

Pass master

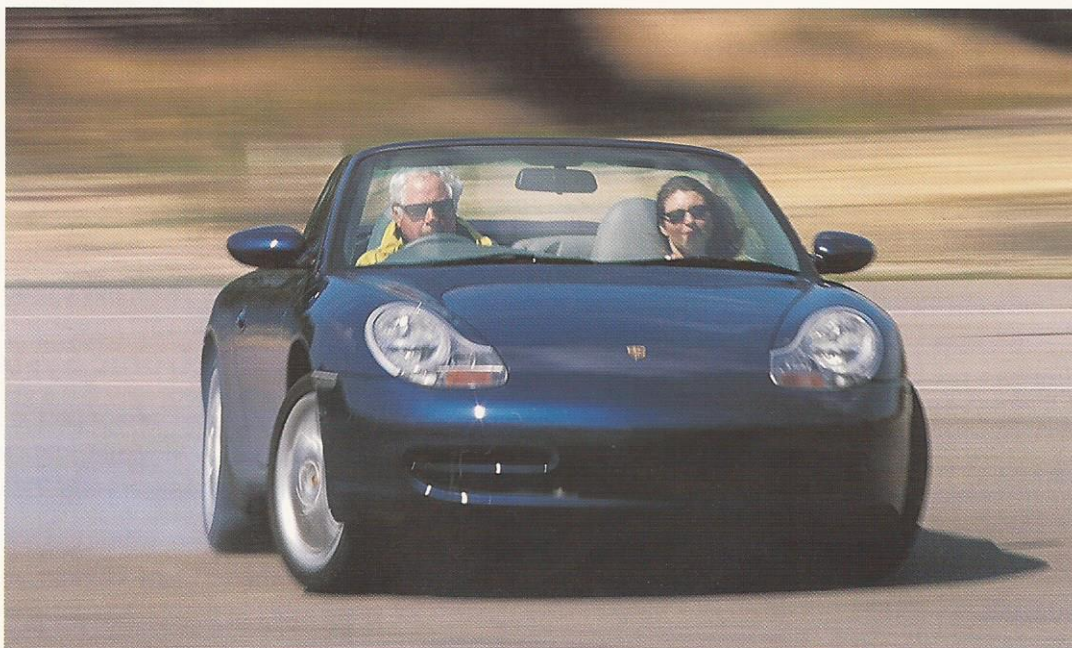
How to drive effectively and efficiently up towards the limits of adhesion, whether on road or track, has always been something of an unexplained art. Andrew Dent takes a lesson from a man who knows the score.

Sure, there are books on technique, some of them by good drivers who were poor writers, and some by good writers who weren't much cop at driving. Indeed, until the Circuit Guide series came along in 1995, no-one had even put the idea of documenting the racing line on circuits into practice.

A few circuit drivers have seen the need for tuition or coaching, even some of the greats, but many more down the years have subscribed to the view that, if you have to be told, then you probably haven't got the latent ability to be good enough. The general view among road drivers is that continuing education is unnecessary, particularly as almost all drivers since the war have had some sort of driving tuition in their lives in order simply to pass the driving test. Anyway, I can drive, can't I? Do it every day.

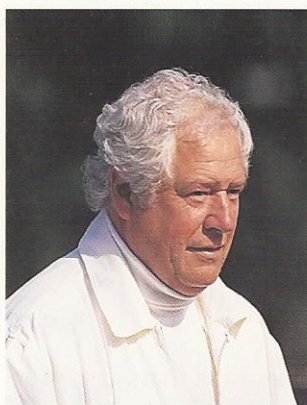
To call this merely misguided is to understate the case. Driving is a skill like most others that needs constant honing, and bad habits creep in all too easily. The general standard of driving on Britain's roads, while better than that in many European countries, is low, and that on track is often not much better. Witness the amount of track day time that is wasted while errant participants are hauled out of gravel traps.

Enter Bernard Aubry of Masterclass, a veritable guru of the art and science of conducting a motor car. I recently spent the day driving, and being driven by, Bernard, and although I have had coaching in the past and knew approximately what to expect, I was left in awe of his



Bernard instils confidence from the word go

abilities as an instructor. This man can read the blacktop like a book, and if only ten percent of his knowledge rubs off, it will make you a far better driver as a result.



Bernard Aubry

We spent the morning at the Military Test Track at Chobham, starting on the circular pan where *Autocar* and *Driven* do their handling tests. Bernard is the antithesis of the frustrated racing driver turned instructor. Vastly experienced but softly spoken, he has been in the instruction business in one form or another for longer than some of his pupils have been alive. He instils confidence from the word go, whether you have plenty of track experience or are just starting out. Likewise his demonstrations are a revelation, whether of the effects of understeer (at 25mph!) or of Vic Elford's theory that connects throttle and steering inputs directly by an imaginary piece of string. Once on the outer loop, Bernard had me pedalling his Porsche Boxster up towards the limits of adhesion, on a track with run-off that consists mainly of

pine trees and the odd bit of military hardware. But his forte is balance, smoothness and car control, skills that are just as important on the road, which is where we went next. This was the bit I was really looking forward to.

Bernard took the wheel of my Mercedes C-class first and we set course from Surrey towards rural Oxfordshire. He drove efficiently and smoothly, respecting other road users and speed limits and yet making fast progress whenever possible. As he drove, he talked. Not just about driving the car, but about the other drivers around us. What they were doing, and even what they were going to do next. The man is a veritable futurologist. I had been told before that, with experience, you can read the intentions of the driver in front from the back of his head.

Bernard is so good, it would seem he could do it with his eyes closed. After the fifth car in a row had done what he said it would, he went as far as to explain some of his driver forecasting techniques. That alone was worth the day. His general observation is astounding, too. He actually looks at road signs, something I had become terribly idle about - and demonstrates that

there is plenty to be learnt from them. He spots dustbins in the road, and predicts a dustcart; lo and behold, it appears.

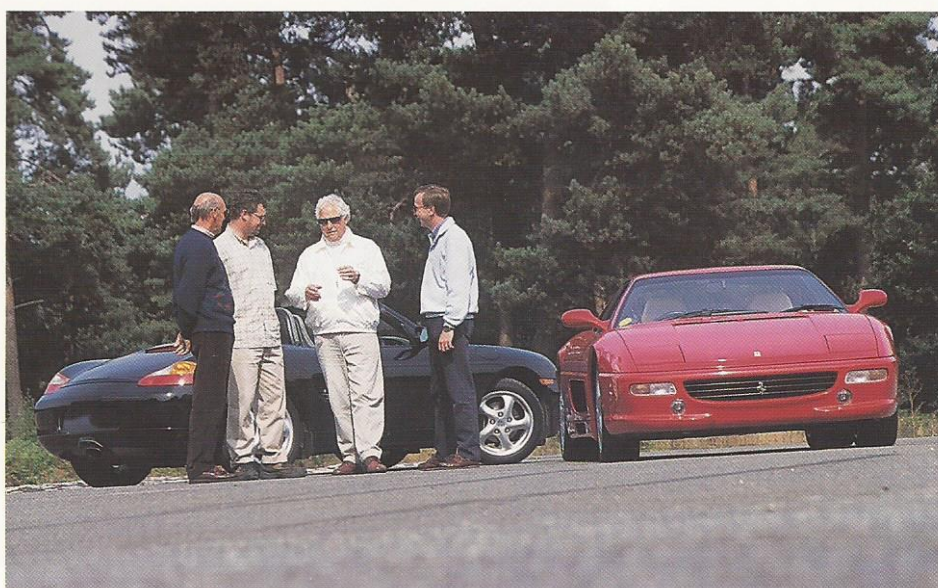
Bernard has been pictured as a younger version of Peter Ustinov, but he struck me as driving's Inspector Morse. Numbering English & Russian classical music, birdlife (of both kinds!) and gliding among his interests, he lives alone, having tried marriage and given it best, and describes himself as a hermit. This point is made to demonstrate that road driving is best done in a bubble of space you create yourself, but I think he protests too much, as he has many friends both within and without the driving business. Richard Attwood, former Le Mans winner from the glory days, is long-time collaborator, and now a full time member of the Masterclass team. Bernard himself often drives with other high performance instructors, and indeed some of today's big names in driver coaching learnt much of what they know from him. He has also been retained by Porsche for many years to prevent new owners of 911s and the like from killing themselves through encountering unexpected terminal oversteer on their first fast run down a damp and

leaf-strewn country road.

After a relaxed lunch in an Oxfordshire pub came my own opportunity to drive, and I confess to having felt a little apprehensive, since I imagined a man of Bernard's undoubted skills might be a little derisive of my amateur efforts. I asked him to be as critical as he wished - it seems all customers say that, but not all of them mean it. In fact, I need not have worried. Bernard's own effortless driving style had already imparted itself to the point that I immediately felt comfortable with him in the passenger seat. He appeared not to be instructing at all in the conventional sense, and yet the salient points that he got across to me are still with me many days later; something which underlines his subtle communication skills. We searched for

those fast A and B roads where his techniques are best illustrated, and as we drove, I really began to enjoy myself.

Having undergone some previous fast road tuition I was already leaving a fair amount of road space in front of me, but Bernard wanted more still, for visibility and reaction times.



Bernard appears not to be instructing at all in the conventional sense

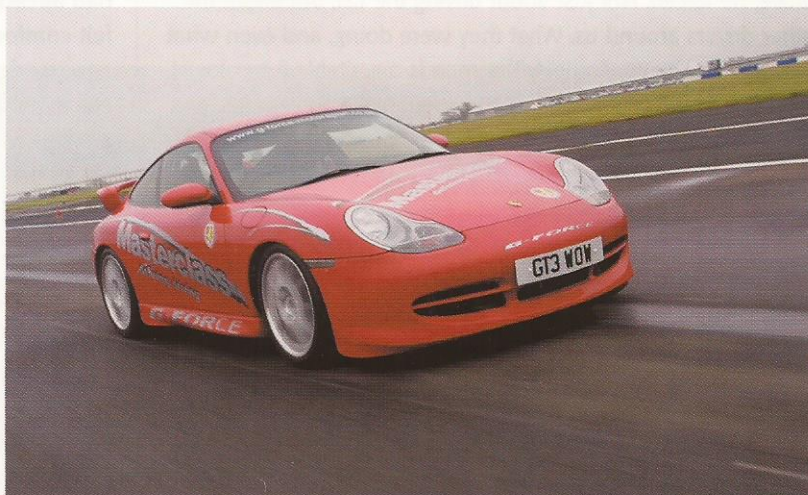
He has a flexible approach which delighted me, since as a natural maverick I hate being told that I should *never* do something like trim the corner when turning right into a side road. Bernard's idea of a natural pace through built-up areas holds good water, but once on an empty open road he is happy to let the speed build. Many of the roads we drove on that afternoon happened to be familiar to me, which I thought might have defeated the learning process, but I still benefited from Bernard's new perspective. Overtaking becomes a carefully planned and executed excursion to the right hand side of the road, and progress is never rushed, just smooth and rapid. At one point Bernard gave me his own style of running commentary, and it became clear that while including the foreground and periphery of vision, he was also observing things quite a bit further down the road than my eyes were resting on at any given moment.

Overall, progress is rapid and satisfying without any of those fraught or sweaty moments of youth. You arrive at your destination only seconds later than you would have done by going crazy fast and a good deal fresher and more

relaxed – this is handy if it's a difficult meeting several hundred miles from home. And you won't have upset dozens of other people en route; perhaps just one or two of those cusses who heartily dislike ever being overtaken. There is a point here, which is that the more power you have at your disposal (or at least, overtaking ability, which can mean torque), the easier it is to put Bernard's ideas into practice. Driving a slow car can become all about conserving momentum – a different game entirely. The more you are able to minimise time on the offside when overtaking, the less of a hardship it seems to be to hang right back while waiting for the moment to arise. Power also eases the clean break one sometimes needs to get past those maddening individuals who accelerate when they see in their mirrors that you are making your move. But as Bernard would say, these guys (and sadly, they are usually men) can sometimes be better controlled if you leave them in front of you – another lesson I learned that day.

If any of the above has rung a bell with you, don't hesitate to give Masterclass a call. You won't regret it, and it may just lengthen your life,

whether by lowering the stress incurred while you drive or simply by enabling you to avoid accidents. As someone fast approaching my millionth road mile in around 30 years' driving, I reckon Bernard Aubry may have given me some tools to enable me to see out my second million. And that makes time with him a great deal more than just a fun day out. For more information about Masterclass, call G-Force Motorsport on 01296 434084.



It's all about swift, smooth but safe progress

Serving Bucks, Beds, Herts and Oxon...

From the very latest Bosch KTS 500 diagnostics, service and upgrades for 996 & Boxsters, to budget work on earlier 911 and water-cooled Porsche, G-Force provides an unparalleled range of services.

Whatever you require, rest assured you will receive classic standards of personal service and attention to detail that is second-to-none.

As usual, advice is free and the coffee is always on, so check us out on our website or call
01296 434084

G-Force Motorsport Limited, Aylesbury, Bucks. HP19 3TE



www.g-force-motorsport.co.uk

G-FORCE

Attn: Team Managers. We can find your drivers 2 seconds a lap! Guaranteed!

G-Force can provide interpreted racecar engineering solutions from advanced data acquisition and individual driver coaching facilities.

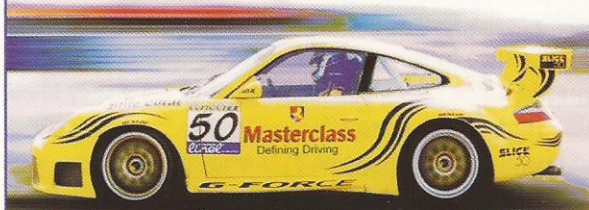
Upgrade kits for cars and drivers! Maximize your race-winning potential via Motec and Masterclass!

From Lydden Hill to Le Mans, whatever your level, we can find you those vital extra seconds.

★ **Motec and engine upgrade kits for GT3R/RS** available now! Download Motec sample software from the G-Force website now (Daytona/Molem)!

Check us out, visit our our website now, or call
01296 434084

G-Force Motorsport Limited, Aylesbury, Bucks. HP19 3TE



www.g-force-motorsport.co.uk

G-FORCE