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MATTHEW FOX LEARNS FAST

WE GAVE HIM ONE DAY AND ONE GOAL:
BECOME A RACE-CAR DRIVER.

HERE'S HIS SIX-STEP PLAN TO MASTERING ANY NEW SKILL



LOST ADAM!
FOR MATTHEW FOX,
THE WILLOW
SPRINGS RACE-
TRACK WAS YET
ANOTHER ALIEN
ENVIRONMENT.

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ATTHEW FOX AND TWO BUDDIES PULL UP IN A DARK SUV THAT'S SHEATHED IN HEAVILY TINTED GLASS.

The front passenger-side window glides down, revealing—in true movie-star fashion—a stone-faced Fox behind an oversized pair of mirrored Ray-Bans. The inside of the car is a vast, inky blackness that contrasts deeply with the sun-blasted desert around us.

The actor looks pissed, perhaps because I sort of forgot to pick him up at the hotel earlier that morning. (It was an honest miscommunication.) Or maybe he's just trying to figure out if I'm the guy he's supposed to meet. Or perhaps he's feeling apprehensive, aware that this day could easily end in public humiliation.

Like his character Jack Shephard, leader of the traumatized, haunted passengers of Oceanic Air flight 815 in ABC's blockbuster series *Lost*, Fox has just crash-landed in an alien environment. We're 80 miles from Hollywood—and 2,600 miles from his home on Oahu—at Willow Springs International Raceway, an automotive racetrack known for ejecting both timid and overconfident drivers far into the desert sand. Waiting for Fox in the pit is Patrick Long, his instructor for the next 8 hours. A gifted young driver of mind-bendingly fast Porsche race cars, Long will race full-time this season as part of Penske Racing's American Le Mans Series team.

Our goal at Willow is to see if Fox, who stars as Racer X in the new movie *Speed Racer*, can use his famous intellect (he's a Columbia grad) and physical stamina (think marathon, rain-soaked shoots on the set of *Lost*) to give Racer X a run for his money, despite having never lit up a real racetrack. It's a challenge any of us would both savor and dread: Given the chance, with your entourage watching, could you master an entirely new skill or sport without falling on your face? How would you pull it off? Let Matthew Fox be your guide.



THE APPRENTICE
FOX LEARNS THE FINER POINTS OF FAST YELLOW PORSCHEs FROM PRO RACE-CAR DRIVER PATRICK LONG (LEFT).



STEP 1 SURVEY THE SITUATION

Back at the gate, Fox's facade begins to crack. He snaps off the shades and extends his hand. "Good morning," he says. He deflects my regrets for our miscommunication: "Oh, no, don't worry. I'm really sorry we're late."

He emerges from the car purposefully, at the pace of someone who's used to being stared at and who wouldn't dare risk momentary clumsiness or even excessive exuberance. He moves slowly around today's ride, a canary yellow Porsche 911. Fox is a lifelong gearhead, and he's certainly seen his share of high-dollar modern sports cars. But he's not particularly conversant with them. He's smart enough not

to start shooting his mouth off about the car and betray what he may or may not know about cool yellow Porsches. Instead, he studies the rocket and waits patiently to be filled in. It's a Turbo, with 480 horsepower, 19-inch wheels, huge brakes, and all-wheel drive for great traction and handling. Zero to 60 in 3.7 seconds, top speed 190.

He smiles. "All right. I'm excited. Let's do this thing."

We meet Long at the Streets of Willow, a highly technical 1.8-mile course that packs in more turns than Willow's 2.5-mile main track. We also meet up with our second ride of the day, a green Porsche 911 GT3 RS. This is the race-ready version of the 911—far

faster through the turns, thanks to its wider track (the distance between the wheels) and its carbon-fiber rear wing. (The wing produces massive downforce, enabling the car to stick to the road like paint.) But Fox will start in the Turbo. He'll have to *earn* the GT3.

STEP 2 CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

Our first order of business: Scare the bejeezus out of Fox. This will help him shift his thinking more quickly from student to driver.

Long takes Fox out in the Turbo and steadily ratchets up the speed as he briskly hits the basics of track driving. He explains

braking points, turn-ins (where the car first dives into a turn), and apexes (where it comes closest to the inside of a turn). All three help determine how much speed you'll be able to carry through a turn and how close you'll be able to stay to the "line," or the fastest route around any course. "This is a decreasing-radius turn, so you want to wait to turn in a little bit later," Long shouts over the jetlike whine of the turbocharger. "Got it," Fox shoots back.

"For this one, use that cone over there as your signal to start braking, then turn in . . . here. It's almost like you're connecting the dots from cone to cone, apex to apex. This next one is a banked corner, so you

have lots of grip and can take it pretty fast."

Exiting the banked turn, Fox, who did all his driving scenes in *Speed Racer* in a studio—with the spectacular but wildly unrealistic tracks inserted digitally—is stunned by the speed. "Unbelievable!" he shouts.

Long slams the car through the curves, pushing against its road-holding limits. Tires squeal. Burnt rubber billows. This is the other half of Fox's learning curve: the car. Long tells Fox to drive like he's riding a horse, something that resonates with the actor, who grew up on a Wyoming ranch. "You want to tell the car one thing at a time," Long says. "If you pull a horse's reins and kick it, it's going to react awkwardly. In the car, you brake, turn, and then accelerate, but you never do them simultaneously."

The same principle applies to how quickly you do things, he adds. You tense a horse's reins before pulling them; you don't just jerk them. Similarly, if you jump on the gas in a car while exiting a turn, the car's weight will shift to the back tires, reducing the grip of the front tires—which are trying to turn—and sending you spinning off the course.

FATHERHOOD

"Speed Racer is about the importance of family and the adversarial relationships within them. My father was hard on me in a positive way. There's a fine line between demanding and abusive. If he was demanding of me, he demanded that much more from himself."

CURIOSITY

"Curiosity is an incredible part of having a fulfilling and satisfying life. I feel sad for people who have lost their curiosity. I recently met Susan Sarandon and William Hurt, both of whom I admire. I was stunned about how curious they are about people and life in general."

HEROISM

"We didn't want Jack Shephard [Fox's character on *Lost*] to be a classic archetype of a hero, riding in to save the day. People aren't that way. That's just an antiquated idea of heroism. People have flaws, and heroism comes from rising above those flaws."

PERSPECTIVE

"Opposing viewpoints all boil down to perspective. Understanding this has made me better at dealing with them. It's amazing how many people walk around in this world thinking their way is the right way and the only way. That's pretty dangerous and pretty unforgivable."

CONFLICT

"My wife and I have very intense fights, but they're over in 10 minutes. We don't hold on to stuff. Life's too short for that. The more you're conscious of this, the easier it is to reach across the aisle and say, 'I'm sorry we got here. What are you seeing? How can we fix this?'"

Styling: Brian Berk; grooming: Pamela Gari/Silverfox; complexion: Mimi; previous spread: Anne Jostel; Photo: T-Schitz; Editorial: Susan Jones; John Varvatos boots; Banana Republic sunglasses; Polar watch

MATTHEW FOX ON . . .

A FASTER FOX
"IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE
HOW COMFORTABLE YOU
CAN BECOME DRIVING
AT THOSE SPEEDS."

**A CAR IS LIKE A HORSE:
GIVE IT MORE THAN ONE
INPUT AT A TIME AND IT'LL
REACT AWKWARDLY.**

After a dozen more laps, each faster than the one before, Long and Fox return to the pit. Fox climbs out slowly, noticeably affected.

"Nauseous?" Long asks.

"A little," Fox replies, catching his breath. "I can't believe how *physical* that was. I have a totally new respect for you guys."

STEP 3 BECOME A STUDENT

Finally, Fox sets out alone in the yellow Turbo. His first recorded lap time: 1:56.44. That's about 30 seconds slower than the baseline lap time Long set earlier in the day. If that doesn't sound like much, consider that in a short, 20-lap race, Long would finish 10 minutes ahead of Fox. Of course, it's early in the day. Fox is still processing Long's instructions. He's used to direction—repeating specific moves take after take and making subtle adjustments to improve the outcome. So in that respect this is familiar territory.

On a racetrack, every turn requires a unique set of pedal and wheel movements to navigate cleanly. Fox is trying to internalize Long's advice about transitioning between these movements. "Remember, be patient," Long says when Fox comes in for a quick break. "Lay on the throttle slowly as you're straightening the car, and always look ahead. When you're in the middle of one turn, you should be looking to the next apex."

Fox listens intently, nodding briskly and mimicking Long's hand motions. A few laps later, Fox clocks 1:45.06, then 1:44.25. Long is impressed. "He has a natural sense of what the car's going to do, and he's interacting with the vehicle instead of reacting to it. Most important, he has a smile on his face. If he was afraid, he'd have no chance."

STEP 4 FORTIFY YOUR WEAK SPOTS

It's now midafternoon and Fox is battling creeping fatigue and a touch of motion sickness. Yet he manages to shave his time to 1:40.84 before pulling in for another break. When he hears his time, he high-fives his pals. He's cut 16 seconds from his time in 5 hours. But his biggest challenge, Long tells him, will be trimming the 17th second.

Long advises him to concentrate on shifting, because he's being too tentative when releasing the clutch. "It's a mental thing," Long says. "Rely on your experience—your muscle memory—to steer the car, and focus completely on the clutch and shifter."

With that, Fox heads back onto the track for a few more laps. He doesn't cut his time, but he makes progress. "Suddenly my ability

THROW GAS ON A SKID

If the rear end starts to slide in a turn, your first instinct will be to hit the brakes. Instead, gently apply the gas, says William Hawkins of the Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving in Phoenix. "Accelerating will transfer weight to the back tires, which will increase traction and stop the skid."

FIND THE LIMITS OF A.B.S.

Antilock brakes are great on slippery surfaces and in turns. But in straight-line braking, they lengthen your stopping distance, says Kevin Hans, an instructor at Team O'Neil Rally School in Dalton, New Hampshire. For that reason, learn to brake hard without activating the ABS. Practice in a parking lot.

4 Racing Skills to Master

DO THE HAND SHUFFLE

Never spin the wheel with one hand—if something goes wrong midturn, such as a tire blowout, you'll lose control. "With your hands at 9 and 3," says Jeff Purner, Porsche Driving School instructor, "pull the wheel down with one hand, meet your second hand at the bottom, and push up to finish with your second hand."

LOOK TWO TO THREE CARS AHEAD

"If you try to maintain a 3-second following distance, other cars will often pull into that space," says Jason Holehouse, chief instructor at the Skip Barber Racing School in Connecticut. "When that happens, look two to three cars ahead as well. When you see brake lights, take your foot off the gas."

to focus is amazing. I'm not thinking about anything else—not work, not what we're doing for dinner tonight, nothing. It's great."

Long agrees that Fox is ready to graduate to the GT3. This car will either put him under 1:40 or erase a day's worth of progress.

STEP 5 LEARN YOUR LIMITS

The GT3, a rear-drive car, is 500 pounds lighter than the all-wheel-drive Turbo. But with all the power being delivered to the back, it's much harder to control in turns. Fox quickly figures this out. Coming through a tight string of curves on his second lap, he spins wildly off the track in a cloud of dust.

There isn't a racer alive who hasn't spun a car—that's how you learn what you and the car are capable of. As the dust settles, Fox eases back onto the track and continues, a bit rattled, his confidence stung. Slowly he recaptures his rhythm, eventually putting up times that match those of his earlier laps.

To help hone Fox's technique, Long jumps back into the passenger seat. This time he tells Fox to focus on using all the available space on the track. "Here, I want you to let the car go out to the left edge of the track as you exit the corner," Long says as Fox navigates one of the faster curves. "But these next two turns are close together, so just coast through them. It's actually faster than laying on the gas all the way through, because your line is straighter."

Fox has only a few laps to go before they kick us off the track for the evening. He persists in the fading light before finally pulling in, rolling slowly to a stop, and shutting down the engine. He climbs out, looking exhausted but fully at ease.

"So how'd I do?"

Best time, 1:37.47.

"Yesss!" he shouts. There's fist-pumping

and handshaking all around. "I really can't believe it. It's amazing how comfortable you can become driving at those speeds."

STEP 6 RECOGNIZE YOUR SUCCESS

Fox and I meet back at Willow the next morning for a few hours of fun driving. "I was thinking all night about driving," he tells me. "Today I don't feel physically exhausted as much as mentally drained. And that's a great feeling. Yesterday, I was completely in the moment. I'm looking for more of those activities in my life. I've started shooting a bow again. I always feel more focused throughout the day when I shoot. I enjoy concentrating on placing the arrow perfectly."

Fox spends the morning tackling other tracks, including the 2.5-mile main course. Between drives, we watch a team practicing on the course Fox raced the previous day. The car is a blue Saleen S7R, with 600 horsepower and a 200 mph top speed. Overseeing the team is Steve Saleen himself, an icon in the automotive industry. Long knows him, and in one of those uniquely Hollywood moments, our two entourages briefly meld.

"You must be lost," Saleen jokes to Fox.

He's heard that one before, but today it couldn't be less true. Fox owns this track, bub.

Watching Saleen's client—a European businessman—navigate the track . . . well, he looks pretty good, but Long isn't so sure.

"You can beat this guy," he tells Fox.

"No way," comes the reply. The S7R has 200 more horsepower and weighs about 500 pounds less than the GT3. It has race tires, race suspension—race everything.

Long starts timing the businessman. One minute, 43 seconds later, we have our answer.

Yes, Mr. Fox, you can beat this guy. You're a race-car driver now. ■

Hop in: See Matthew Fox tear around the track at MensHealth.com/matthewfox.

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