



Michael Pettiford, front, of Go 4 It Racing Schools, leads student Sean Fey of Denver around Second Creek Raceway while helping him find his lines on the track.

MARK LEFFINGWELL / Daily Camera

HARD DRIVING MAN

Louisville businessman shows drivers how to race cars and motorcycles safely

IN THE *Fast Lane*

Michael Pettiford teaches the right stuff for racing cars and motorcycles — or just how to drive safely on the streets

By Susan Glairon
Camera Business Writer

As the race car zips around the track, the noise increases to a throaty rumble, and then wanes to a high-pitched whine.

There's no muffler on this baby. The faster it goes, the louder it gets.

Ann Reese, 33, is in the driver's seat of the 450-horsepower Speedvision World Challenge GT Camaro. It's her second

time driving a race car; the first was an hour earlier in a smaller Mazda Miata. But after 20 minutes around the track — at speeds up to 60 mph on the straightaways and 30 on the hairpin turns — she says, it won't be her last.

"I've always liked to drive fast," Reese says, her face flushed with excitement. "This is the coolest car." By the end of the day, she's cruising at speeds up to 80 to 85 mph on the straight-aways and 40 on the turns.

Reese, a quality assurance manager for a Westminster startup, is on an all-day training session with Louisville-based Go 4 It Racing Schools at the Continental Divide race park in Weld County.

She receives private instruction from Go 4 It's president, Michael Pettiford, a professional racer who has won numerous racing championships, including winning the Sports Car Club of America Rocky Mountain Division nine times, and other races in car, motorcycle and All Terrain

Vehicle competitions around the country.

Pettiford's passion is safety, and he has been involved in safety training for more than 25 years. He started the business in 1985 and teaches basic to competitive motorcycle and car driving. He also teaches ATV, bus and tractor-trailer driving.

"I started this business so people wouldn't have to be hurt or killed in motorized



vehicles," Pettiford says. "People are talking on their cell phone or eating or playing with their kids. It needs to be fixed. Believing that they know how to drive having never had proper training and giving their driving a low priority is a dangerous combination."

Pettiford straps Reese in with a five-point belt and puts up the window nets that keeps the driver's hand in, should the car roll. There's also a roll cage.

"There's a lot of G forces," Pettiford says. "If you weren't belted in you'd be flying around the car."

He starts his students, such as Reese, with classroom time showing where to look and how to hold the steering wheel. He first drives them in the Miata, pointing out the blind corners, showing how to watch the turning points, apexes and exits of each corner, as well as how to use the gauges and mirror. Then Reese drives next to Pettiford. Then she solos.

"The bottom line is safety," Pettiford says. "If people can control a car like this, then when they're in an emergency, they'll be much better off."

Pettiford is not the only one in the Denver area who teaches road racing, but he says he is the only one in the nation to teach motorcycle and car driving from basic to competitive. Most driving schools teach either car or motorcycle driving, and most offering high performance training don't teach basic driving, he says.

There are also clubs that periodically

teach on a track. But Pettiford says nationally there are only about 14 Sports Car Club of America accredited schools and 10 to 14 motorcycle schools in the nation approved to road race by the American Motorcyclist Association.

Denver-based Rocky Mountain Vintage Racing has more than 600 members dedicated to restoration, preservation, racing, and display of vintage cars, according to the club's Web site. It offers a driver's school every year.

The Sports Car Club of America is a 55,000-member nonprofit organization based in Englewood and offers classes for street cars, formula cars and sports racers.

Go 4 It's clients have included doctors and surgeons from around

the country, Tommy Hammons from the Denver Nuggets and John Malone, president of TCI.

Some of Go 4 It's former students, such as Joanne Loh, have turned professional. As a child, Loh played with cars instead of Barbie Dolls. She is now an Indy Pace Car driver and Rocky Mountain regional champion in the Sports Car Club of America race series.

"It was a very good start," said Loh of her instruction with Go 4 It. "Without taking high-performance driving lessons, it would be difficult to pick up those points yourself."

Loh, an aerospace engineer and program manager for the University of Colorado's Center for Lower Atmospheric Studies, started with Pettiford at her side, driving around the track at 35 to 40 mph, banking each corner without braking. It was these early lessons that gave Loh more competence on the race track and in towns, she said.

"Driving on the highway and the streets during snow is almost second nature to me now," Loh said. "I know what the car's going to do, given certain inputs. I'm more in tune to what my car is doing."

Not everyone who studies with Pettiford wants to race. Some want to improve basic driving skills and develop good reflexes

for emergency situations, or learn to drive a different vehicle, such as a camper van. Pettiford taught a woman who was going through a divorce to ride a motorcycle — the tool she used to change her life around, he said.

Go 4 It recently began offering racing lessons as a tool for corporations to improve employee bonding.

For a full day of racing and instruction, it costs \$700 for the instruction, \$700 for the day-rental of the Miata and \$1,500 for the Camaro rental. Students are responsible for any damages, and Pettiford maintains the car including brakes and tires.

Basic one-on-one car instruction using your own car on the street costs \$50 an hour, and a 10-hour course costs \$450. Racing motorcycles with your own motorcycle costs \$500 per day and includes track rental.

Pettiford moved to the Boulder area from Indiana in 1973 to study engineering at CU. Through his business, he trains about 300 people a year.

"There is no other place in the country where there are two race tracks within 30 miles," Pettiford said. "We also have very challenging roads and conditions — twisty roads, snow and ice — so Colorado is the best place for me to have the business."

Sean Fey, 34, an aspiring motorcycle road racer who will begin competitive racing this year, started with a general street riding class in 1999 with Pettiford, and decided afterward to take a racing class.

"I love it," Fey said. "It's a blast. It's



exhilarating being able to ride a motorcycle at those speeds and being able to corner at severe lean angles and having the front wheel of the motorcycle lift coming out of corners. It's definitely a rush."

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