Here, Speed is the Recipe

Like a world-class machine, a finely-tuned team is only as good as its parts.

At the BMW Performance Center West in Thermal, Calif., a match of man and machine finds some true team-building coalescence.

The miles of track, set amid a canvass of Palm Springs-area desert terrain, prove perfect for a customized, corporate BMW getaway event.

"The ability to bring a group together, to build trust through friendly competition is one of the things we excel at here," says Stephen Saward, operations manager at BMW Performance Center West.

"Candidly, groups will often tell us they want something with a focus on competition, so we can skew a day in that direction."

Sporting a stable of 120 cars and the latest in BMW's revered M and MINI Models, Saward and his crew of BMW-certified instructors — all of whom are or were profes-



Set at The Thermal Club amid a breathtaking canvass of desert terrain, the west coast location of BMW's renowned Performance Driving School is ideal for intensely unique customized, corporate getaway events.



sional race car drivers — gear guests through a catered day of driving engagement.

Sure, speed is indeed part of the recipe, but the ingredients therein are comprised of achieving individual and team mettle by way of understanding and mastering the power and performance beneath the hood.

Plainly stated: The day provides a rare rush, and opportunity to run, say, a 600-plus horsepower BMW M5 through a course of carefully-constructed cones, curves and straightaways that makes for an unparalleled drive.

Having hosted group sizes ranging from a dozen drivers up to parties of several hundred, the BMW team takes as much pride in its ability to craft a memorable day for your team as it does in a flexible menu of catered corporate group experiences.

"Everything is fully-customizable to the client's wishes," Saward says.

Half-day adventures are most popular, with groups enjoying a fully-staffed, catered meal (compliments of the executive chef) either before or after a four-hour driving experience. Evening events feature a full bar, where a strict wristband policy ensures nary a drop for those behind the wheel.

Buckling-up across a range of different M Models provides opportunity for co-workers to enjoy a day of unique reward, along with ground-breaking interpersonal interactions.

"Maybe they're out here for a conference, and are antsy to get outside after a few days of meetings," Saward says. "We offer that chance to get out to socialize and to get to know people better."

Crafted for larger groups, BMW's "Free Flow" structure provides a continual Go and

Flow of guest experiences.

"We'll set-up six or seven stations, all with different activities they'll enjoy through either a rotation we've arranged or they can go to whatever station they want," Saward says. "It doesn't have to be a regimented structure, and we coordinate these gatherings with a lot of flexibility in mind."

Through speed comes adrenaline; through adrenaline comes the unknown; through the unknown comes trust.

"In a controlled environment, you can start to test your own limits," Saward says. "We have a philosophy of 'Challenge by Choice,' where we want guests to have fun up to the level where they're comfortable. We don't want anybody to feel left out, so 'Challenge by Choice' is really a keystone of our instruction."

For most nascent drivers of such word-class machines, the initial burst of power charging through one's arms, legs and backside comes with a sense of early trepidation. Yet, the continual dictum of safety, working in concert with real-time driving feedback from instructors, aids to build confidence and car knowledge with each ensuing RPM.

"We give a blend of excitement and adrenaline, along with some instruction," explains Saward. "Along with the fun, everybody can come away from here with some knowledge of something they can do a bit better on the road to be a safer and more efficient driver."

As guests find comfort with subsequent runs, a test of timing sees groups gelling with the introduction of some friendly competition to the card. Timed laps bring a healthy fuel of competitive fun to events, with drivers comparing both individual runs and team relays.

"We can also leverage the timed drives as a team-building activity, when we build it as a relay race," Saward adds. "And it's pretty amazing to see how teams adapt, how they interact in an environment, which is new to most of them."

For corporate groups, guests are used to working in fast-paced environments, bringing some bragging rights to the day fuels a fun flame.

"When we get into the announcement of top three times, yeah, there's always some excitement," Saward smiles. "Or, sometimes, organizations want to save the announcement for, say, their dinner gathering."

For those thinking they've mastered a top time or drive — or having belief they've executed an especially-speedy lap – think again. At the close of the experience, BMW instructors take passenger-seated guests through a smoke-filled, rubber-burning "Hot Lap," during which the pros — to borrow in part from *The Usual Suspects* — are certain to "show men of will what will really is."

Team and relationship-building through corporate gatherings has found historic bonding through the forms of, say, Happy Hours, golf rounds, paint ball and sporting trips. But the stretch of premier pavement in Thermal, Calif. – with its opportunity to thrust oneself forward through the tenets of pure speed, power and control – truly has no equal.

"Sure, you can go to take your team out for golf, tennis, lunch or a spa day," concludes Saward. "But we offer a unique part of the Palm Springs-area experience that people will remember for a long, long time. Where else can you have a day of fun that sends you home with some valuable driving skills?"

To register for a BMW Performance Center Driving School or call 800-345-4BMW.

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