IRP - Identify your Reference Points

A young driver gets just one opportunity to make a good first impression. What type of preparations should a driver therefore make immediately before hand and even in the years before that opportunity arrives?

If a driver lives by the mantra that he should *concentrate on the process and NOT the result* how would he use that foundation in a significant test. The phrase *"concentrate on the process and not the result"* means that instead of driving hard to get a fast lap time, you simply do all the right things and the lap time is a bi-product of those correct actions.

One of the first basic golden rules doing things right, and therefore driving fast, is what I call - *IRP* – Identify you Reference Points. *IRP* is the heart and soul of going fast in a controlled manner and getting up to speed fast. Every driver both young and old should have *IRP* written on their steering wheel before they venture out on to a new track as a reminder and to create the discipline. Every Dad, tuner, engineer or crew chief should be a part of creating this discipline for a driver.

The key reference points are the corner braking points, turn in points and general reference points that can be used to line up your car/kart for a particular corner. The reference point can be almost anything that you can identify; a curb, a line in the road, a painted mark somewhere, a piece of grass, a surface change, anything that you can pick out when driving that you can refer to before you hit the brakes.

When you identify your reference point at a particular corner (which many drivers choose when they do their track walk) it becomes your initial anchor for that corner. When you arrive at the reference point at high speed and you hit the brakes, you can judge pretty quickly the ability of the car to make it through the corner while braking at that particular point. If you can make it through easily, you begin to move the point closer to the corner.

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When using a particular reference point you should have the flexibility to decide whether you need to brake before the point, on the point or just after the point. If none of these points puts the car in a comfort zone as it gets close to the limit, then a new reference point may need to be chosen.

The magic of *IRP* is that it can actually protect the driver by providing him with a stable platform of reference points that if used properly can help the driver deliver consistent lap times. Just think if a driver brakes in the same place at each corner on every lap, with the same amount of tire grip and downforce he would do the same lap time every time. When lap times vary it can mean that the reference points are varying during the lap (in addition to varying fuel loads and tire degradation). If a driver goes off the road, it usually means that he missed his reference point (or maybe didn't have one?). If a driver misses his braking point, it will suddenly activate a host of explosives actions that are naturally triggered as a protection mechanism to attempt to save the car.

A missed reference point can flat spot a tire because the driver is attempting to stop the car in a distance shorter than the car can physically or mechanically stop in. It can cause a missed down shift because the driver is in scramble mode and attempting to downshift faster than normal. It can cause a missed apex and depending on the speed being carried, can lead to the car leaving the road with unknown consequences. *IRP* also provides the easiest way for a driver to get his all important rhythm back after he makes a mistake (which all drivers do). I very often encourage a driver to talk (out loud in their helmet) themselves back into a rythm after some form of disruption.

Think of *IRP* as being the foundation of a driver's house. When the foundation is solid, the rest of the house can be built on it. If the foundation is shaky, there is a very real possibility that the rest of the house will also be shaky. This might seem a very simple starting point but my experience has shown me that drivers even at the top of their profession struggle with this basic principle when it was not instilled as part of their Race discipline at a younger age.

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