

Autocross Basics

Iowa Region SCCA

Prepare

Before the day of the event prepare your car by making sure it has good tires and brakes, no loose suspension parts or loose battery, and no liquid leaks. Gather up things you will want when you get to the event. If you have a helmet with SA2000 or M2000 or later designation, bring it. Otherwise, the club will loan you one at the event. Other things you need are sun screen, a hat, layers of clothing, and rain gear. Yes, we run in the rain and it is fun! It is good to have a cooler with lunch, snacks and water. Because tire pressure is one of the most important aspects of handling it is a good idea to have a good pressure gauge and a small compressor for adjustments. Other useful items are glass cleaner, detailer, cleaning cloths and duct tape. Although you can register for the event after you get there, you can save money by pre-registering. Just follow the link on the web site to Motorsportreg.com and sign up. You do not have to pay when you register and don't lose anything if you end up not coming to the event.

Arrive

Arrive at the autocross site before 9 am and find a place to park and prepare your car. This will be your pit area. Do not park in front of a pile of tires and other junk because that is someone else's pit area!

Register

Hopefully you will have already pre-registered, but you will still need to sign a waiver, wear the wrist band provided and pay your entry fee. You will need a valid driver's license and will be provided with a tech inspection form that you can put under a windshield wiper. If you are under 18 you will need a minor waiver signed by your parents.

Tech inspection

Tech inspection will be carried out by a club member near the registration area. Before you arrive at the Tech station you should remove floor mats and all other loose items from the car. The inspector will make sure your car is safe for the event by looking for a firm brake pedal, a tight suspension, tires with tread, and a secure battery.

Learning the course

You should now spend as much time as you can learning the course before the driver's meeting at around 11 am. Walk the course over and over until you have memorized it. The more details you get in your head the quicker you will be. A good rule of thumb is to "walk until your legs hurt." Get advice from other club members and take advantage of the "novice walk" right after the driver's meeting. The course is defined by cones and if you don't understand the layout of the course, ask someone. It is very helpful to walk with experienced drivers. Remember there are no cones *on* the course! (think about it)

Driver's meeting and schedule for the day

Around 10:30 am there will be a call for the driver's meeting. You must attend and pay attention to what is said. Ask questions if you have them. The rest of the day will be divided into run heats. Cars will be split into two groups based on car number. The low numbers cars run first in numerical order. Each driver gets one run and then each gets a second and usually a third run. During this time drivers of the high numbered cars work the course or carry out other jobs (timing, waivers etc.). Then there is a turnaround in which drivers of high numbered cars run and the drivers of low numbered cars work. This pattern is repeated twice such that each driver gets a total usually 6 runs in the two heats.

Driving

When your group is running, pay attention to the grid worker who will tell you where to grid and when to run. Follow the driver with the number preceding yours. When it is your turn, pull up to the starting line and when the starter indicates it is time, enter the course and proceed through it. Although the overall goal is to take the least amount of time to complete the course, your first goal is to not get lost and complete the course successfully. If you miss a gate you will not get a time, but instead will get a "DNF" (did not finish). If you hit a cone it will add 2 seconds to your time. As your confidence builds you can increase your speed with a goal of reducing your time each run.

At all times other than during your run your speed should be a "walking pace." Anyone driving recklessly will be told to leave the event. Also because event sites are very difficult to find, you should drive responsibly to and from the event. No burnouts, slides, or high speeds are allowed (except when on course!).

Many people at the event will have had years (or decades!) of experience. The fastest way to get quick is to ask them for advice. The best drivers are the ones that learn quickly from other drivers what is important. No one has ever had a perfect run, but most people agree on a few principles:

1. Know the course before your first run.
2. Don't overdrive. If your car is sliding dramatically it is actually going slow.
3. Try to make the course as short as possible by coming as close to the inside cones as you can.
4. You should be right at the edge (but not over) the limits of accelerating, braking, turning, or a combination of the three at all times.
5. Learn from your mistakes.

Working

When you are not running you should be working. Being a course worker is a great time to get a close up look at how experienced drivers handle specific sections of the course. Having a high numbered car will allow you to see people on the course before you have to negotiate it. While you are working you should always stand up and pay attention to the cars that are near you. Face oncoming cars and be prepared to get out of the way if someone loses control. If you are working on a "hot" course you should not use a cell phone or camera. When replacing downed cones, do so in a quick and safe manner. Do not put yourself or others in danger. One worker in each station will have a red flag to signal to drivers to stop because of an unsafe condition. If you see a red flag while driving, come to a quick safe stop and wait to be told what to do by a course worker. Also the person with the flag will have a radio to call in infractions. After the runs have concluded there is still work to do to pick up the cones and clean up the site.

Performance versus fun

Run times are posted after each run. You should look to see if you got a time and what it was. If you received a DNF, you need to figure out why. A specially marked worker assigned to assist novices may be able to help you with this so that you can correct the next run. It will become very obvious to you after your first run that you have just had a tremendous amount of fun. That is the most important aspect of autocrossing. Drugs and alcohol are not allowed at events, but as you gain experience and your times drop, you will discover a natural flow of adrenaline and you will have even more fun.

Iowa Region Website: <http://iowaregionscca.org>