

# The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer

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Our illustrious Editor reminded me that I had not written about the 993 Cabrio at Mosport, having promised to do so in my prior Tiptronic article. So here goes:

First; "Limited Lifetime Warrantee" as it refers to brake pads you can buy at your local auto parts store to fit your 993 means "They won't last two days"! Suddenly, the Cool-Carbons look like elder statesmen for surviving two events. Cheese graters, that's what I'll call those brake rotors from now on. And I'll call the pads "lunch meat". Pathetic. But they do stop well.

Second; there is simply not the right gear in turn five for the Tip, and it will either not pull down to give you first, so you better get used to limited climb speed, or drop down in the turn and disrupt the balance so you are reluctant to hammer the gas. After a couple of aborted attempts which resulted in my having to pull grass from the AC condenser, I said to hell with it and simply accepted my limited speed. I am CERTAIN the newer Tip S, with five speeds vs. my four, is flat perfect for the spot. Mind you, the difference is less than three mph at the top of the hill, but that is a couple car lengths EVERY lap, so it do add up!

I know; this is starting to sound like I am advocating that no-no word around Driver's Ed; "Competition". Not so. As I've said before; learn to drive what you own. Improve yourself before you try to improve it. My only real competition is with myself; to do it smoother or quicker or better. But there comes a point where you have to acknowledge that it is stupid to try to teach a pig to sing, because it wastes your time, and just annoys the pig. So I will hereby acknowledge that there were a few cars with better ability to plant power there which walked readily away from me up that hill (the back-straight at Mosport is a steep incline). Lap after lap. The question is; how come that was not the last time I saw them?

Truth be told, I had such a solid success elsewhere that I was able to regularly catch up to them, even to the point of having to brake in turn two, the downhill left-hand double apex (NOT a good place!) to avoid hitting them, but could not get enough oomph to pull by in the very short leg between turns three (long, late apex, right-hander with rough pavement and my mass on the wrong side of the car) and four (blind, long downhill left-hander with apex and exit at the same point), immediately before braking hard for the three turns comprising Five. Net effect I'm sure was frustration for us both, as each held the other up through part of the course.

On the other hand, what made the driving exhilarating was precisely those differentials; two different setups in vehicles with seemingly identical lap times. Which brings me to my point. (You KNEW there was a punch line; you just couldn't figure when the tripe would stop and the lecture would begin). I have been something of a fan, but not a fanatic, of F1 racing for years. Mostly, in marked contrast to the wildly successful NASCAR in its varying guises (C'mon, guys, "Racing Trucks" aren't. Period. And a Ford Taurus has four doors. And fuel injection. Gimme a break!), I like to see engineering applied in search of that elusive "unfair advantage" so much a part of the F1 scene. I've been enthralled with F1 ever since Brabham read the rules which prevented aerodynamic aids but allowed a cooling fan, so they attached a huge blower to the back end of the gearbox to "cool" it, which just HAPPENED to suck the car down like a hammer hit it. "Ground Effects" was a good way to describe the wear generated on the body skirts and skid plates. Such gamesmanship is a significant part of the attraction for me, as it underlines the utter futility of people who make rules presuming they will outsmart those whose best interests lie in getting around them. Sort of like what happened in the Radar Detector Market when the Double Nickel went into effect.

Those of you familiar with Porsche history will remember a “few” examples of innovative “interpretations” of racing rules which have benefitted the marque’s legend. The Daytona win on the Starter Motor because the winner has to be rolling under its own power at the end; the 917 at Le Mans, because the FIA was certain only the French would build enough to meet the 25 required for homologation; the Can-Am 917-10 and -30, because Roger Penske understood that the only thing which can beat cubic inches is cubic dollars, and PREPAREDNESS is the key; the 959 Paris-Dakar, because no mere “car” was up to the task; the second 935 rear window covering a water-air intercooler, because the rules allowed “unlimited aerodynamics while keeping the original greenhouse”; the PDK progenitor of the Tiptronic, which had no loss of boost because of instant gear changes; and, not least of which, walking away from their fabled track history at Le Mans when the rulesmakers tried to make rules which penalized good engineering. (Don’t get me started on the wisdom of skipping Le Mans so they can work on an SUV... I think the comment in AutoWeek was succinct; “Porsche is building an SUV and Cadillac is contesting Le Mans; it must be a parallel universe!”)

Anyway, editorial commentary notwithstanding, one thing about F1 has always been striking to me; the drivers. If you read the Nigel Roebuck writeups in AutoWeek, sometimes you wonder if you actually saw the same race as him. I have laughed openly at his blatant Brit-centric commentary in the face of overwhelming evidence putting it to lie. For example, starting with Nigel Mansel; talented, no question. But his approach was crash, break or win. And he would only drive the best equipment. So he won the World Championship driving for Williams, which was the unquestioned best car in the field. Then he repeated in the best car in CART. Fast forward to Damon Hill. A late starter despite a famous F1 pilote father. In Roebuck’s eyes, Damon was always a victim when he didn’t win. This despite the unequalled capability of his race car and powerplant, and Damon’s lack of EVER “putting the competition away”. I see the same thing now with David Coulthard. Bottom line; he is competent, but no more. Want proof? In equal equipment with Hakkinen, he has NEVER bested Mika. And ONLY when Michael Schumacher’s car is clearly bad has David beaten him.

So here are some thoughts to keep your syapses up at night. With the vast majority of cars in F1 being pitiful if not atrocious, when compared with those who have found that “unfair advantage”, why do such a limited few seem to generate such consistent finishes? The answer is to be found in a role reversal, or to be more specific, car reversal. Take any matchup on any track and ask yourself what the results would likely be were the drivers to swap equipment. Damon and David would be rolling pylons. Or how about a historical perspective; the “Professor” Alain Prost, vs. Ayrton Senna vs. Michael Schumacher vs. Mika Hakkinen, all in the same equipment. I don’t see Mika near a podium. And ask yourself what the real difference was between the Benetton which won the World Championship with Michael driving vs the same team, after he went to Ferrari, barely scoring at all. And the fact that Mika won the WC last year should give him little comfort; it went right to the wire, despite the substantially better McLaren/Mercedes, vs the SECOND Ferrari driver.

So, now that I’ve either pissed you off or sent you off, think about your own skills. You might recognize, and even invest in, Roger Penske’s equation above. But you AND I can both learn a lot from car capability differences. I believe it will undoubtedly help your overall driving skill if you can jump into ANYTHING and get the maximum of its potential, however modest that may be, instead of plunking down the cubic dollars to buy iron with which any moron ought to be able to go faster than the competition. Speed, per se, is overrated. If you don’t believe me; swap cars with your “nemesis”. Now we’ll see who has TALENT.