



Anyone that has been following sportscar racing in North America the last five years or more is probably well aware of the name Spencer Pumpelly. Since the mid 1990s, he has made the most of his opportunities behind the wheel of a race car, picking up well earned victories in some of the greatest of races from the Six Hours of the Glen to the longest of the American endurance contests, the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona. His Rolex watch, presented to him for winning the GT Class in the 2006 race with TPC Racing, is one of his proudest possessions.

Pumpelly started out like so many others with an interest in speed by taking a three day Skip Barber driving school. He immediately fell in love with the idea of going fast equipped with the knowledge to keep himself in control of the car lap after lap. He soon came to be aware his skills were above par and so he decided to pursue the dream to become a professional racer.

Through a persevering drive to prove he belonged in the big leagues of racing, Pumpelly initially realized his dreams with an older Porsche that he raced in the early years of the GRAND-AM series. Woefully outclassed by the teams with much better equipment – and the support crew to back them up – Pumpelly pushed on and soon became noticed as an up and coming hot shoe.

One astute observer of his talent, and the man who enhanced Pumpelly's dream by putting him in a competitive car, was Kevin Buckler, the owner of The Racers Group (TRG) team. The pairing has landed Pumpelly on the podium many times, often while driving with a semi-professional sharing the ride.

When he has the time, Pumpelly works with racer wannabes who attend the Skip Barber Racing School three-day program. In that capacity, Pumpelly chooses not to share a car with anyone.

"I'm still an instructor at Skip Barber but my racing commitments have caused me to cut back on the number of days I can be at Road Atlanta teaching. I also do more over the winter than during the racing season.

"First of all, I do not passenger, ever! When I first started doing this I did sit in the car with the person I was coaching. What I found is that, if there is even a seat in the car, the safety considerations seemed to be very secondary to what was applied to the driver. They would throw some belts in the car and say 'that should be good enough'. I found I could never get the belts tight enough or they would slip off my HANS device. But back then I used to think, 'what could possibly go wrong'?

"Then I had to learn the hard way – twice – that something most definitely could go wrong.

"I was involved in two crashes while sitting in the 'passenger' seat. One was the driver's fault but we fortunately did not crash too hard. The other one was not the driver's fault. A deer jumped out in front of us as we were traveling at a very high rate of speed! I think if the driver hit the deer he would have killed it but we missed it when the driver took the car off the road. When he hit the wet grass we got up close and personal with the tire wall real quick! Fortunately we were not hurt although I was sore for a few days afterwards.

"I decided then and there I would find another way to teach people how to drive – from a safe distance!"

Pumpelly's own experience began with him taking instruction from people like Peter Argetsinger and Brent Rubinich at Barber. He did well and then tried his hand at lapping days – where you do lap after lap just to get the experience. It wasn't long before he had to make those laps count.

"I did my first race in 1996. I was doing OK for a few laps before I threw the car off the road. I knew I had to find a way not to leave the racetrack on a fairly consistent basis! One thing was certain at Skip Barber, if you went off you had to bring the car in for a complete safety check.

"At Lime Rock Park I did manage to kill a lot of mosquitoes with all the tire smoke!"

Pumpelly feels anyone who has an interest in at least experiencing the world of racing from the inside should consider signing on for a Skip Barber school course.

"I would say Skip is a great place to do your first couple of races for sure. You need to get the basics down and build a good knowledge and the right skill sets if you want to move forward. If you wish to move up you will need that solid foundation.

"Another key piece, if you decide you want to try to become a professional, is to hook up with a good team and try to avoid being in sub-par equipment. Nothing good ever comes from that.

"Then again, just participating in the school and having that on track experience is enough for most people. You don't need to make racing a career to enjoy a few days of high speed fun. If you fall in love with it like I did, at least you will have given yourself a good start by learning the basics."

Pumpelly credits a lot of his professional success to his start with Skip Barber, and to his association with TRG.

"TRG is a great place to work. They have a great group of talented and knowledgeable people there. Kevin has brought together people who all contribute to the team's success. There are people there who are much smarter than I am about how to approach racing and I feel I have learned a lot."

It seems even those who teach can still be taught. Pumpelly is a great example of taking your skills to the task at hand, and to the hands that wish to be tasked as racers.

