



Not So Fast

— story by Pat Ho

I didn't start racing until I was in my late 40s. Once I decided to go vintage racing, I found myself moving light speed. I read all of the magazines, I bought the first "dream" car I came across, I went online and bought the "racers" drivers package that was delivered by UPS the following week. I found a vintage race school that was being offered early in the year and decided I would be there come hell or high water.

A month before the school, I started to examine my "dream" car. Two weeks before the school I really got serious, as there were the expected things to be fixed. But I encountered were many unexpected issues, like broken transmission mounts, etc. After a few days' struggle, I took it to a shop to have them do the work. They were booked, but finally gave into my pleading and waving of a handful of bills in front of their noses and agreed to help get me to the school.

The day before, I hooked up the trailer to retrieve my race prepared car, and there was a tire problem on the trailer. Got it fixed, loaded up the car, the driver's gear, spares. I was ready to go.

At the track, things kept moving quickly. I had to register, find a parking spot, unload the trailer, set up the canopy, get the car through tech — all before the first session. Registration went smoothly, my load of friends helped unload the car, and get the pit set up.

Tech was another story. I was asked if I had filled out my tech sheet. I had not. Go back, fill it out, return to the line. When I presented

myself and my car, the first thing the tech inspector asked for was my gear bag, I pulled it from the front seat and it spilled all over, still in the plastic bags it was shipped in. "New, huh?" stated the inspector. He used his pencil to push around the bag of socks, nomex underwear and suit. He then requested that I take my helmet out of the box. "The first thing I would do is make sure everything fits," he said.

I must have looked like a deer in headlights. He then went onto the car, explaining to me that since it was a school, and even street cars were allowed, he would allow my "race prepped" car to run the weekend. He said to bring the car to him after my first session and he would make a list of required fixes and recommendations. I did and it was quite a long list.

After tech, I went directly to the classroom. My confidence in my car had been shaken, I was distracted and really was not paying attention. When it was time to go to the grid, I unwrapped my drivers suit and found it to be much tighter than I had anticipated. I was also uncomfortable with the helmet: it was a little big and kept slipping forward and pushing on my glasses.

I got into the car, an instructor strapped in next to me and we went out in a group for a few laps. The on-track driving was exaggerated, and the instructor was pointing out apexes, braking and turn-in points, shift points, turnouts etc. It was overwhelming. I kept attempting to take a deep breath, but the suit made that a challenge.

I got out of the car a defeated man. My instructor noticed and brought me to his trailer for a chat. For the next hour, he and I talked about vintage racing, what I was hoping to get out of the school, and he solved a few problems. He had an extra drivers suit that actually zipped up without me having to lay down. He added a few pads to my helmet so it no longer slid. We discussed the track and the best ways to get around it, breaking it down corner by corner. When my next session came I was a different driver. I was on my way to being a vintage racer.

By the end of the day, I was exhausted. My pals wanted to party, and there was plenty of that in the pits, but I heeded the advice of those who generously had offered it. I went to the motel early, practiced my heel and toe, and rested.

Sunday, was a full day of instruction, and I was listening, learning and demonstrating new skills. I was hooked on vintage racing. My first actual green flag was a year later. It took me that long to get things right.

I learned a great deal that weekend. I went too fast in making all of the decisions about vintage racing. Hindsight being 20/20, I would have done more research on the "dream" car, which would have saved time and a lot of money. I will never buy a suit or helmet without trying them on. I would start earlier, read more and ask more questions.



courtesy of VSCDA

Drivers school poses a challenge for those who are unprepared.

I also realized that vintage racing would be much harder to get into without the many people who are willing to help. I became quite friendly with the tech guy who wanted to laugh at me but did not. My driver instructor will always be my instructor. I still get information and confirmation from him at the track. I intend to pay forward his efforts with me eventually by becoming an instructor, but for now I volunteer to work the grid on events I am not racing in. I would suggest to anyone getting into vintage racing is slow down, ask questions, go to the events, volunteer and when it all comes together, pay it forward and have a great time.

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