

Kristi Does Drivers Ed in February, and . . .

by Jim Heimer, Pit Crew Boss

. . . it was colder than a well-digger's ankle. That was the official report from the well-digger. We never did hear from the witch.

My daughter, Kristi, became a Porsche owner about a year ago, and after the agonies she endured while her husband and I endeavored to teach her the fine art of the stick shift, other than the trip to Marble Falls last Spring, she really hadn't had a chance to drive her '02 Boxster in the manner to which it should become accustomed. For sometime, I had been trying to get her to a DE, but conflicts always seemed to come up for one of us until the weekend of February 9th and 10th. I volunteered to be the pit crew, and on Friday evening we drove up to College Station and the Manor House Hotel.

For those of you who haven't done a DE, the Manor House Hotel serves as Lone Star Region HQ. Kristi signed in, picked up her schedule, run group decal and team assignment. We grabbed a quick bite across the street, then attended the new driver briefing at the hotel. That gave all the first timers a chance to ask any final questions, like what time to leave the hotel in the morning and where to park at the Texas World Speedway.



There were two jobs left to do, and that was to put the numbers on the car. Kristi had elected to use painter's tape, which we picked up at the Wal-Mart up the street, in an attractive purple color (the pit crew's preference for light blue having been ignored). We also picked up some bottled water and soft drinks to take to the track,

although as it turned out, we wouldn't need the cooler we had brought along to store them in. Finally, we removed every loose item from the car, from floor mats to CD's to the ashtray thing in the center console.

The pit crew (that would be me) was up early checking the tires and procuring nourishing Shipley Donuts, coffee, and coke in lieu of the much healthier breakfast on offer in the Manor House breakfast room. Once the driver had been roused, we departed for the track, the drivers' meeting, and the first classroom session for Green Group (beginning) drivers. After that, and before the first track session, Kristi had two more chores.



The first was to get the proper seat position, as explained in the class.



The second was to torque the wheel nuts to the specs in the owner's manual. Fortunately, we were able to borrow a torque wrench and get

some instructions on its use from our garage mate. Although the pit crew (that would be me) would normally perform this function, in consideration for scrounging donuts (and still a little bit put out due to last night's tape color selection), this activity was duly designated a "driver learning experience."



The cars lined up on the grid for the first on-track session, which is done without helmets. The instructor drives the first few laps while explaining the "line" around the track. Then, the student takes over and never has so little been seen by so many going around the circuit – Kristi was no exception. Once on the track, the student's vision narrows to the road ahead and dials out corner workers, crash barriers, other cars, and any other features. Over the next two days, the instructor will work hard to broaden the vision and comprehension of the student as she (or he) perfects their on-track skills.



But it is not only the in-car instructor who works hard during the DE. The classroom sessions are also important in explaining to the students what they are doing on the track and why, as well as

reviewing their performance. Stan Wenger, former LSR President, PCA Club Racer, and DE Instructor filled that role.



And finally, the on-track and classroom sessions are supplemented by a braking session held on the infield of the track for the Green Group each day. The purpose of this session is to demonstrate the powerful braking capability of the Porsche, and to demonstrate smooth braking in combination with smooth acceleration. The instructors give individual attention to each driver.



But the real action is on the track, and from the second track session through the eighth and last session on Sunday afternoon, it's "helmets on!"

At first Kristi drove pretty conservatively. Her pit crew (that would be me) watched from the garage area as she "tore" down the front straight hitting, oh maybe 60 mph, yelling "faster Kristi, faster." She would enter the straight with eight or 10 faster cars trailing along, so she got a lot of practice with the passing signals. It was after the third session that her instructor swapped

places with her and took her out in the Blue Group to demonstrate what he judged she and her car could do.



After a briefing before the last Saturday track session, the pit crew (that would be me), was amazed at the change in driving style. Kristi burst out of turn 15 onto the front straight with nary a car in sight behind her, and she was actually passing other cars.



Saturday evening was spent with 60 DE participants in the side room at the Outback, unofficial restaurant of the Lone Star Region DE Committee. Some of the overflow ate in the bar or the main restaurant, but what the other 120 did we never did find out.

The pit crew (that would be me) performed flawlessly the next morning - checking tires, getting donuts, etc., and Kristi didn't do to badly either. Her Mom (who did many of these photos) and I moved around the infield to get the best vantages of the action - the turn 2 / 3 straight and turn 10 were especially good.



Was the weekend a success? Kristi thinks her driving has improved 1000%, and I think she really took the instruction to heart. And as she pulled off 290 ahead of me on the way home, her left arm emerged from the window with her fist raised - the signal for "I am pitting."

Well done, Kristi.

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Scenes from the February 2007 DE



Classroom sessions are held with the students broken into small groups to discuss track performance and common problems



Turn 10 offers a lot of action from this vantage point on the infield



As the cars go down the front straight, it is an opportunity for faster cars to pass slower cars. The driver of the car in the middle signals a pass on the right side to the car behind.



Driver Ed events are not races. Still, there are a few very fast cars on the track.



It was especially nice, with the temperature topping out in the low 40's, to have a garage space.



Everyone is welcome at the DE - even this apparently homeless LSR member.