focused on next upcoming reference point. Often fails to scan or use wide vision.		Looking past upcoming reference point. Understands wide vision, uses mirrors, aware of traffic.		Looks through corners and plans well ahead. Anticipates problems ahead. Sees with wide vision (central and peripheral).	
	Situational awareness	Doesn't see beyond car ahead. Doesn't see obstacles. May focus on car behind. Misses flag stations.		Sees flags and understands them. Aware of traffic. Solid pit-in and pit-out.		Sees flags and problems ahead, but may not anticipate foreseeable problems.		Anticipates problems ahead, even in distance. Remembers and uses previous lap experiences.	
Controls	Braking	Abrupt, too soft, too early or too late. May reapply brakes. Brakes when frightened.		More consistent but conservative and focused on brake initiation versus brake release. Working on smoothness.		Hard, steady, timely. Smooth brake application. Developing better brake release to get trail-braking.		Hard, steady, timely. Smooth brake application and release. Developing proficient trail-braking.	
	Steering	Nervous, jerky, inconsistent. Hands not at 9 and 3 position on the steering wheel.		Smooth but inconsistent turn-in. May make many steering corrections through turn (sawing at the wheel). May require reminders for hand position.		Smooth and consistent, but may still correct steering inputs. Consistent 9 and 3 hand position. No shuffling unless appropriate.		No shuffling unless appropriate. Few unneeded corrections. Quick countersteer if needed.	
	Throttle	Abrupt and/or tentative. May blast down the long straight, or coast at times.		Squeezes throttle, but little feel or knowledge of effect on car balance.		Understands effect on balance. Developing sensitivity, mid-corner adjustments.		Sensitive and controlled but occasionally too early because of experimenting.	
Line	Knows and drives line	May not know the track at all. Does not know where to position car for corner entry.		Drives a basic safe line, but inconsistent and imprecise without continuous instruction.		Solid, basic line. Understands early / late apex. Uses all track width. May still be flustered off-line, but aware of alternate lines and experimenting with them.		Drives own line, but can drive school line if asked and experiments with alternatives. Knows how to drive off-line intentionally.	
	Apex	Wide (by feet) and inconsistent. No understanding of early / late.		Often wide (foot plus) but late (good). When early may not realize it. Inconsistent.		Consistent (within a foot), but still conservative.		Consistent (inches) and tight. Uses benign curbs appropriately. Understands surface changes in the wet.	
	Uses full track width	Creeps in before turns. Fails to track out fully.		Crabs in on entry when tense. Tracks out, but leaves excess room.		Does not crab in. Tracks out, but leaves excess room to a wall or berm.		Initiates turn from very edge of track. Tracks out comfortably, even to walls and berms.	

For the details of the Skills Grid, each skill and box represents a behavior you will encounter as an instructor, and a challenge to bring that student up to the next level. Have you, the candidate, really read through the grid? Do you understand all of the terms and behaviors? If not, ask questions.

Once promoted, instructors are expected to observe all 14 attributes and render an opinion on where the student fits. That is ***not*** the same thing as emphasizing all 14 skills verbally with the student. In particular with a novice student, it is wise to limit your approach to just 2, maybe 3 at a time. Primary focus is on safety and getting them around the track.

When I share the evaluation with my students, they often are surprised that I have evaluated them on something we never discussed. I hope that it emphasizes that there is always more to learn.

SKILLS GRID		Novice		High Novice		Low Intermediate		Intermediate	
AREA	SKILL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Balance	Corner balance, throttle steering	Probably not applicable. Insufficient speed to use or feel balance.		Delays throttle to achieve corner exit and avoid understeer.		Experimenting with controlling rotation with brake release. Working on applying throttle as soon as possible without inducing understeer.		Becoming proficient controlling rotation with appropriate throttle.	
	Gear shifts	No heel-and-toe (MT). May not select own gears (Auto). May be rushed, awkward or just forgotten.		Smooth upshifts. May not use heel-and-toe on downshifts, but smoothly engages clutch (MT). Usually selects proper gear manually (Auto).		Smooth, unhurried shifts. Still working on heel and toe with better success, or uses auto-throttle-blip (MT). Downshifts to correct gear to maximize corner exit speed (Auto).		Quick but not rushed. Solid heel and toe or uses auto-throttle-blip (MT). Manually shifts to optimal gear at all times (Auto).	
Confidence	Consistent lap-to-lap	Highly inconsistent. No two laps are the same.		Relatively inconsistent. Vision is improving. Aware that looking further ahead builds smooth inputs.		Can be consistent. Focuses attention on specific corners for improvement.		Highly consistent when trying. May experiment and push in certain corners.	
	Pace	Slow.		Full throttle on straights, but may lift approaching corners, especially challenging or blind turns.		Full throttle to braking zone. Higher corner speed exhibits slip angles, corrections.		Able to drive in run groups with High Intermediate and Advanced drivers without disrupting the flow.	
	Behavior	Confidence level usually not aligned with skill level. Anxious, uncertain, focuses on cars in their mirrors. Or, overconfidence may lead to pushing beyond skill level.		Anxious in turns and traffic, otherwise reasonably calm. Or, overconfident, not recognizing when stability and/or traction controls are intervening.		May be anxious in heavy traffic. Confidence level may not be balanced with skill level; either over- or underconfident.		Comfortable in most traffic at speed, including heavier traffic. Confidence and skill level are more closely aligned.	
Self-analysis	Understanding and self-diagnosis	None yet, or possible over-analysis and confused conclusions.		Limited. May not know when a corner is entered too fast or turn-in is too early.		Working on self-diagnosis (e.g. knows when they are early or too hot).		Good self-analysis. Asks for help too. Understands not just what happened, but why (root cause) as the situation is resolved.	
Status	Driver's overall performance	Novice		High Novice		Low Intermediate		Intermediate	

With the upper level students, they often have one skill that is holding them back from being promoted. It's perfectly fine to concentrate on that one thing.

Confidence

This is a tricky area. Too much confidence is off-putting, but a successful Instructor Candidate has to have at least some degree of confidence in his/her tool box. There are times in the right seat where you need to give very clear directives. It's not, "Um, you should maybe think about slowing down some..." it's more "Brake! Now!"

Confidence (and the usage and display of it) is also something that is level sensitive. With a Novice student, the instructor has to exhibit enough confidence to either calm a nervous student or convince an over-confident student that they really need to listen to you. Your tenor/inflection is critical. Trust works both ways; if you convey a complete lack of faith in your student, you may shoot yourself in the foot. At the intermediate level, it's OK to dial it back a little and make it more of a peer conversation, "I see you're still doing the student line here; I've been playing with a double apex instead, I think it's working well for me."

Evaluations at Instructor Clinic

Everybody that you share a car with is asked to give their impressions on how you did. If the role-play includes a 3 minute interview, they will grade the interview. For the lower level role plays, there is an element of 'gotcha' in that the mock student will typically be exhibiting something 'wrong' to see if you catch it. Unfastened helmet, missing wristband, very bad seat position, driving with one hand, elbow out the window, hand lingering on shifter, eyes fixated on apex as they pass, stuff like that. If you don't call them on it, it's "points off" of your evaluation. Interestingly, I have had candidates that correct my behaviors without specifically addressing it, like "OK, I want you to be looking all the way through the corner to the next reference point." (when I was fixated on the apex) That totally works.

Evaluations are generally done by consensus, with each of the four (typically it's about four) evaluators giving notes about what they observed, what you did well, where you need work. If all agree that you're ready to be promoted, you pass. I have seen a few instances where the first evaluator for the day had a "needs work in this area" observation, usually conveyed to the candidate directly, and the subsequent evaluators say the candidate totally improved in that area throughout the day. Those usually result in promotion as well.

It has to be said that this is a "humans judging humans" process, and the same approach with two different evaluators can give two different outcomes. I don't know of a better way to do it, and it pretty closely matches what you're going to experience when you actually are instructing in the right seat. Not every customer is going to become your best friend.

If you are promoted at the Instructor Clinic, you are typically informed later that same day. If not, the CDI (or a delegate) will share some notes with you at a later time, typically within two weeks.

I Didn't Get Promoted, Now What?

Hopefully, you got some useful feedback. If the feedback was "needs more seat time to develop his voice", teaching Driver Skills / Car Control Clinics is a great way to do that. Between Audi / BMW / PCA, there's about ten times a year to practice. The three clubs are similar enough that you can drop in to any one of them.

Audi Club has two DS events that happen at the same time as HPDE; MAMDS in May, and Quattrofest in November. We also have a stand-alone 'University of Quattro' each February.

BMW Club has a separate Car Control Clinic (CCC) at most of their Pacific Raceways dates.

PCA does all of their DS days at Bremerton Motorsports Park, and none associated with their HPDE dates.

Here are the 'landing pages' for Audi / BMW / PCA events at motorsportreg.com (MSR):

<http://audiclubnw.motorsportreg.com/>

<https://www.motorsportreg.com/orgs/bmwcca/puget-sound>

<https://www.motorsportreg.com/orgs/pca/pacific-northwest>

Each club has a different 'instance' in MSR, and they may have to set a flag there to unlock your ability to instruct Driver Skills / Car Control Clinic. You can contact the Event Master directly, or reach out through your Chief Driving Instructor to make that introduction.

If the feedback was, "You need to work on coaching at xxx level" then you're someone who could benefit from a role-playing session (or even peer coaching) at one of our HPDE events. All three clubs seem to do this, each a little differently.

Candidates who are proactive in seeking out these opportunities tend to be successful. In Audi Club, we are attempting to get instructors pointed at specific candidates in advance of the event. Having said that, it also happens on an ad hoc basis; an instructor whose student didn't show up is looking for something to do.

In the last few years, we have done more 'mid-year' promotions at other events than we have directly at the Instructor Clinic.