

I Found the Color of Satisfaction

Brian Baker

At some point in our lives, we begin to look for a greater sense of satisfaction. This satisfaction comes in as many forms and levels as there are individuals, which is part of what makes life so darn interesting. As we age, our definition of what is fun or satisfying changes and matures. I know plenty of folks that believe satisfaction comes from great sums of wealth, and others that have much less complicated needs and are satisfied with less money. Unfortunately, in our society, a little money helps when you have an expensive hobby like a love of cars but in the end it's the decisions you make along the way that enable you to find satisfaction.

Enough of the philosophy, I found the key to satisfaction. It's red and only comes with a Boss 302. The better news is this red key opens other doors to satisfaction.



The silver key is the street key. The red key changes over 600 engine and drivetrain parameters and prepares the car for track use.

May 14, 2012 the same day my son turned 27, I took delivery of my 2013 School Bus Yellow Mustang Boss 302. I'll try not to bore you with all the cool stuff about this car; you can read about these awesome cars yourself online. What I do want to talk about is one very cool standard feature every 2012 or 2013 Boss 302 comes with. A feature you can ONLY get on a Boss 302; the Boss 302 Track Attack program at Miller Motorsports Park ("MMP") in Tooele, Utah.

After reading lots of posts about how cool this one day driving instruction program is, I signed up as soon as I could, fearing the Track Attack would only last 1 year.

Because of the accelerated release of the 2013 Boss, I got my name in for the school the day after I took delivery. The October 30, 2012 class was open, I signed up. Recall I said the school is a feature on the car? That means it's included in the price of the car! No charge. I can afford free!



My wife Amy reminds me often that she owns 50% of the Boss and takes every opportunity to use up her 50% and drive it hard. So as any good husband would do that is lucky enough to have a wife that appreciates fast cars, I asked if she wanted to take advantage of the guest slot each Boss owner gets. She took the bait and I signed her up for the guest program. The guest program is done alongside the Boss cars in track prepared Mustang GT's with the same suspension and brakes as the Boss along with a cage and a 4.6L instead of the 5.0 Coyote. Also, when taking the one day class, you can upgrade to a second day of instruction in the Mustang FR500S Race Car. This qualifies as the first step in getting a NASA driving license. This second day is a mere \$995 plus the \$400 upgrade to the FR500S. These are spec cars built by Ford from about '06 to '08 for what was the Miller Cup Series. Now racers use them in NASA races across the US. Miller has about 50 of these cars for use in their training programs.



Ford Mustang FR500S at Speed on MMP's very fast West Course. Day two class for me.

Utah is a clean and beautiful state. Tooele, (the locals pronounce it to-willa) just 30 minutes west of Salt Lake City is no exception. Surrounded by snow-capped mountains, this arid plane with mild elevation changes

is the perfect spot for a racetrack. Opened in 2006 by Larry Miller, this world class facility has something to offer every gear head. An off-road track where the Lucas Oil Off-Road Trucks series is run, a rock climbing course where they offer a Ford Raptor program similar to the Boss program, a cart track, no less than four road course configurations and finally a couple hundred garage bays leased by race teams and other related shops all on 500 acres.



Larry Miller even had the wisdom to offer space in the three story business offices to the small city of Tooele to use as city HQ when he was building the facility. So it's also City Hall for Tooele.

The Evening Before Day One. We arrived for the Boss owner's reception October 29, the evening before our big day. The weather was perfect, lows in the 40's, high around 70 and not a cloud in the sky. Amy and I arrived a couple hours before the six pm start of the reception to have time to explore the museum. Hands down, for a Mustang / Ford fan, this is a must see. While it's relatively small with about 25 cars, you can spend hours soaking up the deep history of these famous cars.



The newest edition to the museum is the camera car driven by Steve McQueen in the 1971 movie LeMan's. The Miller family recently paid \$11 million for that one alone.



Bill Reinhart

Bill Reinhart is the lucky caretaker of the museum in addition to being one of the instructors at MMP. His history includes racing bikes with Steve McQueen back in the day. A wealth of knowledge, he blew our group away sharing a detailed history of the museum cars down to their serial numbers and why each one is significant. I wish Bill had more time to spend with our class of 14. There is so much to learn from him. But not this time, he was off to SEMA to give the press and dignitaries high performance rides in cool Fords the rest of the week. I only wonder if he was going to drive the 2013 School Bus Yellow Boss marketing car to

Vegas for SEMA. Bill said it already has over 12K miles on it. It's a terrible job, but someone has to do it!



MMP's 2013 Boss Marketing Car

During the reception in the museum, we enjoyed dinner with several of the instructors, vintage racing videos and some lively conversation learning what each participant owns, their driving experience and getting to know one another. Early to bed that night, we had to be back ready to suit up and learn at 7:30 the next morning.

Day One – Sweaty Palms. While I've had some experience racing dirt bikes, go-carts, drag racing and several open track events including competing in the Optima Batteries Invitational (Speed TV), I have never had any formal driver training. Amy, on the other hand, has no performance driving experience or professional training. The prerequisites for the class are simple. You must own a 2012 or 2013 Boss 302 (or be the guest of an owner), a valid driver's license and an ability to row through the gears.

In addition to fresh coffee, juice and breakfast snacks, waiting our arrival in the classroom is a personalized folder for notes including track layouts to study and a name tag. Six instructors are also waiting to greet us. We start promptly at 8:00. A welcome video from the three engineers responsible for the new Boss program get us started and encourage us. Their message is clear; The Boss Mustangs were built to drive...on the race track. They expect us to do just that taking full advantage of the cars this in this class. I cannot wait!

A session on driving basics get us started. Our instructors begin by explaining the basics from seating position to how to hold the wheel and manage steering inputs. At first I think this might be a little

elementary but I am wrong...again. This review of the basics is designed to establish the ground rules for driving at speed in a properly prepared car on a proper race course. Lesson learned.

Surrounded by Professionals. Our instructors were the consummate professionals, each with his or her own unique credentials. They bring real racing experience and insights and are not shy about sharing it with you. The level of and detail to their experience is humbling. I'll realize that even more clearly later as I sample their driving.



My Boss 302 School Ride

This day our instructors include: Johnny Kanavas, Johnathon Start, Ronnie Swyers, Donnie Edwards, Tyler Dahl and David Andahl. These guys are not household names but each has impressive credentials. Plus they are each down to earth easy going guys.

After less than an hour in the classroom, we get fitted for driving suits, helmets and load in vans up to head over to the garage and our Boss 302's; with each of our names on the windshield, waiting for us. Professionally prepared, roll cage, 4 point harnesses, and full of fuel, these cars are ready to rock and roll. Fire them up boys and girl, it's time to hit the track for some lead follow to learn the racing line on the East track.



The fourteen of us head out onto the track in several groups of three or four split up and follow an instructor car. Two laps at low speeds to get us all acquainted with the track follow. The East track is 15 turns and 2.2 miles with names for sections like Agony, Satisfaction, and Attitude. MMP is billed as the safest racecourse in the US but the East course is the most technical we are told. Even at slow speeds listening to the Boss side exhaust talk to you is a rush. A Boss 302 on a track...I must be dreaming. Back to class, this time in the garage classroom so the instructors can fuss at us and debrief. Our instructors politely tell us to follow them. "Snow tracks" they say. "Trust us, we know how to get around this place. You may not think the lines we take at slow speeds it will once you are up to speed." We'll see later how important those instructions really are. The remainder of the hour is used to discuss in detail the attributes of each corner. How to get in, get out and go fast exploring on a whiteboard, every turn and elevation change. Buckle up and head back out to the track for more lead follow and to stop and walk sections of the track dissecting every nuance was next.

It's all of 9:30 now and the class is split in two. Five of us head back out on track, Amy is included in my group while the other half heads to the skid car. We do four much faster laps now. At this point, the track is beginning to become familiar. I use the time to also practice my heel – toe technique and listen to the side pipes the Red Key or Track Key enables on this trip out. The Boss comes to life. Back to the garage now so we can head over to the skid car.

Jonathan tells me the skid car, a Ford 500 sedan, is one of the most expensive (non- museum) cars at the facility. It is set up with hydraulically controlled sub-frame and out-riggers that adjust the weight and contact patch each wheel of the car carries. They have this front wheel drive car set up so it drives like a rear wheel car with over-steer on slush. Not ice, not snow. Slush. It's amazing technology. I want one for Christmas. Ladies first; Amy climbs behind the wheel. We are asked to navigate a small and simple autocross course designed to give drivers a feel for over-steer and how to correct and drive through it. Amy

promptly spins the car. What fun! Then in less than a lap, she quickly gets the hang of it, drifting the car, at a mere 15 mph around the course. Every single driver in our car, including me, spun it on the first lap! Jonathan, our instructor, could control the hydraulics at the touch of a button at all times. I think he "allowed" us all to spin on purpose to humble us. He denied it but I don't believe him. He insistently helped us work on our "eyes up" technique and steering input habits. "Wheel shuffle, no overhand moves" he encourages. It worked, we all feel sufficiently warned of over-steer and car control when we complete this very cool class but are also much more confident with that sideways feeling. Help me out here would you Santa? I need one of those to play with.



A Boss 302 Sneaking up on Amy as she shows off the stylish "three sizes fit most" driving suit.

No High Heels Allowed. After another classroom session to learn the proper heel-toe technique, it's back in the cars. A section of the facility has been set up in a triangular course and instructors are positioned at each corner with radio's. Their position allows them to listen to the heel toe downshift of each driver as they approach each corner and then coach with instant feedback. So what is heel toe shifting? Since there are three pedals in these six speed cars and we only have two feet, one of our feet has to operate two pedals. When driving at speed approaching a corner, you want to get your braking done before the turn-in in order to maximize traction. As you are braking you need to also

be prepared for the correct gear once you are slowed for the corner. If you were simply to down shift and let out the clutch, engine braking would cause the rear wheels to go slower than the speed of the car causing a loss of traction and upsetting the balance not to mention potentially over revving the engine. By revving while down shifting so engine braking does not happen when you let the clutch out in a lower gear, you slow the car with only the brakes while also preparing for the correct gear in the corner. Proper heel toe technique involves using the ball of your right foot on the brake pedal and while braking, rolling your heel to the right over the accelerator and blipping the throttle to rev the engine as you downshift. Then once the lower gear is selected, the braking is completed by rolling your heel back over the brake pedal as you smoothly engage the clutch again. If you need to slow more than just one gear change, the process must be repeated. A smooth and accurate heel toe maneuver will reward you with a rapid and smooth corner transition and exit. Plus it's a riot to listen to as you come off of a 120mph straight and heel toe down to third for a 70 mph corner. It makes you feel like a hero to execute that kind of car control once you learn it.

Tie it all together. After nice lunch back in the museum, we were cut loose to get some track time under our belts with instructors leading, following and coaching. 20 minute sessions were broken up with more technique refinement and feedback in the classroom. At some point someone in our group asked why the 20 minute blocks of track time? The instructor team revealed that as a result of driving school experience from across the industry, they determined that is the ideal timing. Any more at this level of experience starts to cause mistakes from fatigue and allows bad habits to form.

The last ride of the day was with an instructor. Now I know why they saved that for last. These guys were talented and fast. Had we ridden with them earlier in the day and experienced what fast really feels like,

some may have pushed too hard and, not having enough car control experience, got themselves into trouble. What was amazing is how much I learned from the right seat during this ride. These pros are smooth, calm and consistent. While I "generally" followed their line when I drove, their minor line differences allowed for so much more speed. Combined with what seemed like buttery smooth braking, shifting and steering inputs, these guys allowed the car to do what they wanted. The biggest lesson I learned was a fast lap is a boring lap and a slow lap is an exciting lap - likely due to mistakes.

Reward. As we all came down from the adrenaline rush of riding with the pro's, we were hauled back to the museum classroom for the graduation ceremony and gifts. One of the gifts was an ultra-cool trophy consisting of a chrome base and a Boss 302 rod and piston assembly straight off the assembly line. We also get T-shirts and a pair of G-Force driving gloves. Thank you Ford and MMP for such a well-run program!

All in all it was an unforgettable day that I would highly recommend for anyone who likes anything about cars. But wait, it only comes with a Boss 302 right? Yes and no. MMP offers several driving schools all featuring track prepared Mustangs you can learn the same lessons with. Only Boss owners get to drive a Boss. Amy was so smitten with the whole experience in her track prepared GT, she announced to me during dinner afterwards that she wants a track car to go play with. For a girl that was not excited about taking a driving school, that is evidence of how much fun and adrenaline inducing finding the right satisfaction can provide! Go do it!

