

Preparing and Surviving Drivers Licensing School

All your life you wanted to be a race car driver. You are sitting at the red light waiting for it to turn and you rev the motor a little extra. You check out the driver next to you without turning your head. The grip on the steering wheel gets a little tighter. You plan your move. The wait seems like a lifetime as the pounding of your heart gets louder and louder. The light turns and you hit the throttle, careful not to lose traction. You pull ahead of the competition (although the competition does not know about the race) and you are able to switch lanes in front of him and hit the apex of the freeway on ramp. The big sweeper is testing your ability to keep the car under control yet you hit the freeway at a little faster than the flow of traffic. You switch over to the number two lane in front of a guy in a raised 4X4 and are stuck behind the guy in the Prius trying to get over to the carpool lane. You settle into your lane and the adrenaline rush is subsiding. Suddenly you realize the radio is on and the announcer is trying to sell a male enhancement pill.

You pay no attention to the radio but you love the feeling of driving fast. You want to become a race driver and you found out the SCCA is your gateway to racing immortality.

There are so many things to do. You are new at this and what do you do first? Chances are if you found out about drivers school then you are a member of the SCCA. If not this would be the first step.

Next set aside February 24-26 for driver's school. The San Francisco Region has only one driver's school per year, so don't let your mother-in-law's 50th birthday party supersede your date with racing immortality.

To enter driver's school, you need to enter on MotorsportReg.com and you need to get your Novice Permit from SCCA National (that will include getting a physical and having your doctor fill out the SCCA physical form). All the forms and information are on the drivers school page on www.sfrscca.org.

The driver's gear is the next item that should be addressed. Buying quality driver's gear at a reasonable price will take some shopping. There are lots of local shops that carry the stuff you need. Unless you know exactly your size it is much better to go to a store that has all of the gear in stock so you can try it on. The suit needs to fit loose enough so you can bend over and move your arms freely. Also the suit has to have a fire rating of SFI 3.2A/1 or higher. When picking a helmet make sure it is of the latest SNELL rating (2005 or 2010). Also make sure it fits properly. With the helmet on you should not be able to turn it sideways past your eyes.

After you have all of the gear wear it around the house, and get comfortable in it. Sit in your racecar and practice shifting and turning. Make sure you fasten the belts. You need to be able to operate all of the controls sitting static in the garage. If you cannot operate the controls comfortably here you certainly will not be able to do so while the car is on the track.

The car you choose to go through drivers school can be anything that is legal is an SCCA class. Everyone has a reason for racing the class they choose, so I have no advice to offer in this area. I will tell you that in driver's school you have very little time to work on the car so it needs to be something that is reliable and needs very little prep time between sessions. For this reason, a lot

of people choose to rent cars from one of the rental shops. Make sure the car will pass tech inspection, especially the safety items. The belts need to be up to date, the fire system needs to be charged, and the battery kill switch has to be properly marked, and the brake light needs to work. A good rule of thumb is a clean car has a much easier time passing tech inspection over a car that was just dusted off from the last race without the oil being checked.

A part of drivers school is the classroom session. During these sessions the instructors will cover lots of topics, like flags! Flags in sports car racing are not the same flags used in NASCAR. Spend some time and read the General Competition Rules (GCR) The instructors will also cover racing etiquette, racing the line, and the procedures for entering and exiting the track, among other things. Make sure you pay attention in class because you will get a chance to test your retention skills on the track.

It is now time to go out on the track. Make sure you have all of your gear on (this is where the test wearing our driver's gear comes in handy). Most of the time you will need a crew member to assist you in fastening your belts, don't laugh but you should practice this because the people on grid will check to make sure you have done it right. Next, drive down to grid in a controlled manner and wait for the grid people to release you on the track. Once you are released to go on the track, it is OK to pinch yourself to confirm that you really are about to become a real race car driver.

The first session is usually a follow the instructor session at very slow speeds to make sure you drive the line as the instructor told you. There are observers stationed around the track to make sure you are doing as instructed. The sessions will come fast and often, after each session you will meet with your instructors and discuss the last session. They will also go over what to expect in the following session. Make sure you listen to your instructor and apply the techniques he/she has to offer. Keep an open mind and remember every one of the instructors have a vested interest in making sure you are a competent driver out there (they will be racing with you soon). Before you know it, it will be time to go back out and learn the next lesson. That is why you need a car that needs minimal work between sessions.

Before you know it all of the sessions will be over and you will be standing around talking to the other drivers in your group about the short race you had at the end of the school. If you kept your nose clean (or your car's nose clean) and completed the minimum number of hours you will be issued your novice log book. Now you are just two regional races away from having your regional racing license and who knows, maybe Red Bull Racing will be calling you to replace Sebastian Vettel!!