



**The 007 Experience: Shaken, Not Stirred  
by John Gardner**

“This,” I thought as I was looking out the passenger window at the section of racetrack that was supposed to be outside my windshield, “is not a good thing.”

There I was, minding my own business, trying to hustle a heavy police-package Chevy Caprice equipped with a Corvette LT1 V8 around the BeaveRun Motorsport Complex’s 1.53-mile racetrack, when I was rammed into from behind going into the uphill-hairpin Turn 10. The impact turned me completely sideways, created the above-mentioned moment and forced me to employ some of the training I had received earlier that day.

So I counter-steered into the skid, dropped the hammer, powered the big Caprice into its proper trajectory and continued on my intended lap. No muss, no fuss.

Sounds like something out of a NASCAR race, right? It’s not.

What it is, is just one moment in a long day of on-track mayhem known as The 007 Experience, one of the programs offered by the BeaveRun Driving Academy (BRDA).

BRDA has been an integral part of the BeaveRun Motorsports Complex, located between Pittsburgh, Pa., and Cleveland, Ohio, since the facility opened three years ago. The Academy offers a variety of training programs, ranging from basic highway safety to very specialized police and security curricula. The 007 Experience was developed to give John Q. Public the chance to experience some of the same training that security agents receive before shipping off to dangerous overseas assignments to transport diplomats and contractors.

What they offer is simply unavailable to the general public in any other driving school. The 007 Experience starts out with basic car-control skills, but moves on to such things as barricade breaching, reverse 180s and the PIT (Precision Immobilization Technique) Maneuver.

My day began with a brief classroom session conducted by BeaveRun co-founder Tim Silbaugh that included a thumbnail preview of the day’s upcoming agenda and a basic discussion of vehicle dynamics and proper driving technique.

The 12 students were split into four teams, each assigned to a Caprice with an instructor. My instructor, Jon Gray, is a longtime SCCA racer who now enjoys teaching others how to go fast safely. Our first on-track assignment was to master threshold braking, applying maximum braking pressure without locking up the wheels. Then we had to navigate a set of cones. Pretty basic stuff. At one point, though, the instructor suddenly grabbed the wheel and pitched us off-course into the grass, and my teammate had to get us back under control and back onto the track. Just a taste of things to come.

Then it was back to the classroom for a second vehicle dynamics lecture, this time on the various types of skids and how to deal with them.

We were soon back in the Caprice, headed for BeaveRun's six-acre Vehicle Dynamics Area to play on the skidpad. However, the skidpad was covered in sand, and we were forbidden to use the pedals. The instructor would handle that part; all we had to do was steer. And the steering was going well enough until Jon hammered the throttle, kicking the big Caprice sideways. We learned quickly how to counter-steer to correct the oversteer condition, and how to unwind the wheel to counter understeer. As soon as we could get it gathered up, he'd stomp the gas again and off we'd go. With the engine screaming and the sand flying and with hands a-blur on the wheel, this was big-time fun!

After another brief classroom session, we returned to the racetrack to learn about progressive braking in corners and the "swerve and avoid" maneuver. We started out having to panic-brake in corners, both uphill and downhill, learning how to steer and modulate the brakes in order to maintain control while maximizing the stopping power. The "swerve and avoid" drill involved approaching a cone at ever increasing speed, with the instructor saying "left" or "right" at the last second. The driver has to brake, steer around the cone and come to a stop in a box of cones behind the avoided cone, all without locking the brakes. It's easier said than done, and tricky to master (at least for me!).

All of these preliminary lessons were building up to the big pre-lunch session. We returned to the classroom to prepare ourselves for "Tech Driving," which is basically lapping the track as fast as possible. We were instructed on the proper line around the track, entry, apex and exit points for the corners, and how to maintain momentum. Then it was back to the track for more high-speed fun. As someone who has attended a couple of racing schools, this was more familiar ground for me. But the formula cars and sports cars in which I'd been schooled in the past were far different beasts than the big Caprice, even with its Bilstein shocks. It was a blast hustling the big sedan around the track, but what was to come next added even more excitement.

Once all of the students in each car had their turn at lapping the track, a new exercise was introduced. This was, appropriately, called "Pressure." Remember the moment at the beginning of this article? That's "Pressure." A student runs laps at top speed on the track, while an instructor in a following car tried to harass, hit and generally distract him or her. The following instructor bobs, weaves, taps and (in my case) hits in order to accomplish his goal. The drill is intended to illustrate being chased by bad guys, but it's eerily similar to the last lap in a NASCAR race at Watkins Glen or Infineon Raceway. When I got hit in Turn 10 and pitched sideways and managed to recover from the spin, the feeling of accomplishment was very satisfying. After we stopped to change drivers, I turned and applauded the instructor who hit me, and he gave me a big thumbs-up. Very cool.

After our catered lunch, the fun ratcheted up another few notches.

When's the last time you had to contend with the sticky problem of getting through a roadblock, with a vehicle intentionally placed across the road in front of you? That's what I thought. It could happen, though. And the good folks at The 007 Experience are considerate enough to prepare you for that eventuality in their very thorough training. For this exercise, called "barricade breaching," the Caprices are parked (since they have to be used again), and students are equipped with cars that could politely be called "beaters." They run, but for how long is a question. The instructors show you exactly where to hit the offending roadblock car, and with which part of your car to hit, in order to make the roadblock car pivot nicely out of the way and no longer impede your progress. Each student gets a few passes, and you'd be surprised how many times you can knock a stationary car completely sideways until your car begins to leak vital fluids. (By my unofficial survey, the answer is six. Luckily, BRDA is adequately supplied with replacements.)

After the barricade breaching instruction came one of the things I was most looking forward to. How many times have you been watching a movie or television show where the hero (or villain, as the case may be) backs up his car at high speed, spins around and takes off in a forward direction, all in the same lane and in one smooth motion? This is usually followed by the thought, "Man, that looks like fun! Wish I knew how to do that." The 007 Experience will teach you exactly how to do that. The maneuver is called "The Reverse 180." We went back out on the racetrack in the Caprices, and had this amazing trick demonstrated to us. Then it was our turn. It turned out to be astonishingly easy to do. This was the one exercise we did during the day that made me laugh out loud every time. I could have spent all day doing Reverse 180s, but it's a little tough on transmissions and equilibriums after awhile.

The last scheduled exercise of the day required some more classroom time, as it is one of the most complex. The maneuver in question is called the "Precision Immobilization Technique," or PIT. The name may be unfamiliar to you, but the tactic isn't, if you've ever watched "World's Greatest Police Chases" or programs of that ilk. You've seen instances where the police car closes up on the rear-quarter of the bad guys' car, nudges gently into the rear fender and send the baddies spinning off the road. That's the PIT. For this training, we were sent back onto the racetrack driving beaters, and were shown exactly how to PIT a car. Each student got three or four chances to perform the trick, and also had it done to them. It's just amazing watching a car spin away in front of you, and once a following car gets into position and begins to PIT you, there's nothing you can do. There are, however, things you can do to prevent being PITted, and we were instructed in this technique as well. One thing, though: If you wind up on one of those TV shows, the nice instructors at BRDA would just as soon you didn't attribute your skills to them on camera.

As the day drew to a close, we were promised a "surprise." And that is what we got. The BRDA staff had concocted a contest for our four teams that comprised many of the skills we had learned during the day, and some we hadn't. Here's how it worked: Each team began from a standing start in a Caprice, driving at top speed about a half-mile down the track, where we were required to stop in a cone-marked box. We then jumped from the car and ran to a nearby beater, on top of which were positioned three paint-ball guns. At that moment, an SUV crossed our path on a gravel cross-over road that divides the track, and we were instructed to fire at the vehicle, with

varying points scored depending on the passenger-side window we hit (five for the front window, three for the middle, one for the back). Then it was back in the car (changing drivers), racing down the track to another stop, then driving in reverse around a corner and through a set of cones. We then had to change directions and head forward, stopping in another box. We repeated the paint-ball shooting exercise, then got back in the car (changing drivers again), and raced around the track, having to navigate another set of cones, and in the final corner instructors jumped out of the bushes and shot us with paint-ball guns! Then it was back to the start-finish line. Your overall lap time was devised by taking your raw time and subtracting seconds based on your shooting acumen. My team would have done better, except that a Driver Who Shall Remain Nameless managed to spin off into the grass while trying to drive backwards quickly and killed our lap time. (Sorry, guys!)

The day ended with much laughter, back-slapping and high fives, and while the BRDA staff were busy cleaning paint-ball hits off the Caprices, the students all received a signed certificate of accomplishment and another unique memento: an engraved martini glass.

As I sit at my computer now and contemplate my day at The 007 Experience, my engraved martini glass glistening on a nearby shelf, it occurs to me even though I am now thoroughly trained in many of the skills required to be one of those guys you see in the movies and on TV doing amazing things with cars, usually with beautiful ladies and other cool accountrements, I probably shouldn't hold my breath waiting for the phone to ring with that exotic assignment to be Mr. Secret Agent Guy. However, I can take lots of satisfaction in knowing that I had an incredible amount of fun and learned a lot about car control, not to mention a few nifty tricks, that I didn't know before.

If you want the ultimate in driving excitement, and to spend a day making cars do things you never thought you'd be able to, The 007 Experience is just the ticket. There are lots of driving schools out there, but there is nowhere else you can get this kind of specialized training. It would also make a great gift for that car-crazy guy or gal "who has everything," or a very unique group outing for a club or company. The facility is first-class, the instructors are friendly, patient and reassuring, and you can combine your day at BeaveRun with an evening out in nearby Pittsburgh, which has transformed itself from its smoky, industrial past into a shining example of urban redevelopment, with outstanding restaurants, nightlife and sports facilities.

At \$995, The 007 Experience is not cheap, but you definitely get your money's worth and a day chock-full of four-wheeled fun and excitement. Dates for 2006 will be May 5, May 30, July 6, August 21 and September 11. If you're interested, know someone who is or want to gift someone with a day they'll never forget, it is recommended to make reservations early. For more information, call the BeaveRun Motorsports Complex at (724) 535-1000 or visit their website at [www.beaverun.com](http://www.beaverun.com).