

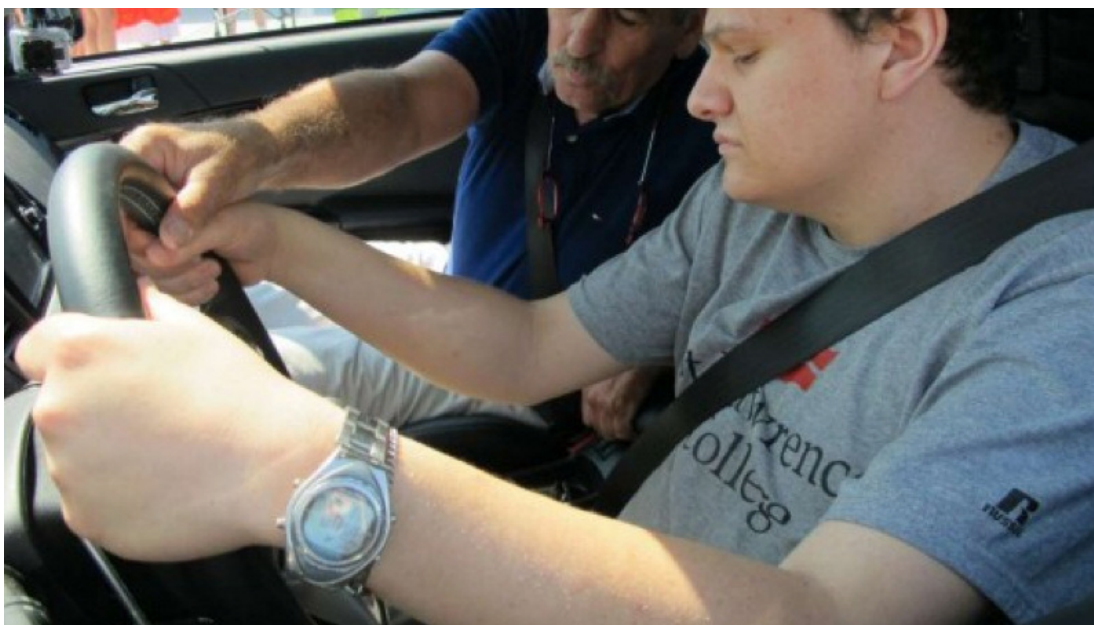
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Triumph over adversity at Mosport

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Robert Hampson powered his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo into one of Mosport's notorious hairpin turns exclaiming, "This is the best day of my life".

At full throttle down the front straight, hard on the brakes and just clipping the apex, such was Hampson's pace that I was in the back seat and starting to get motion sickness.

Not bad for a guy who is blind.

In the car with me and Hampson were multi-championship winning race driver, Rick Bye, and beside me in the back, Bernie Gluckstein who, between the three of them, may have just opened a whole new world to people with disabilities.

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PERFORMANCE DRIVING EXPERIENCE:
Lapping up the thrills at Old Mosport

By Kathy Renwald

Not just in Ontario, but around the world.

It's one of those rare instances when people from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences meet at one magical moment in time.

At the Canadian Tire Mosport Park on July 2, people with acquired brain injury, spinal cord injury, other neurological disorders and those with visual impairment were invited by Gluckstein Personal Injury Lawyers (GPIL), of Toronto, to come to the track and drive a real racetrack prepared car for the first in what might develop into an annual event.

Called the Performance Driving Experience, it was billed as a one-on-one driving experience with a professional driving instructor. To ensure a safe and controlled environment, a driving instructor was present for the entire duration of the event.

It all started with Hampson's grandmother, Dorothy Davey, of Toronto.

Hampson, 22, of Toronto, has not let his vision impairment hobble his daily life. A tireless volunteer and King Clancy Award recipient, he has accomplished a lot including sky diving, but his ultimate wish for Christmas last year was to drive a racecar.

That Christmas wish, led Davey to Rick Bye, an internationally renowned driving instructor who had his own life-threatening challenge.

On January 29, 1998, Bye and his co-driver were hauling a brand new Mustang racecar to Daytona behind a Ford F-350 pickup on Interstate 77 near Statesville, NC.

As they crested a hill in the rain, before them were two semi-haulers stopped side-by-side and blocking the highway only yards ahead.

No one really knows what happened next, but the best guess is Bye threw himself in front of his passenger a split second before the crash taking the whole hit.

The passenger had a few broken bones. Bye was so badly injured he was placed into an induced coma. By all rights he should have died.

But if you know him, as I do, he is a tough customer with one of the strongest wills to survive I have ever seen.

He never should have walked again, let alone survived, but he did.

During his rehabilitation period he became a client of GPIL and he and company principal, Bernie Gluckstein, became friends.

Bye is currently involved with Brian Donato, of Orangeville, who is a paraplegic.

They have created Roll With It Racing and have entered a Lancer Evo donated by Mitsubishi Canada in this September's Targa Newfoundland six-day race with the team sponsored by GPIL.

Out of that, Bye and Gluckstein (also a King Clancy Award winner) came up with the Performance Driving Experience, which saw some 75 people turn up at Mosport's twisty Driver Development Track on July 2. Joining them were professional racecar drivers Bill Adam and David Deacon, donating their time to help out with driver/instructor duties.

The sports cars (Porsche, Mitsubishi) being used at this event were tailored to ensure that everyone had a unique driving experience. For example, the cars featured hand controls for those who have been left without the use of their legs. The visually impaired were able to drive a racecar, with a specially trained instructor in the passenger seat.

In addition, GPIL donated Victory Laps, which entitled recipients to ride in a performance sports car driven by a professional driving instructor and made available to children, teens or adults who choose to be a passenger for the thrill of the drive.

When Hampson took the wheel, Bye told him when to accelerate, brake, turn left or right and, occasionally, grabbed the steering wheel to help Hampson make some of the more difficult turns.

I have to tell you, he did great. But the best part was hearing Hampson laugh with joy after charging through one difficult corner after another.

Sitting beside me in the back of Evo, Gluckstein was mightily impressed, making no bones about how fast we were going.

"What this is," he said, "is a triumph over adversity."

"Here we are today with some of these people having had a chance to do something they have dreamed of."

What he also said was that Performance Driving Experience is probably the first event of its kind, not just in Canada or North America, but perhaps worldwide.

"I would like to grow on this and make it an annual event," he said.

For more information visit gluckstein.com