

Formula Drift: The Streets of Long Beach and The Petersen Automotive Museum

In 2017, for the second year in a row, we combined our love of learning and cars to design an out-of-state educational field trip for local automotive students and their instructors. Last year, we took five students to [Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca](#) and [Canepa](#) to watch and interact with professional IMSA race teams and learn about automotive history and restoration. This year, our data from students showed that they would be most interested in attending an event in the Formula Drift series. So, we set out to create an interesting, valuable, and exciting learning experience for local students and believe we succeeded in just that.

So, why take students to a race?



As an organization, we focus on the value of having novices intersect with experts in learning environments. Through partnerships with local high school automotive programs, we have been investigating the best ways to provide these types of interactions for the benefit of students. Upon hearing that students were interested in [Formula Drift](#), we reached out to Jim Liaw, the President of the organization. We explained that we wanted to bring a group of high school

students and their teachers on a plane from Seattle to Long Beach so they could attend The Streets of Long Beach competition and expand their understanding of careers in the performance automotive industry. In addition to the races themselves, we wanted to provide opportunities for the students to connect with a variety of professionals and different automobiles during their visit. Jim hopped right on the phone with us to talk about what he could do to assist. We also reached out to the [Petersen Auto Museum](#) in Los Angeles to arrange for a tour of “The Vault” which contains some of the world’s most rare cars.

Students who were interested in attending the trip wrote us an essay about their interest in automotive technology and their ideas for future career paths. All students who submitted essays were then invited to an interview where we asked them to talk about their experiences with cars, what they found most intriguing, from a learning perspective, about attending the race in Long Beach, and what they hoped to gain from this experience. It was very difficult to choose the students because we heard some incredibly compelling and interesting stories about how automotive classes really impacted their lives and how they hoped to use this experience to help them think about their career paths within automotive fields. We ultimately selected 10 students (three of which were outstanding female students) and also brought their teachers, Pat McCue out of the Northshore Automotive Program and Richie del Puerto out of the Sno-Isle Tech Center.



This was our first time taking students to a drift event and we were not disappointed! Jim Liaw personally took our group around the morning we arrived at the track. The students told us in advance they were particularly interested in tires and how they influence the cars during drifting. An expert from Nexen Tires spent time with the students and teachers and explained the unique challenges that tires pose when drifting. From there, students spoke with Rusty Waples, the Brand Manager for Black Magic and Gumout through ITW Global Brands who discussed the technical challenges of engines in drift cars as well as some of the marketing and business issues people involved in the sport need to consider. Students then had a chance to speak briefly with well-known drift racer, Ken Gushi, and see his Toyota 86 car up-close. Throughout the course of the weekend students would get to experience the spotters' tent, talk at length with an electronics technician from AEM about electronic control units, meet with another driver, Alec Hohnadell, and speak with a lead mechanic from the Hoonigan team. These opportunities to intersect with the professionals and speak with them about their career paths, education, and day to day challenges were among the most impactful parts of the weekend. We were incredibly impressed with the open, communicative nature of the professionals at the race. Their willingness to engage with students and openly share knowledge was really a fantastic part of the trip.

Having the teachers present is another key component of the automotive trip experiences. The teachers are able to make connections back to the classroom and auto-shop which helps make the learning more explicit. They are able to draw students' attention to particular aspects of the performance racing scene that are relevant to the work students do in their shops (or on their pit crews, in the case of the Northshore program). Even when we were looking at the various show cars and race cars, the students and teachers were having technical conversations about the tuning done to individual cars.

We wrapped up the weekend at the Petersen Auto Museum. We learned last year that getting an up-close look at a wide variety of cars with experts available to discuss and answer questions was a real added bonus. Drift cars obviously encompass a very finite, particular range of vehicles for students to explore. The Petersen Museum is world-renowned for its collection ranging from some of the first cars ever built to incredibly cutting edge super-cars. Students engaged in lively discussions with their peers and teachers about the cars, builds and modifications we saw at the museum as well. It gave them the chance to see a wide array of cars as well as informative displays, such as the Maserati section which featured pulled apart Quattroporte's so that students could explore the suspension, engines, frame and body as separate components.

The experience culminated in follow-up research interviews with students and teachers honing in on what was most valuable in terms of their own learning and development so that we can use those findings to drive future automotive projects. We at foundry10 were just thrilled with the second iteration of the automotive racing trip model. We are grateful for the time, support and collaboration of the folks at Formula Drift, the input and work of both teachers, and for the enthusiasm and willingness to learn and experience new things the students brought. We look forward to sharing a recap video as well as findings from our research questions in early May!