

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Porsche Experience Centre, Silverstone; 'Evolution 911', the Kick Plate, the Ice Hill and more...](#)



Many of us will have been on countless 'driving days' with instructors on hand for guidance. But if something has a Porsche crest on it, well, it should be slightly different. Having had 90 minutes of one-to-one coaching in three different-era 911s, I can't exactly say I am '911-proficient', but I did learn an awful lot about these brilliant cars - in an amazingly short time.

Porsche Cars Great Britain had decided the 'Evolution 911' course was the best way of sampling what was on offer at the Silverstone Porsche Experience Centre, a dedicated track with an on-site, superlative restaurant and fitness centre, set on the outside of Britain's Grand Prix circuit. Visitors can get a fine view of Becketts, the Hangar Straight, Stowe corner and the run up to Abbey bend from the upper terrace.

In fact, I'd first been to the Centre just after it had opened in 2008, and watched a wet British GP from the roof. This afternoon, however, it was sunny skies and an intense programme that involved driving a new, PDK-equipped 911 Carrera S, a 993-series 911 and an early 'G series' 1980s 911.



It's a tough call to cater for the 'let's give dad a treat on his birthday' market (a 'Gift Experience' is £290) as well as appeal to GT3-owning track-day enthusiasts, and amateur racers looking for that last second (the £1645, two-day 'Performance' course from the Porsche Sport Driving School will do that).

My er, 'experience' of the Experience Centre was that the instructor (mine was the ever-patient Mark Burkinshaw) would soon discover exactly what the visitor was looking for, tailoring the exact content – within certain guidelines – to suit. With typical Porsche thoroughness, drivers are briefed on a correct driving position and the simple safety rules of the cunningly designed circuit complex.

Okay, the professional drivers can drive round the track faster than you or me, but unlike many driving days the emphasis isn't on *their* skills, it's on yours. I was soon powering the new car around with some vim, the result being increasing understeer. With attention to the lines, making better use of the throttle (less ON or OFF, and using the full face of the foot on the 'organ pedal' accelerator) this was gradually dialled out, with no drop in pace.



At a more advanced level, the principles of trail braking (carrying speed into a corner while braking) are explained and implemented, as well as where and when to brake, looking 'through' the bend and the correct use of the stability management switches. Snap-oversteer from the iconic tail-engined car? With its massive tyres and sophisticated suspension, a thing of the past... unless you get it wrong in slippery conditions...

... which brings us to the Kick Plate and the Ice Hill with their computer-controlled sprinklers and super-slippery low-grip surface. Approach the Kick Plate at a steady 20mph, and when it activates the rear of the car loses grip, the result being a classic, tank-slapping spin for the length of the soaking wet, 75-metre strip.

The answer is to keep the throttle steady (tricky to start with, I know...) and be prepared to put a LOT of lock on, either way, very quickly, all the time looking ahead in the intended direction of travel. It's not easy but, after just half a dozen attempts, I was getting the hang of it – all in complete safety.



The Ice Hill makes things slightly trickier. There's no Kick Plate but you approach a soaked downhill section of low-grip track and steer an 'S' through water jets, promptly spinning out in the process. As with the Kick Plate, steady throttle, quick reactions and constantly looking ahead is the way to do it. This is, if anything, the more difficult procedure to master. But it could be a real-life situation next winter, and what you learn today could save much crunched metal, and possible personal injury.

Finally, it was time for a few laps of the Low Friction Handling Circuit, composed of a specially formulated Tarmac/polished limestone mix that allows low-speed oversteer slides and safe investigation of extreme throttle on/off, braking and steering inputs.

And then we did it all again in the older 993 and G Series 911s, both cars owned by Porsche Cars Great

Britain and on hand to show how the car has developed over the years. And how to drive them properly, too. The Kick Plate's a little too severe on these older cars, but we do all the circuit work, including the Low Friction Handling Circuit and the Ice Hill which is fiendishly difficult in the 993; although I'll put that down to a set of tired Michelins.



The quirky driving position, big steering wheels and, in the case of the G Series, cranked gearlever and stiff gearchange show just how far Porsche has come with its 997-model 911, a version that will be replaced in the next few months. However, taking horsepower, improved ergonomics and refinement out of the equation, you get as satisfying a driving experience from the older cars as you do in one of the latest, 188mph, circa £80k GTs.

And by spending a few bob on some driving tips by a real expert (Mark was extremely good; lucid, patient and forbearing) you will unleash both your, and the car's potential. I cannot recommend this highly enough.

For further information on the Porsche Experience Centre, see www.porsche.com/silverstone.

N.B. All buyers placing a deposit on a new Porsche get a half-day driving experience in the model they have chosen. This can either be taken before delivery in a car provided by the Porsche Experience Centre, or after delivery, using their own car.

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