

Driver's ed for the big boys

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A Porsche takes a slippery turn on the wet pavement at a performance driving school organized by LSRPCA at the Houston Police Academy. Photo: John Vigants / HC





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I wasn't exactly nuts about the idea of an e-brake 360. In fact, I was petrified.

I was driving as fast as I could (or so I thought) on the wet pavement, slick with soap. "Faster, faster!" my instructor said from the passenger seat of my Fiat 500. He even pushed my right leg down on the throttle. Then, while in the middle of a swerving turn, he pulled my emergency brake. I screamed as the car spun, the world revolving outside my windshield. And then it was over. All that drama, and I hadn't even been going fast

enough to do a full revolution. It was more like an e-brake 280.

Lucky for me, I was safely spinning around on the wet skid pad at the [Houston Police Academy](#), where the Lone Star Region of the Porsche Club of America offers a performance driving school every few weeks. Guests are welcome to sign up, bring their own car (and it doesn't have to be a Porsche, but you'll see a lot of those there) and learn how to drive it better and more safely.

"We have the fire trucks come out and foam an area down, so at relatively low speeds, we can get you, the driver, into a skid - and then it's up to you to correct that skid," says [Greg Platt](#), president of the LSRPCA. Skid correction is just one of the many exercises practiced at performance driving school.

"This program is teaching drivers driving skills that aren't taught anywhere else," says [Hugh Brazier](#), an advanced driving instructor with the LSRPCA. "If you go to driver's ed, you're not going to run an apex course or a slalom course or a skid pad course. These exercises allow students to do these things in a very safe, controlled environment. You're not going to hit anybody, and nobody's going to hit you." So feel free to let your instructor, who will be in the passenger seat for all the exercises, do something like pull your emergency brake while you're spinning around on a soapy wet skid pad. You just might learn something about how your car handles.

If you're already pretty familiar with your car's handling capabilities and you think you'd like to try your hand at racing, MSR Houston's competition driving school near Angleton puts drivers through a three-day course, at the end of which they are eligible for a regional license with the [Sports Car Club of America](#), which organizes club racing events.

Would-be racers can also hone their skills at Texas World Speedway, near College Station. It's a road-racers track with 1.8-, 1.9- and 2.9-mile high speed road courses, featuring multiple banking turns, with 15 corners in all. The performance driving school here is split up into groups that are color-coded based on the driver's ability; newcomers are placed in the green group and

can work their way up through the blue, yellow and white groups. By the time you've risen through the ranks to the white group, you're perfecting skills such as passing in turns and trailing throttle oversteer. The red group is reserved for instructors; the most advanced drivers will be asked to join.

"You've got to be using very advanced driving skills, you've got to be able to drive off-line, you've got to be really in the top 10 percent of the white group; you're passing other people, they're not passing you," says Brazier about being invited to the instructor's group. "Safety is obviously of the utmost concern, so safety advanced driving techniques and driving lines is also key."

Speaking of safety, not every car makes the grade for this course; each vehicle has to be vetted by a mechanic to ensure that it's safe for high-speed road course driving. Most cars built after 1984 make the cut, including some cross-overs and SUVs, but light trucks and vans will likely be denied from participating. So leave the minivan at home.

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