



DRIFTING INTO THE FAST LANE

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Start Your Adrenaline” is a sign you will see as you enter the BMW Performance Driving School in Thermal, CA. Located at the south end of the Coachella Valley the BMW Performance Center has quickly become one of the top facilities in North America. If driving at fast speeds, taking hairpin corners and screeching tires are your thing then a trip here is just what the doctor ordered.

Opening their doors in early 2015, the team at the BMW Performance Center set out to bring high performance BMW's of all types to the public to teach car enthusiasts how to drive their own cars to the maximum of the car's ability in a safe environment. Several driving experiences are offered at the center whether looking to learn how to master slick, wet conditions or just trying your hand at taking an M4 out for a joy ride, the choice is yours.

Our experience at the Performance Center was as exhilarating as we could have ever imagined. We started off with a safety briefing inside a classroom where we were introduced to two course instructors, both professional race car drivers. This certainly set the mind at ease knowing you are in the hands of overqualified experts. After our briefing we were given our helmets and each of





us got behind the wheel of four different cars, an M4, M3, one convertible and the X5 SUV.

Our instructor set us up for a comfortable and safe ride and off we went to test the limits of each vehicle. Following behind the leader who was talking to us through a CB radio located inside each car we learned the ins and outs of high performance racing. One by one we ripped around the track and were instructed to “Hit the pedal to the metal!” “Screech those tires, burn that gas up!”

Five laps later all drivers were instructed to pull to the starting line and swap vehicles, thus giving each rider a chance to feel the power and handling of each model. After racing all four models we were told we were now ready for a “Hot Lap”. Not knowing exactly what that was you could say we were all a little intrigued. Our instructor took us each in his car as he got behind the wheel and showed us how a professional would drive this course and the experience is hard to put into words. Exciting is an understatement.

Our instructor was a professional drifter and he took all the corners completely sideways as fast as the car would handle it. It

was a ride we will never forget and a few of us had no words when the ride was over just a look of pure amazement as we pondered how we had survived.

Once the first experience was complete, we started feeling like pros and we were ready to race each other during a session of timed laps, this is where the true competition begins! Our instructor briefly showed us how we should take each corner for proper handling and one by one we took the track at maximum speed to compete for the fastest time. As you cross the finish line you see your time up on a monitor and the instructor makes sure to announce who is in the lead to get you even more eager to secure a win. Each driver has five chances to solidify the best time and at the end the winner is announced making for a very fun and competitive experience.

The last experience for the day was to take to the large race track to really feel the maximum speeds of these cars on a full NASCAR style race. The leader starts out like normal and one by one each car is instructed to stay no more than a car length away from the car in front of you to keep the pack together. After coming into each corner, you're instructed to find your line and once that wheel is straight, put the pedal to the floor and let that engine roar. With speeds up to 130 mph on the average you can definitely feel the G forces behind the wheel of these performance vehicles giving you the full BMW experience.

To finish the day off we did a final “Hot Lap” with our instructor, this time with a lot more top end speed, white knuckling the entire time. As we walked back to our car after the BMW Performance experience, we suddenly had the urge to see what our own cars could do out on the open road but then we soon remembered that would be illegal. We will just have to wait until next time to fulfill the need for speed as we certainly will be back.

