

Winter DE Season

Text and images by Niket Anjaria, of VR Motion Labs and Justin Becker, owner of South Shore Autoworks

September's DE season finale at Palmer featured a pretty impressive turnout - Paddocks were packed, garage bays booked out, and the Saturday social was a blast as always. It was great to see all the familiar faces once again and talk about all the track adventures throughout the year.

Perhaps a more sombre topic on everybody's mind was the fact that it would soon be time to do that last oil change, bring out the car covers, prep that garage floor, and put the toys away until Spring which, based on earlier this year, will arrive whenever it feels like.

So, Track Rats, here's 10 ways to properly winterize your race car and put it away for six months.

Just kidding!

I teamed up with Justin Becker of South Shore Autoworks to bring you the inside scoop on how you can continue to drive your track car, visit new racetracks, and actually improve your driving over the winter. To do so, we signed up to use the unique, yet complementary, services provided by each other's companies. Read on to find out how it went...

Justin visits VR Motion Labs

Over the last year, Justin has spent several hours in our 3DOF VR Simulator, learning new tracks, preparing for his first wheel-to-wheel race, and then coming back to learn more new tracks before he visits them. The simulator is designed to mimic the motion of a racecar, and the Virtual Reality headset provides an incredible, immersive experience. I interviewed Justin on his thoughts after having used the simulator -

What made you want to use a simulator?

We've been slowly ramping up our track transport and arrive & drive services, and had to take some customer cars to Sebring as part of that so I figured why not learn the track before I head over there. (See Winter Warmth story from Dec 2017)



What were your initial impressions? Did you get sick?

I was definitely uncomfortable at first. It's not a natural feeling and I had to stagger the first half hour over 2-3 sessions just to get used to the VR and motion. Your body will tell you when to stop and it's probably a good idea to listen. I started to build tolerance during subsequent sessions, though.

The immersion was so good, I had to close my eyes every time I went off-track and into a barrier!

Did you get better at driving in the Simulator?

It's just like seat time in the real world. Once I got the hang of the motion, I began to push harder and really hit consistent marks on every lap. After my second or third



time in the sim I was very comfortable at 'reading' the motion and predicting the driving feel.

It also helped to go back home, take time to think about the track, and return to the sim. This time around, I knew what to do and I was focused on finding the limit and setting better lap times.

What would you recommend for first timers?

Definitely start slow. Get into a Miata or something and slowly go around at track walk speeds. This will help with two things - You'll observe the types of corners, elevation and the surface, and you'll also give your brain more time to adjust to the VR and Motion. I would spend the first 20-30 minutes doing just this.

You won't be driving smoothly and setting great lap times right off the bat, but you will eventually get there with some patience and seat time.

So, on to the real stuff. Tell us about the experience at Sebring.

The PBOC event was amazing. We drove over in the shop's new trailer with a GT3 RS and a GT4 Clubsport, but we weren't even the cool kids. We shared the track with all sorts of cars including Ferrari Challenge cars, Viper Competitions, Radicals and of course various Porsches.

There were some really good drivers out there, with years of driving history behind them, so the more advanced run groups made for a pretty intense experience.

How did the sim time play into the on-track experience?

Think back to your first time at a new track - You could watch any number of YouTube videos, or memorize the track map, but you'd still spend your first DE day figuring out corners, track surface, camber/elevation and braking points.

At Sebring, the difference was night and day. I jumped right in and started driving at a very good pace. I just.... knew the track. I feel like I made the most of my track time by eliminating that initial learning curve.

That's good to hear. You also came back after to train for Barber. What was happening there?

I got invited to drive a LeMons car! It all happened very quickly so I'm glad I got to spend some time in the simulator since I hadn't driven at Barber either. In fact, it was my first time in an actual race.

I went right in at 8/10th's....knowing the track wasn't even a question in my mind, just like at Sebring. I think that helped the most since I barely got five laps in during practice. We ended the race 2nd in class, and my personal best was at par with the owners of the car.

That's a great outcome! How did sim time help here?

First of all, I knew the entire track. By entire track, I mean I knew every possible line through every corner because I had practiced it. I think that helped the most because I didn't even have to think about it while in the car.

I also played with various car setups in multiple cars because I had no idea what I would be driving. I mean... it is LeMons after all!

I also should have simulated a couple races just to get a feel for what it's like sharing the track and passing in tough spots. Maybe next time?

Track Services by South Shore Autoworks

Like many other club members, I used to run the 'streetable' DE setup so I was no stranger to the long, uncomfortable drives to and from the track punctuated by



an assortment of car noises and exhaust fumes. All that after spending an entire day of driving, wrenching, then driving again!

As you can imagine, I was sold on the idea of track transport the moment I heard of it. The service is a lot more than the name lets on, and the benefits of outsourcing your track day logistics are apparent when you realize how much of your own time it frees up.

The rewards kick in as soon as you sign up. You know that long checklist of small tasks that precede a track day? You let the shop worry about that - they'll check your tires, bleed the brake fluid, look at rotors and



pads, torque your wheels and address anything else that comes up during the track inspection. Even the tech forms are taken care of, and you don't even need to visit the shop for any of this. Go out to dinner with the wife like I did, or do anything else the evening before because you won't be stressing about the car!

On the morning of the event, it doesn't hurt to sleep in a little. You load up the daily driver with your helmet and HANS, grab a coffee on the way to the track and that's it. You don't get there early to get a good spot in the paddocks, or unload your trailer/car, or get in line for tech. Drive up to the SSA tent and there's more coffee waiting, along with an assortment of donuts, beverages, and your friendly neighborhood Porsche techs. With the car and formalities taken care of, all you have to do is prep yourself. I used the extra time to discuss the track map with a couple other drivers who had already driven there before (Unfortunately, Palmer is not officially supported, in either direction, by any of the simulation providers), and also setup my camera and AiM data logger.



Later, you come off track after a session to a waiting tech who will immediately note down and adjust hot tire pressures, ask how the car feels, and look into anything else that comes up. Some racing rubber remover for the hood, a quick splash of gas in to the tank and you're good to head back out again! While this might seem like no big deal, I couldn't help but think of the countless times I've had issues at the track and had to miss sessions or even days because I couldn't fix stuff then and there. That's what track support is for, and it felt good knowing that they had my back.

All in all, I thought this was a great service to take advantage of. It definitely starts to make sense when you factor in time savings, peace of mind, and the idea of a



predictable, trouble-free track weekend. Plus, if you're like me and don't want to deal with the hassle of towing and trailers then this really is the best option.

There's no such thing as off-season anymore

It's up to you to decide how much driving you'd like to get in over the winter. The Simulator provides a tried and tested way to brush up on skills, learn new tracks and work with a pro coach. It can be designed around your needs for setting up at home, or you can drop in and rent it by the hour. Either way, the VR and Motion will get that adrenaline going!

You can be at the front straight at VIR in the middle of a Blizzard and, if you enjoy it, give Justin a call and see if he'll actually take you there. This will be the second

year that South Shore Autoworks will transport client cars to places like VIR, Road Atlanta, Sebring Raceway and more. All you have to do is fly in, suit up, and take your car out on the track.