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September 28, 2001

## Roch Voisine learns to rock and roll

Singing a faster tune: Slow ballad singer and composer is instructed in the fine art of car control

Sarah Bohan

National Post

Roch Voisine puts his foot down on the gas pedal to accelerate quickly along the short straight of the track that kinks to the right before he brakes hard to turn left into a series of S-curves. The Audi S8 squeals with enthusiasm in the tightest section before gobbling up the long straight of the Autodrome St-Eustache. Topping 180 kilometres an hour, he brakes to swing left into the infield portion of the twisty 1.8-kilometre circuit. Finally, a 90-degree right-hander, followed by a left hairpin, spits the car out onto the starting straight.

With his personal stable of high-end thoroughbreds, including a Porsche Carrera 4S, an Audi A8 and a Range Rover, the recording star is a worthy candidate to try Audi's latest performance offering, while receiving some professional driving tips.

The 38-year-old singer and composer is the first to admit he is more conversant with the high-tech gadgets in a recording studio than the technical aspects of a racing line. He has never taken a performance driving course despite his affinity for fast German cars.

As the chief instructor at the Autosport Basi Racing School that operates out of the St-Eustache circuit, 20 minutes north of Montreal, Philippe Letourneau knows this is the situation for most drivers.

"But the laws of physics are the same. It doesn't matter if you are driving a Formula car or a sedan. Even though it's performance driving, there are so many things you will bring home with you that will make you a safer driver on the road," says Mr. Letourneau.

Before putting the silver Audi through its paces, the instructor sets the Edmundston, N. B., native in his correct driving position.

"It is very important that when you sit, there is a bend in your knee when the brake pedal is fully depressed. If his leg is stretched all the way out on the brake pedal, on impact it could break his hip and his knee. If you

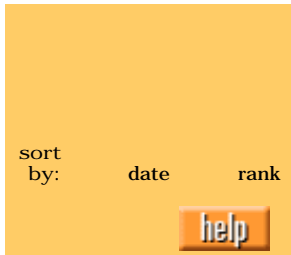


Christinne Muschi, National Post

A day of personal instruction and songwriter Roch Voisine is a much faster and safer driver.

look closely, all race drivers sit very close.

60-DAY SEARCH



"Next we set the height. You should be able to put a fist between the top of your head and the roof."

Hand position on the steering wheel is also critical and Mr. Letourneau notes Voisine has a tendency to hold the steering wheel with his left hand on the right side.

"The hands should be at the nine-and-three position, not 10- and-two. This way you will have 180-degree steering lock in the case of emergency. Also, in the event of an accident, if your hand is across the steering wheel when the air bag explodes, it will break your wrist on your forehead."

Resting your right hand on the shift lever is another no-no.

"First, for control, you should always have both hands on the steering wheel. Second, if you have a manual, you put pressure on the gearbox, which increases the wear and tear on the bearings."

The 360-horsepower S8 has the five-speed Tiptronic transmission that gives drivers the ease of an automatic and a dynamic standard shift when they choose.

Under Mr. Letourneau's guidance, Voisine completes several laps. "I have more confidence in this car than my Porsche 4S, because I already put one in the tree!"

It was on a treacherous stretch of road in Vermont where Voisine says he encountered his worst driving experience. "I was driving to put my car away. It was in October and the temperature was about 4 degrees. I could see the splash on the road from the lake and the road was packed with [wet] leaves. I was on the straight and I slowed down to take the curve, and as I turned, it never stopped and the Porsche went really slow through the corner into the trees. I was counting on the four-wheel drive too much."

"The thing about having powerful cars, especially the new models, is they have so much help for the drivers -- such as ABS and steering control -- people rely on it way too much," says Mr. Letourneau.

"They forget that the only thing that's in-between you and the road is the contact patch with the tires. So, there's about four square feet of rubber on the road and it doesn't matter if you have traction control."

Voisine quickly learns the science of a corner: Look far ahead as you drive; brake in a straight line before entering the corner, off the brakes to turn and gently touch the gas to maintain a constant speed and get the car nose back up, clip the apex to drive in as straight a line as possible and accelerate out of the corner.

Armed with these few tips, Voisine cuts 13 seconds off his initial lap time.

Wouldn't it be nice if it was this easy to reduce the time required to produce albums?

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