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*The following are driving tips written by Bob Smyth of The Genesis Coupes, a leading member of a great group of sports car enthusiasts.*

**Dragon Driving Tip #1:** The Dragon is not NASCAR. Maintain your following distance and allow for an absolute minimum of one car's length distance between you and the car you are following. There will be motorcycles and even other cars who will attempt to pass you in spite of the fact that passing is illegal and extremely dangerous on winding mountain roads. Leave enough space between you and the car in front of you so that you will have time to react to what the driver in front of you is doing as well as allow space for a passing vehicle to pull in quickly if the need arises. Do not take your daily driving mentality and apply it to the Dragon... it will get you or someone else killed.

**Dragon Driving Tip #2:** "Road Hypnosis" is a real thing. 318 curves in 11 miles is no joke, and you will find that you will begin to automatically react to the rhythm of the curves. Do not fall into the trap of losing situational awareness and forgetting that you are not on the road alone! If you have to, roll your windows down and stay alert! If you find that your mind is wandering as you are driving and you cannot focus... it's time to pull over and give yourself a break.

**Dragon Driving Tip #3:** Drive only as fast as you feel comfortable. If the person you are following pulls away and you are not comfortable driving faster... let the other car go! There are a few folks who do a lot of preparation for their weekend driving on the Tail of the Dragon. They have spent weeks optimizing their cars for the curves. If you are driving your car stock (no brake or suspension upgrades) you will be fine as long as you stay within the limits of your car. There are a number of cars out there that have upgraded brakes, fluid, springs, dampeners, and other suspension upgrades and tuning that will allow that driver to brake later and harder and go into turns much faster than you can in your stock-ish vehicle. Do NOT overestimate the abilities of your car or your driving skills. You can get to the bottom or top of the mountain and brag all you want, but while you are driving, be honest with yourself.

**Dragon Driving Tip #4:** Don't drive tired. There are a lot of activities planned from very early in the morning and going very late into the evening. You are not required or obligated to participate in any of it. I know the temptation is to cram as much as you can in the weekend and attempt to enjoy all of the activities. Tired minds are as bad as minds that have been inebriated with drugs or alcohol. Your reaction times will be slower, and you tend to focus harder on tasks while ignoring what is going on around you. If you have to, take a mid-afternoon nap or go to bed early. Nobody is going to give you any crap about getting well rested.

**Dragon Driving Tip #5:** At every stop, take the time to check your car! Mountain driving will expose your car to stresses that you will not encounter in your daily commute. As a minimum, you should check your tires and brakes, PS fluid levels, brake fluid levels, and overall condition of the car. At gas stops, make sure you check your oil levels. Never just assume that your car is good to go.

**Dragon Driving Tip #6:** Brake fade is a reality! With the exception of a few folks who are running high performance brake pads, stainless steel brake lines, and high temperature brake fluid, you will experience brake

fade. Once that happens, the only way to recover is to SLOW DOWN and use your brakes less. Do not attempt to continue driving and braking hard once you notice the fade. At some point your brake pads are going to glaze over, you are going to leave massive amounts of brake pad burned on to your rotors, and your brakes are going to fail. Brake early and reduce your speed to what you feel is safe going into the turn BEFORE you get into the turn and coast around the first half before accelerating out. This is especially true for you guys driving automatics!

**Dragon Driving Tip #7:** Be aware of changing road and environmental conditions. So... you've been up and down the Dragon 10 times this weekend and you are very comfortable about what is what. DO NOT assume that everything is as it was the last time you traveled up or down the road and adjust your driving style to compensate for changes. For instance, you do the early morning run down the Dragon at dawn... and you take a 30-minute break at the bottom of the mountain to watch the sunrise. When you head up the mountain, what was a light fog is now a morning dew that has settled on the road, which is just enough to draw up the oils that have accumulated on the road while it was dry. What was a dry sticky road coming down is now a slick road going up. Environmental changes can quickly change road conditions from safe to unsafe in literally minutes. Never take for granted that nothing has changed.

**Dragon Driving Tip #8:** Stay in your lane! All that stuff you learned at Track Day about driving "lines" and reducing corners... LEAVE IT ON THE TRACK. The Dragon is not a track, it is a public road. There are approximately 318 curves on the Dragon... 159 of which are blind corners. The Dragon is not a competition to see who can get to the bottom (or top) first. If you are driving so fast that you cannot keep it between the lines, slow it down! Your life and the lives of others is not worth the bragging rights of being the fastest.

**Dragon Driving Tip #9:** Take the time to warm up your tires or allow time for your tires to warm up before pushing hard. If your car has been sitting overnight at freezing or near-freezing temperatures and you jump in and start hitting the curves hard before your tires get a chance to warm up, you may find that you are driving on what feels like hockey pucks instead of rubber. This is especially true if you are on summer tires. Take the opportunity on the Hellbender drive to gradually warm your tires up by taking it slow initially and then gradually picking up the speed. Don't drive hard on cold tires.

**Dragon Driving Tip #10:** Other drivers will not follow the rules (and neither will the wildlife)! Other drivers will cross the double yellow lines, they will pass in no passing zones, and they will drive faster than their cars or their abilities will allow. Wildlife will wander onto the road... especially at dawn and dusk when the traffic is light and they are busy foraging for food. DO NOT allow other drivers or wildlife to spook you into making sudden avoidance moves that will force you to drive off the mountain or into it. Keep a calm and cool head and keep your wheels on the road. While a head-on collision may not be what anyone would consider to be an optimal solution to the problem of a driver in your lane, you may find that driving off of the mountain is a far worse consequence. Keep in mind that your car is built to withstand a head-on collision. You have crush zones, seat belts, and air bags that are all designed to minimize the consequences of taking another car or a large (or small)

animal head on. That is not to say that you shouldn't try to avoid the crash all together; however, if given the choice, hitting another car or animal may be a better option than flying off or into the mountain.

**Dragon Driving Tip #11:** Do not get overconfident. Overconfidence leads to overestimation of one's ability, which leads to mistakes. Your judgement, perception of reality, and ability to make sound and rational decisions can be adversely impacted by overconfidence. If you find that you no longer get a little knot in your stomach just before a run on the Dragon, you may need to pull yourself aside and give yourself a reality check. Driving on the Dragon should not scare the crap out of you before each run, but you should be concerned if it doesn't bother you at all that you are about to do some spirited driving down a road that has taken so many lives. A little bit of anxiety is actually a good thing, because it heightens your awareness and focuses your attention on the task at hand.

**Dragon Driving Tip #12:** Don't take yourself too seriously. In spite of that fantastic self-image you have of yourself, you are not Mario Andretti and this is not the Monaco Grand Prix. We gather on the mountain twice a year to meet one another, show off our cars, and drive them. At the end of the day, we have dinner together, drink together, and swap stories. This is not a racing event. This is not a hooning event. The winners are those who can go home at the end of the weekend and talk about all the great people they met, the really great roads we drove on, and the good times that we had. Losers go home on a flat bed truck if they are able to go home at all. Don't be a loser.

**Dragon Driving Tip #13:** Breathe! No... seriously... breathe! People who are stressed will sometimes hold their breath or start breathing rapidly. Both actions have consequences. While the altitude in the Smoky Mountains will not give you hypoxia, the oxygen levels are lower than sea level. Couple that with holding your breath or rapid breathing (hyper-ventilating) and you can put yourself into a hypoxic condition where your brain is being starved of oxygen. The first signs of hypoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain) include impaired vision, decreased reaction time, and impaired judgement followed by a sense of euphoria, light headedness (or even nausea), and headache. Hypoxia can be aggravated by the consumption of alcohol. Make sure you take time out to actually breathe!

**Dragon Driving Tip #14:** If you have a passenger, use them as a co-driver! If you have someone with you who is brave enough to sit in the passenger seat, give them a job that doesn't necessarily involve screaming at you that you are driving too fast! Radio calls are probably the best tool that we have to communicate with one another while on the move. Use your co-driver to identify and call out hazards not only to you, but also to the group on the radio. Hazard calls should be repeated. Don't assume that just because you heard the call that others in the group have heard it as well. Repeat the call so that everyone has a chance to hear. It may seem annoying sometimes when three or four people call out the same hazard, but better safe than sorry.

**Dragon Driving Tip #15:** Smooth is fast. We are talking about driver controls... steering, braking, and accelerating. Abrupt changes in direction and/or changes in speed will force your car into an unbalanced condition where one or more wheels leave the ground. Since those little rubber contact patches on the ground

are the only thing that separates you from a fiery, crashy death, it would be ill-advised for any of those little rubber patches to disappear when you need them the most. If you find that you have to slam on your brakes (the ABS is kicking in), or your back wheels are breaking traction coming out of a turn, or if you find that your car slides sideways in a turn, you are driving too fast and/or your driving inputs are too abrupt. Try to visualize your movements and work on making smooth inputs.

**Dragon Driving Tip #16:** Move your seat closer to the wheel. This is actually a race car trick. Most of us have our seats set where we are most comfortable, but often not where we really need to be sitting to optimally control the car and see where it is going. By moving your seat forward by 1 to 2 inches, you change your perspective on the road and will find that your effort driving the car is reduced. Give it a try and see if it makes a difference.

**Dragon Driving Tip #17:** Driving with one hand is only cool in the movies. While there are times where it is unavoidable, for instance those with manual transmission who have to take one hand off the wheel to shift, anyone who has watched race car drivers know that they will keep both hands on the wheel. This is especially important on our cars where bump steer is an issue. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term "bump steer", in simple terms it is the tendency for a car to have steering inputs made by imperfections in the road. MacPherson struts (the type of suspension in our cars) are especially susceptible to bump steer. Although Hyundai has done a pretty good job at minimizing bump steer in our cars, it still happens, and a large enough bump can introduce a significant steering input. If you only have one hand on the wheel, you may not be able to react fast enough or hold the wheel hard enough to prevent the input. *(Crossfire note: this was written for Bob's Hyundai group, but the same holds true for our Crossfires)*

**Dragon Driving Tip #18:** Let faster drivers go by. Although it may hurt your ego a little to let a Fiat 500 pass you because you are going slower than they want to go, find a pull off and let them go by. By not allowing faster drivers to pass you, you are inviting them to pass you anyway... and most probably in an unsafe way. Better to have a little bruised ego than to force a confrontation with another driver.

**Dragon Driving Tip #19:** Black Ice is a thing. Black ice isn't really black... it is a very thin coat of very clear ice usually left on the road by mist that has frozen on the road's surface. Black ice is damn near impossible to see, especially in low light, but can easily turn your car into a hockey puck. The most likely condition that you are going to find black ice is when the temperature is just above or just below freezing in shaded areas, areas that have wind blowing across the road, and on bridges. The most insidious part of black ice is that it can form when there is no other indicator that there is any ice anywhere else. Always assume that if temperatures are near freezing that black ice can be present... especially in the early morning hours where there has been little if any traffic on the road.