

Der Sonnenfleck

Sunshine Bimmers Newsletter

Summer 2015

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Contents:

1. Fun Facts

2. Feature Article

3. Chapter Events

4. Brain Teaser

Fun Facts

-- The Jeep Wrangler is the lowest rated vehicle by Consumer Reports with a score of "20", BMW M235 is rated a "97"

-- BMW bicycles built for over 60 years

-- Since 2013, BMW has used the Linux open sourced software operating system as the basis for the in vehicle "infotainment" software

Joseph Lenart

Feature Article



BMW M School

July 2015

I heard that voice again this morning, “stay as far to the left as possible, without going to the edge where all that junk accumulates and look ahead, hold your speed and accelerate when your wheels are straight”; this was Jim Clark’s advice for a sporty entrance onto the highway. Yes, I did it again, I accelerated after going through the toll lane, held my speed on the curved part of the ramp, looking ahead far to the right around the curve, then full throttle once my wheels were straight on the merge lane as I made another entrance for the morning commute, merging smoothly with the flow of traffic; driving with a sense of purpose and precision for those of us who actually care

about driving, not to mention fun of driving. Jim Clark was one of the instructors at the BMW Performance Center.

It was back to school for my son Jonathan and me, although he just finished his Master's program; this school was at the Spartanburg South Carolina BMW Performance Center, the class was the one day M school, I hope we have homework. The chance to drive several BMW M cars all day with my son, on a track, free of any public road concerns was like winning a contest; with the added potential to learn new driving skills from some of BMW's best instructors.

We arrived the day before the class, in time for a brief visit to the modest BMW Museum in front of a very large factory complex for most of the BMW X vehicle production. The museum had some interesting exhibits of various vehicles; a notable display was an Isetta, a little car from the early post World War II days of BMW, set up with the matching color themed camper, it would be a wonder to see the Isetta move with more than the driver sitting in the vehicle, no less pulling a camper, even a very small camper. It was like an ant pulling a flea circus; I could imagine a family of four getting to the first stop sign after leaving the driveway and someone calling out "Dad maybe we should have bought the Suburban instead, we are never going to make it to Disney World".

On a cool, cloudy morning, after a short drive from the hotel, we arrived early at the Performance Center; the building had the "BMW International" modern style, similar to new facilities in Munich and remodeled dealerships in the US. We had a chance to go outside where the M vehicles were parked, ready for the day ahead; we were sad to note that the 1M was no longer there, replaced by the M6. We would be the first class to use the M6. The night before we spoke a lot about what to expect today, especially driving the new F10 M5; it was hard to sleep due to our anticipation and here it was, just waiting for us.

We gathered in a large room with a row of tables for the start of the course, the lead instructor introduced himself and the other members of the instruction staff; they were all highly qualified, experienced competition drivers with impressive backgrounds. The 15 participants came from many different states, various backgrounds, and they owned an array of different vehicles; most of them had BMW models as one would expect. All were looking forward to one thing: driving the M vehicles. All three vehicles (M5, M6, M3) we were going to drive today, have the M Double Clutch Transmission (M DCT); the 1Ms had manual transmissions, perhaps they may again have manual equipped transmission M cars some other time.

The lead instructor started the first part of the program with an overview of the track with detailed aerial photographs and the next time I arrive in a helicopter instead of the budget rental car, this will be very helpful. We reviewed the proper seating position; the correct position for holding the steering wheel with arms bent at the elbow to allow larger steering movements without moving the hands from the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions, in addition the proper use of the foot rest on the left side of the pedals.

While holding a rimless tire, and pushing down on it to show how tires deform to different contact sizes on the surface of the road by increasing or decreasing the contact area of the tire with the road surface, the dynamics of the weight shifting under acceleration, braking, or turning for increased weight for the front and the back tires was demonstrated. There was a discussion of knowing how the front wheels are pointed; it may not always be obvious. It was noted that “understeer” is when the front tires have lost traction and are sliding while “oversteer” is when the back tires are sliding; acceleration and braking can have an effect on both of these situations, to improve or to worsen the situation.

There was also advice about how to drive on curves, that is, how to “straighten” a course, finding the right curve entry point, the apex of the curve, and the proper curve exit; the correct curve entry point is found by “trial and error”, and as noted by the instructor, “that is what practice laps are for”.

Another key point that was mentioned several times was “look far ahead” and “look where you want to go”, “the hands will follow the eyes”. During performance or emergency driving situations, one should not always look straight out the windshield over the hood of the car, which under most daily circumstances is the natural tendency.

There was also practical advice for day-to-day driving, such as entering a highway, carefully watching other drivers to anticipate precarious situations on the road; looking for potential “escape routes” through the traffic, observe for any indications of the psychology of the other drivers and what unusual things they may do in daily driving situations, especially in heavy traffic. I was thinking how great all this information was for any daily driving situation and how productive the time has been already yet I haven’t even driven any cars. No matter how much or how little we have driven in our life experience, it is always good to get a refresher course; as common as it may be to us, driving any car under any conditions, is a dangerous activity.

Divided into 3 groups of 5 participants, our group went first outside into the still cool early morning South Carolina air; we took our seats in the M5s, the instructors used a hand-held radio on a “broadcast channel” specific to each group, every vehicle had a radio located in the door pocket. The instructor could speak to all five of us at once, or to one of us with the other four listening into the conversation; we were asked to just listen and not use the radio to transmit unless it was necessary, screaming in panic over the radio was discouraged.

Our first instructions were to turn off electronic assistance settings on the M5, not quite all of them, just most of them; nice I thought, 560 horses unleashed as all the engines started together emitting a combined sound, subtle; however, authoritative and ready for action.

We slowly followed the instructor’s vehicle for the very short drive out to the skid pad; all the driving areas are visible from the main building. The skid pad is a polished concrete

circular driving surface; water sprinklers ensure that the already slippery surface was beyond slippery, there is a reason it is called a “skid” pad.

At first, several of us went out with one of the instructors in the M5 as he demonstrated the skid pad skills we would practice and how “easy” it was going to be, and for this drifting champion, it did seem like second nature; as he completed the demonstration by some double reverse maneuver to leave the skid pad, a maneuver so convoluted, I was not sure we were spinning to the right or to the left or both; he assured us that we will be doing the same soon. The rest of our small group went out with the other instructor for their demonstration ride.

Only two vehicles are on the skid pad at one time; we left the other M5s parked in a side area. The skid pad was not very large nor wide, it seemed to be a perfect circle with the early morning light reflecting off of the shimmering wet surface; this is the only driving activity for which the instructor is in the vehicle with the M school participant, along with anyone else who was brave enough to stay in the car for the ride.

Now it was my turn, I was holding the steering wheel at the 9 and 3 o'clock positions, I was correctly positioned in the M5 seat and applied throttle; corrective steering and braking, I was still spinning like a gyroscope with the world a blur outside the windows, heading for the dirt edge of the skid pad, unsure if it started with understeer or oversteer. With 560 hp and no traction control, it does not take much throttle to lose control on this slick, smooth surface.

The skid pad is a difficult exercise with a lot of drama as one approaches the side of the track, out of control and fast; off-road driving does not make the instructors happy, they like to keep the M5s on the pavement. At first it is difficult to control the vehicle; slowly the confidence builds with better results and ultimately control: “yes, I went into a spin with an M5 and I regained control”, that is a good feeling, a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction, a satisfaction that comes from expanding our skills on the way to greater levels of driving performance.

We all knew this activity had direct application to situations we may encounter on the public roads, in rain and slippery conditions, sometimes the world can become a large skid pad. After having a chance to let our heart rates get back to an acceptable level, we drove back to the main building and switched into the M6.

With the M6, we had to negotiate a small circuit that started out with full acceleration on a short straightaway to a first left-hand turn, then another hard left turn, a few additional more turns and then a full stop after one lap; it would be a good workout for these brand-new M6s.

For the first turn, braking “helper” cones were on the right hand side of this small track; set up as 1 (start braking), 2 (really brake now) and 3 (too late to brake now) with a blue colored “turn in” cone (turn now like it or not!), which at that point one should already be looking left for the yellow apex cone as the “target” during turning, at least this is what

our instructor was saying on the radio for each of us as we were barreling through the track. Then two more turns, accelerate hard in another short straightaway; again hard braking, using the braking cones at the end of the lap as a reference. It never seemed to be enough distance to stop, it turns out that the M vehicles have very good brakes.

Most of the drivers had difficulty staying to the far right in the first part of the course with the aim of the first blue turning cone, most started drifting to the left toward the yellow apex cone as this seems to make sense to the novice performance driver; the turn can be made this way, just not as efficiently.

In a moment of didactic inspiration, the driving instructor decided to put out a cone in the middle of the track to force the drivers closer to the right edge; he also started standing in the middle of the track closer to the blue cone as he was coaxing the drivers on his radio to stay closer to the right edge. Looking for some strange short cut; going way off course in the middle and behind the instructor, a driver almost ran him over while the rest of us froze in anticipation of a horror to come, the instructor did get a little excited, although not as much as I thought he would, perhaps this has happened before, or maybe when he was shouting, he forgot to press the transmit button on the radio.

On the far side of the driving area, the last driving activity before lunch was the autocross in the M3. The first part of this short course was sinusoidal, cones outlining somewhat of a slalom course, then a long curve to the right, followed by a few sharp turns. For this activity, the drivers were all on the course at the same time, unless the instructor told someone to wait in a “drive off” section to establish adequate spacing between vehicles.

This was a continuous driving exercise with the time passing quickly; and all too soon we fell in behind the instructor’s vehicle to slowly drive back to the main building for some lunch and good conversations with the other participants and instructors, I was told that during the week there is a chef who prepares the lunch.

Another classroom session started the afternoon portion of the program; this session focused on describing the three remaining driving activities; driving on the large track, timed autocross, and the “rat race”. The first activity for our group would be in the M5 on a large track configuration that now incorporated the skid pad with the water sprinklers running, the curve negotiation section that we practiced in the M6, although this time opening up on a long straightaway where it is possible to reach speeds over 100 miles an hour.

To achieve that high speed or better, one must negotiate the curve before the straightaway with a high level of proficiency. There was also a passing loop to allow faster drivers to pass slower ones; my son did well enough to pass several cars during this activity.

The large track gave an appreciation of the power and the agility of the current F10 M5 model, with great sound under extended full throttle. One of the hard parts in the

straightaway for me was to actually accelerate all the way to the first of the three braking cones; the tendency for most of us from our daily driving experience was to ease off the throttle before hard braking started as it didn't appear like there would be enough time to reduce to a reasonable speed before making a hard left turn onto the very slippery skid pad.

The instructors would remind me to stay on the accelerator until I actually reached the cone and then apply hard braking; fortunately this was not my car. This time, the skid pad had the water sprinklers running for this activity; this gave me a chance to test the windshield wipers on the M5 as well as my nerves while drifting around this section.

The next activity was the autocross again in the E90 M3, although this time it would be a timed one lap with a "stop box" set up with four cones; stopping outside the box would mean disqualification of the time for that lap. For the timed autocross, one car at a time would be on the course; as earlier, the first part of the autocross section was sinusoidal weaving between some cones like a slalom skier, then a long curve to the right, a hard left turn with a hard stop.

My son improved his time on each of his laps with a nice finish, let me just say I was very consistent with my lap times. Pushing the M3 hard during this activity, showed how well this vehicle performs and the confidence it can inspire on such a track, every instructor I asked said they enjoyed driving the E90 M3 the best.

The final driving activity of the day was called the "rat race" in the M6s; this was on a smaller oval track with a rough surface and lots of water applied to make it slippery; all traction and stability control was now turned off on these vehicles, oh oh; we better pay attention now.

Two drivers would start at opposite sides of the wet oval with the point of trying to "catch" the other driver; this "catching" driver would be declared the winner and they would stay on the course; the losing driver would leave. After several practice rounds for each driver, the competition began. This activity was a good example of looking where the car is actually going, which is not necessarily straight out the windshield over the hood; in this driving activity we had to look out the left driver's window to keep the car steady with our "hands following our eyes".

With a lot of spin outs and water spraying, a winner finally emerged for our group of drivers; this time it was Jonathan, although everyone at the BMW performance school is a winner.

We drove back to the main parking area for the last time; it was the end of the driving for the day. Although there was one more passenger activity left, the instructors would take anyone out on the track for a "hot lap" and judging by all the noise, smoke and fresh rubber on the track, it was a very hot lap.

We returned to the classroom for final comments and a commencement ceremony, ok it was a certificate presentation that seemed like a commencement ceremony; at least to

me; now my son and I were both “certified” BMW drivers. We also received a special version of the BMW baseball cap and a T-shirt, they said that the baseball cap can only be given out at the BMW performance school facility, it has a little symbol of the state of South Carolina on it.

I drove away from the performance center with a great feeling of the experience of driving BMW M vehicles all day in an environment that was ready made for them, and I also left the performance center as a better driver.

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Chapter Events

August 15 -Cars & Coffee: The Chapter is joining with Fields BMW of Daytona to go-host a Cars & Coffee event at the BMW dealership in Daytona Beach. The event starts at 8:30 am on Saturday, August 15. This will be a chance to see the new location, which is a little south of their existing dealership in the Daytona International Auto Mall on the west side of I-95. The dealer's website is at <http://www.fieldsbmwofdaytona.com/index.htm>.

August 25 - Teutonic Tuesday: The Chapter's regular monthly membership gathering for August will be held on Tuesday, the 25th, at *alFresco* in downtown Winter Garden, as described above for July. Please RSVP to [Dave Kash](#) to let us know how many people will attend. This event is held the fourth Tuesday of every month at the same location unless another site is announced.

September (late) - Oktoberfest in Windermere: Tentative; more info to follow.

October 10 - Ride to the Ranch: This event was rescheduled from April. More info to follow.

November 6 - Sunrise to Sunset Tour: By popular demand, Sunshine Bimmers has coordinated another "Sunrise to Sunset" road rally for the weekend of November 6, 2015. Our rally will begin on Friday, November 6 in Sebastian Florida at Captain Hiram's on the Intracoastal waterway. Their room rate starts at \$135.00 per night for a superior room and for riverfront and poolside they are \$151.00 and \$159.00. We will drive to the west coast Sandcastle Resort in Sarasota on Lido Beach where their discounted group rate is \$139 per night for courtyard rooms. Additional details are

forthcoming, but in order to block rooms, we need a firm commitment of those who would be interested. Our last Sunrise to Sunset event, from St. Augustine to St Petersburg on St. Valentine's Day weekend, was a lot of fun and we hope this one will be even better! Please indicate whether you may be interested in this event by replying to [Al Butler](#) in the next few days.

November (mid-month) - Bavarian House lunch in Mt. Dora: More info to follow.

December (early) - Holiday Party: More info to follow.

For more information on all Sunshine Bimmers Chapter events, go to the Club's [website](#).

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Past Brain Teaser

What was installed on the Empire State Building in New York and never used?

Al Butler was the first to respond with the correct answer: Moorings for "lighter than air" airships such as Zeppelins

Current Brain Teaser

Who was Albert Einstein's favorite composer?

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Special Note: The Sunshine Bimmers Chapter was required to rent an official post office box as a condition of charter by BMW CCA. Our new official address is PO Box 3214, Windermere, FL 34786-3614; however, you should directly contact the person listed above who is most likely to be able to respond to your need, as the post office box is not checked daily.

