

Is Slower Really Faster?

Mon, Nov 2, 2015

[By Eric Peterson](#)



North Carolina Officers observe EVOC Training from a safe distance away.

“I never would have believed it if I hadn’t seen it,” said one officer after watching a timed drill during EVOC training to show slower is faster.

In the training, officers took two runs on a long and fairly fast cone course. On their first run, they drove all out, as hard as they could. These first runs looked fast, with plenty of sliding and tires screaming. On their second run, an in-car instructor told them when to brake, usually 20 to 50 feet earlier than what they had just done. These runs looked boring and uneventful. All the officers driving and watching agreed: The first runs were faster. The second or “slow” runs were clearly much more precise and under control.

Here’s the twist — the slow runs were actually faster. This happens about 75 percent of the time during these drills. Even when early braking yields a slightly slower time, the vehicle is under control and the officer has a safety buffer, or reactionary gap, to deal with the unexpected — like brake fade, misjudged braking points, or a collision threat from another vehicle. Most importantly, officers are noticeably calmer during and after the slow run — that’s a good combination to have in the real world when an officer arrives on a scene.

The Hillsborough Police Department has also used in-car, GPS-based performance computers or data acquisition systems to show how and why aggressive runs are often slower. During the making of the North Carolina League of Municipalities' "Slower Is Faster" video, officers made aggressive and conservative runs on a typical 90-degree turn that officers regularly encounter on the street, as well as a higher-speed, 180-degree turn. In both cases, the data regularly showed the "slower" run was faster in both segment time and exit speed.

For example, on the 180-degree turn, a conservative driver entered the corner 11.62 mph slower and started braking 45.9 feet earlier than the aggressive driver yet was still faster in overall time and exit speed. How does this happen? Aggressive drivers often lose time because their cars are sliding and go off line. They end up having to drive a longer distance and to wait even longer to start accelerating. Braking almost 50 feet earlier, compared to the aggressive driver, seems like a lot, but this equates to only about three car lengths. It ensures you stay on line, under control, have some margin for error, and can get to the throttle earlier if you need it to help settle the car down. Once you pick up a severe case of understeer in a 4,000+ pound vehicle — thereby overworking the front tires — you're just along for the ride, hoping ESC or ABS will bail you out of trouble. These advanced technologies are great, but they can't defy the laws of physics. Therefore, our instructors often say, "It's better to brake 50 feet too early than 5 inches too late."

Results from our in-car data acquisition systems were not surprising as we see similar results when teaching competition driving schools around the country. A student or officer will enter a turn or transitional maneuver faster than the instructor and then exit slower, thus losing time and sacrificing consistency and car control that risks leaving the pavement.

Police driving requires a high level of discipline, especially with the natural urgency to push hard when responding to a call or when in a pursuit. **Patience and understanding learned from good EVOC training proves to officers that slower really is faster!** Mixing in the fact that driving usually degrades when responding to a call due to adrenaline and multi-tasking, it's critical to get on the brakes extra early to make getting through the corners and intersections uneventful. If it feels exciting, like you're driving fast and things are happening quickly, chances are you're doing it wrong and need to slow down. Many winning runs in various national sports car championships actually seem slow and boring to the drivers. If it feels like you're on a brisk drive to the grocery store during a call, then there's a good chance you've hit the sweet spot of being swift and safe. This means you're likely looking ahead, thinking ahead, entering turns under control, and maintaining your composure to maximize your ability to absorb information and make decisions.

By

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Eric Peterson is the town manager for Hillsborough (NC) and has worked in municipal government since 1987. He's instructed and coordinated the Hillsborough PD's annual driver safety training program since 2000, as well as the N.C. League of Municipalities annual "Slower Is Faster" police driving safety seminar for police instructors/trainers (in car and classroom training) across North Carolina for the past three years. He is a member of ALERT International. Eric has 21 years of competitive motorsports experience and 10 years of professional instructing experience. In 2014, he won the Sports Car Club of America Pro Solo Championship Series and was the SCCA Solo National Champion in his respective classes. As town manager he has extensive experience in budgeting, performance measurement, and human resources.