

Best Places To Speed Legally

Hannah Elliott, 02.13.09, 04:00 PM EST

Got the need for speed--and a spa treatment? These private tracks and premier racing clubs offer racing and luxury.



In Depth: [Best Places To Speed Legally](#)

Economy got you stressed? Try blowing off some steam at 145 miles an hour.

That's what the members of private racing clubs get to do every weekend. And with golf-club-like amenities at the track, they can even finish up with a scotch and a session in the sauna.

To hear several club owners tell it, the recession hasn't hit racing the way it has other hobbies. Despite a slight delay on the groundbreaking for the 872-acre, \$82 million [Prairie Hills Motorsport Club](#) in Lake Village, Ind., CEO Michael Krupka says business is booming. Club memberships are selling fast (only 560 are offered), with no sign of letting up.

"It's going great," Krupka says. "If you didn't listen to the news, you'd think that there was nothing wrong."

If tearing around a hairpin curve sounds like some much-needed therapy, there's no shortage of options. Some are new, like [Palm Beach Driving Club](#), which opened last year; the [Aspen Motorsports Park](#), on the other hand, opened more than 50 years ago. The many choices in private driving clubs offer an array of aesthetics, amenities and prices, and there are enough of them to fit just about any driver's style.

Where to Floor It

Several racing professionals and track managers shared their experiences to help us compile a list of the best private racing clubs and tracks in the nation. We looked for spots that offered private instruction, fleets of loaner cars, garage space, on-site racing pros, proximity to airports, generous track time and a real sense of driving camaraderie.

They range from Nebraska's Motorsports Park Hastings, with a \$1,000 initiation fee, to the Palm Beach Driving Club in Florida, which costs \$125,000 to join. The list even includes a legendary school--Arizona's Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving, which offers such customized options as a four-day, \$5,925 "anti-kidnapping" driving course.

Despite their differences, each site attracts scads of financially successful, mostly corporate, males. Networking opportunities abound.

"Instead of just a racing experience, it's an actual lifestyle experience," says Ken Langdon, a spokesman for Club Spring Mountain in Pahrump, Nev., which costs up to \$100,000 to join. "It's really viewed more of as a country club membership for people who, instead of golf, they want to race cars."

The clubs offer tracks ranging in length from a 1.1-mile, eight-turn road course in Aspen, Colo., to more than four miles of road at Monticello Motor Club in Monticello, N.Y. Amenities at these clubs include everything from cigar bars and rooftop dining to spas and swimming pools. Many even offer landing strips and helipads for their jet-setting clientèle.

It all has yet to take a huge hit from the credit crunch, says Ian Prout, president of the Sports Car Driving Association. People who buy \$100,000 cars can still afford to pay a couple hundred dollars in track fees.

It *is* a Race

Don't let the posh digs fool you. These are serious racing clubs with semi-professional drivers who compete fiercely during race events. But not every club is the same. Randy Pobst, a 24-year veteran driver with more than 70 professional race wins to his name (including two wins in the Rolex 24 Hours race at Daytona), says the advantage of a racing club is a lower crash risk--for the most part.

"If you're up at Monticello and you're in your collector Ferrari that's worth a million dollars and there's a guy next to you, he's in one too, so he's not likely to run into you," Pobst says. "But when you're up at [Lime Rock \[Park\]](#) doing an SCCA club race, and you've got your Ferrari vintage car, and there's some kid in a Rabbit, it would make you real nervous."

Some clubs are more no-nonsense than others. Ken Brown's Aspen Racing and Sports Car Club in Colorado sits on one of the highest--and, to Brown, the most beautiful--race tracks in the country. Members earn equity in the property, which is no small thing for a 50-acre plot smack-dab in the middle of some highly valuable real estate. Last year, a 30-acre property just outside the town limits sold for \$12.3 million.

"All that has to happen is the owner shows up--drives in, flies in, whatever--comes over to the race track, lets us know he's coming, his driving suit is ready, he's got a clubhouse locker, gets dressed up, his car's ready for him, he goes out and runs the race or practices on the track, and then he's off on his way while the mechanics are doing all the maintenance work on the car to get it ready for the next time," Brown says.

The Racing Bug

Of course, many who start out driving only on the weekends find it difficult to temper their enthusiasm, says Steven Wagner, a founding partner of Autobahn Country Club in Joliet, Ill.

"Some are just happy coming out with their weekend warrior car--Ferrari, Lamborghini or Porsche--and just learning to drive that faster and safer," he says. "And then some, they get kind of 'bit,' and they enjoy that so much more, the next thing you know, they go buy a race car. Once you get bit, it's hard to stop."

If you're concerned about becoming an absentee parent in the event racing taking over all your free time, not to worry. Several clubs on our list have family-friendly amenities like swimming pools, playgrounds, fishing ponds and go-karts.

The luxe feel is just part of that country club lifestyle enthusiasts pay so much to enjoy. Of course, if the downturn continues, a few laps around the track might be cheaper than therapy, anyway.