

**By:** Andrew S. Hartwell

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He has driven faster than others and now he is driven to make others faster. He is Ross Bentley, a man once on a mission to see that it was his eyes that made first contact with a checkered flag. For several years now his attention has instead been directed towards helping other athletes and executives find the key to top level performance so they can be first at what they do, be it drive a racecar or lead people. He is an accomplished author, coach, mentor, speaker and motivator.

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The most recent driving challenge Bentley faced in 2010 was a drive in a Chevron vintage racer in the Le Mans Classic Historic Race in July. Prior to that race he ran with the Canadian Bullet Racing team, in a Porsche 997 GT3, in the GRAND-AM Rolex Series at the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona. (They finished in 13<sup>th</sup> place in the GT class.)



### Ross Bentley

Bentley's racing resume includes many races in prototypes as well as Indy cars and several other types of fast moving vehicles. An established entrepreneur, he is about to embark on yet another new venture, this time a school for learning how to become a professional rally driver. This on the heels of his having written a seven-volume series on driving entitled Speed Secrets, creating and operating a driving school for teens called Swerve ([www.goswerve.com](http://www.goswerve.com)) another one called The Driver Training Group ([www.tdtg.com](http://www.tdtg.com)), another working with a business called Shark ([www.sharkinc.com](http://www.sharkinc.com)) that creates high-end steel products workspace solutions for car dealers, and yet another business called Speed Secrets ([www.speedsecrets.com](http://www.speedsecrets.com)), where he works with racers to develop the skills he covers in his books of the same title.

"I also do performance coaching through my Performance Rules company ([www.performance-rules.com](http://www.performance-rules.com)). My life never lacks variety!" he told us.

Bentley's latest motorsports venture is centered on the sport of rallying. As he has done for road racers and executives, he plans to provide a canvas on which the aspirations of future rally drivers and enthusiasts can be drawn. That canvas is a new rallying instructional complex to be located in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States.

Bentley filled us in on his new found love for rallying and how he hopes to inspire and instruct others to excel at speed along twisting, hilltop roads.

"With several key partners, I am starting up a rally driving school here in the Seattle, Washington area. We are calling it the DirtFish Rally School ([www.dirtfish.com](http://www.dirtfish.com)). We have an incredible location for our school with over 300 acres in the Seattle area situated right next to a mountain and a five-star resort. We are 30 minutes from downtown. We have eight 280 horsepower Subaru rally cars.

"I've always been passionate about rallying but I have never been able to work it into my schedule. This summer I had the opportunity to run some practice laps in a rally car in Europe and it was such a blast! I've driven all sorts of racecars but the first time I drove a rally car I asked myself 'what have I been missing all these years!' Now rallying will take up a lot of my time once we open the new school in the fall.

“We are currently developing the curriculum for the school. We decided to take a ‘clean sheet of paper’ approach and set out to do something greater than what anyone else had done before. We began by looking at what other people were doing and learned all we could keeping in mind that we did not want to just copy everyone else’s approach, we want to exceed it. With the current interest in extreme sports, rally cross and so on, it is almost like rallying is becoming the new road racing.”



**Ross knows how to go fast in a variety of cars.**

A new driving school – like a traditional school – requires a classroom in which to learn. DirtFish has eight 280-horsepower classrooms and the learning comes fast in each one.

“The cars were built by Vermont Sports Cars. They run the Subaru factory team in Rally America for Travis Pastrana and Dave Mirra. The first four cars could have been taken to a rally and, with Travis in the car, they could have won or finished in the top three. These are not your typical school cars. These are outright Group M rally cars. We have an additional four rally class cars that are stunning in terms of how fast they are and how well they handle.”

Besides Bentley, the teaching staff will include several veteran rallyists who can bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table – or in this case, the driver’s seat.

“We’ve got guys who have been involved with rallies from running in them to organizing them for many years. They have the right backgrounds to both teach and to look after the cars.”



**A classroomful of eager students attend Ross’ DirtFish Rally School, eager to get out into the real, live Subaru rally cars awaiting outside.**

Bentley used to be in the same position most drivers are in, they have to keep looking for new rides in order to secure new sources of income. In his case, he found that by taking on the role of both driver and coach he could enable two streams of income to flow his way. Eventually, the aspects of looking for rides, while a complete challenge in itself, proved far less enjoyable or fruitful than did the prospect of operating challenging businesses that could provide a steady stream of income – and personal satisfaction.

“About seven or eight years ago I started Swerve, a driving school for teens, and while I still have ownership in it. I decided that I most enjoyed starting and building new businesses, but after a time I didn’t want to be tied to managing them and running them day in and day out. I have a management team in place to do that.

“I started a lot of these businesses knowing that the psychological side of racing could have applications in business. Many of the people I coached in racing were businessmen who thanked me for helping them shave seconds off their lap times but then went on to say the things they learned were also being applied at their business. Then I started to get guys asking me to come to their businesses and do some coaching for their management teams.”

Bentley loves going fast and he has come to recognize his other love is in helping others to excel.

“I love coaching and motivating others. What I love about coaching racers is that, you try something and within a few minutes you know whether it worked or not. In business it could take six months or a year. But what I like about the business side is it is all more people-oriented. You have to figure out how to get the best performance out of people, and because you don’t have that immediate feedback you have to think more long term and in a more strategic manner. That part is fun as well.

“Ultimately what I do is coach performance, not as a performance coach. I try to help people get into the right state of mind. Through the years I have learned several tools that I can apply to helping others. I help them understand the challenges they face and how our mental programming can affect the way we tackle those challenges. Sometimes it means you – in effect – have to get them to delete a program and reboot, so to speak. It comes down to having the right program at the right time.

“I build what I call triggers. An example would be working with someone like Colin Braun who races in the NASCAR Nationwide Series. At Road America I said three words to him and people asked me why I did that. Colin knows that those three words are the trigger for him to reboot or switch his program. This all takes a lot of prework and when it comes time to perform, the words help the person to align the right program to the task at hand. In some respects I imagine some people would think it is like what a hypnotist does but it is so much more than that.

“One of the most fun things I have been doing the last few years is coaching motorcycle racers. One man I was introduced to a few years back, Joe Kopp, told me he felt he couldn’t keep up with the younger riders any longer. Since I don’t ride I couldn’t help with any technical riding skills or techniques but I could and did help him focus on the mental aspects of riding. Today, at the age of 41, he is kicking the butt of the young kids. It is just so much fun working with him because he is having a blast!”



### **Ross IndyCar.**

Bentley has few regrets about not pursuing a full time ride as a driver.

"I am so busy doing what I absolutely love that I find I don't have time to miss driving. But when I do drive I go 'man, I still love this', and I feel I can still do it. But I don't miss having to work your butt off trying to put the next deal together. When a ride comes along I jump at it, but I do not miss spending all my hours searching for an opportunity to drive. I don't want to do that anymore and besides, that is for the younger guys now!

"But of course, if I could use my skills to help a team win I'd be more than happy to coach and drive!"

Being a happily married man and father to a 15 year old daughter, Michelle, we wondered what trigger words might his family use when they see a need to reprogram him.

"Ha-ha {there are} but there really aren't any I can admit to in public! I'm just very lucky to be married to Robin who loves racing and what I do as much as I do."