

The Events:

The Chick School hosted by NCR and Women at the Wheel, Precision Driving Instruction hosted by SCR

Chick School - The Beginning:

The idea of a Chick School started with 2 questions. After an event in 2003, long time local autocrosser, Emmie Fisher, and I were discussing the lack of female participation at local events. There were certainly plenty of them actually AT the event, but they weren't driving. We started asking - why don't you participate and what would it take to get you to participate? The answers to the first question also gave us the answer for the second question. Women didn't participate because they found it too intimidating and they didn't want their significant other to yell at them. The Chick School was born!

Women at the Wheel – The Beginning:

SCR's Solo chair at the time heard that another region was doing a ladies event and brought it up at the first BOD meeting of 2017.

The newly elected BOD met in January of 2017. There were three women on the BOD at the time. Myself, Melanie Murray and Alex Daley. We had no idea what the event would look like at the time but put it on the schedule for August of 2017 and started working on it. We really wanted to design a program for women to get a confident start in Autocross and that's really how teaching the elements and then a full course came together.

Fun Fact! I was put in touch with the Ladies from the Chick School and they sent me everything they had from their event that they thought might be helpful.

Chick School - Inaugural Event

SI 1- We were fortunate that the local club - Tarheel Sports Car Club - was very supportive of the idea of increasing female participation. We scheduled the event for a Saturday prior to a Sunday event to help keep costs down.

SI 2 - Emmie really put her heart and soul into making it a very welcoming environment with name tags, give aways.... a lot of hand holding for students and instructors alike. We had enough students that we did not have enough female instructors. So we improvised....

SI 3 - We hand-picked three male instructors we were confident could instruct without intimidating. It helped that we asked them to wear skirts - which actually went a long way to dispel any perceived intimidation. We also changed their names - Eric became Erica, Carl

became Carla and Scott became Scarlet. By the afternoon session, the students were completely comfortable with them and even said it was ok if they took off the skirts.

Women at the Wheel-Details of the event:

We plan Women @ the Wheel as a part of a 2-day weekend.

SCR does have a smaller group of ladies and since this is an instructional event, we cap it to a least a 2-1 ratio depending on how many instructors are available. One helpful tip – We pull ladies from neighboring regions to help us. We have had instructors from NCR, Coastal Empire GA, and even from Tennessee!

Our day is split in half. We teach elements in the morning usually braking, slalom and an oval. The afternoon is spent doing an in-depth course walk with some extremely talented Ladies and then we run a very basic autocross.

We do our best to allow the instructors to ride and or drive cars they are familiar with. We station the instructors at elements in the morning because we run them simultaneously. when the students are done learning the elements, we swap them so they get a new element and new instructors.

One thing that we do very different from NCR, is we allow men on site but not in grid or any active areas. We also allow our instructors to fuss at any men other than our workers, that do try to cross the lines and talk to the ladies.

We really do like having some of men there on site to work. This proves the ladies that the men of the region do support us and that they are approachable. We do introduce the workers to the students and we have found that those that attend the autocross on the following day are more than happy to have our guys ride along as instructors in the event that one of the female instructors they connected with aren't available.

All students, instructors and workers get a free entry into the autocross on the following. day.

We record times during the autocross and the student with the most improved time is awarded a one year annual membership to the SCCA.

We are extremely fortunate to have the site that we use for Women at the Wheel because it's HUGE! While we run Women at the Wheel on one side, we have our Jr. karts come out and run on the other side during the event. While most of the children that run karts on the day the event belong to the instructors, it is an awesome way to introduce women and families to karts as well.

Chick School – Branding

We had a graphic artist do our original t-shirt design but it wasn't conducive to updating each year. We've gone through a few variations of the design over the years, but have always kept the 'chick' aspect in place. We have finally settled on this one and use it in multiple ways. Each school has a magnet/dash plaque that goes with the corresponding event following the school. The logo goes on the t-shirt or hat or whatever the giveaway happens to be, although we've pretty much settled on shirts exclusively - and we'll talk about why in a minute. We tailor the shirts depending on if the recipient is an

instructor or student. That gives the instructor a boost and also helps the student know who the instructors are vs other students. Why a t-shirt? Because people wear t-shirts! Which means other people - other ladies, in particular, see the shirt. It immediately identifies the wearer as either an instructor or former student which opens the door to further conversation about the school and is awesome advertising! We started using the tech shirts which are way more comfortable in hotter temps than plain cotton - so they do get worn.

Women at the Wheel – Branding

We started with a drawing done by my Brother in law. That drawing was then given to another woman that autox with us that is a graphic designer. She made two logos for us and at the time we swapped between the two. We also use a few pictures of actual women from our region and their actual cars to post on social media.

Chick School – Preparation

There is a lot of prep work that goes into the school. Because instructors are always asking for guidance, we provide a cheat sheet which really stresses enthusiasm, positive feedback, and ensuring the student is having a good time. We send a communication to all of the area clubs inviting them to send instructors and students.

We design a course with very basic elements - slalom, sweeper, offsets, chicago box. We try to make it as straightforward as possible. And we provide course maps, which are really helpful when the student and instructor are talking about the upcoming run.

Women at the Wheel – Preparation

Preparations start months before an event takes place. SCR opens registration and starts advertising the event at least 3 months ahead of the actual event. Once registration closes we reach out to all of the students to provide a welcome letter and schedule. The letter provides the students with information about the event like what to bring and what to wear and what we will provide for them.

We are very dedicated to having the women design all aspects of the event. We have a team that works the course, some amazing ladies lead the course walk and teach the elements.

We have only run two events as of the 2018 season but after each event we revisited the event as a whole and look at what we could do better. We get tons of feedback and make adjustments as needed.

Chick School – Extras

We love to make this a fun event for everyone involved, so we do work hard to tailor this to the students. We do not allow any men on site - with the exception of drop off. We don't let them

stay to help get the car ready - we have ladies waiting to help with that upon arrival. And while a real issue in the early years of the school - the men REALLY wanted to see what was happening! - it is now very much an accepted part of the school. Our survey responses indicate that this is a huge plus and not something we are likely to change.

We put together goodie bags for each student and instructor that contains their t-shirt, sample sunscreen and alcohol cleaner, information about the local clubs, course map, dash plaque, and any other information we decide to include.

We do everything we can to make it as simple as possible for students. Since most students have only ever attended an autocross and some haven't even done that much, we try to eliminate any excuse for not coming. So we provide the sunscreen and the water and lunch. We help them ensure their tires are pumped up and their cars are empty. We provide loaner helmets. Basically, they just have to show up with a car and close toed shoes.

We send out lots of information (although most of that has moved to social media now) - maps, directions, schedules, what to expect. There are LOTS of questions and we give them every opportunity to ask things up front and make sure they know exactly what to expect when they arrive on site.

We also do a pre and post event survey. The pre-event survey helps us know what the student wants out of the school, their experience, and other information that helps us match them up with compatible instructors. The post event survey really tells us what we can do to improve the next school. The information is invaluable and also helps us know when any of our instructors might need some additional coaching.

One of the biggest behind-the-scenes things we do is matching up instructors and students. We base it on the car they are driving and level of experience of both the student and instructor. You'd be surprised at how often an instructor doesn't feel comfortable in a high horsepower vehicle or a rear wheel vs front wheel drive car. We also change up the instructors between morning and afternoon sessions. If the morning instructor is a newer instructor, we'll make sure the afternoon instructor is more experienced. IF the survey indicates someone more technical/analytical, we find at least one similar instructor.

Women at the Wheel – Extras

We provide lots of extra little details for this even that we don't normally supply at autocross events.

We try to keep the students and instructors in a relaxed and fun environment ALL day. We bring in lunch and have an hour of down time while the afternoon course is being setup and also encourage the students to take some time not driving if they feel like its too much or if we are pushing them too hard. There is a lot crammed into one day so if need a break - they take it.

One really fun thing that we have done is bring in a photographer for the event. This is really a lot of fun for the students, they get great pictures of their cars doing crazy things they never thought they would of could do.

Along with the free entry into the free event the following day, we offer an instructor for them if they feel like they need or want one. There is a seperate class for all of the students that plan to stay over so they get to run together.

Contact your Solo Development Coordinator. The very first year that we ran the program Scott Dobler was the SE Solo Chair, we presented the program to him and provided documentation for the dollar amount requested to support the event. The amount was approved in support of the event.

Chick School - Lessons Learned

There have been plenty of lessons learned over the years, but these are the biggest ones. Our school is really tailored towards beginners. The drivers at a more intermediate or advanced level are looking for additional seat time and tend to want a more intense experience. And while we can certainly handle that, we've found it's better to be very clear up front that we are tailored to beginners.

I understand it is controversial, but having a ladies only environment has been a huge part of our success. We absolutely get plenty of students who have no problem driving with men. But we absolutely get just as many, if not more, students who are just more comfortable in the ladies-only environment. And those are really our target audience - those ladies who would not otherwise give autocross a chance.

It goes without saying that the club has to really support the effort - both in terms of scheduling and financial. We keep the fees extremely low - again, to take away any excuse - so the club has to be willing to possibly lose money. Anyone who attended nationals last year knows how quickly a day can pass and that it's no fun to have runs impacted by lack of time. Having a time keeper is ESSENTIAL to ensuring everyone gets the maximum number of runs. We designate one person whose job is to do nothing but keep track of time and direct people where they need to be and when. We schedule the day in 15 minute increments and the time keeper makes sure we stick to it.

The Chick School is an excellent way to develop instructors. If an instructor is not engaged with a student during a session, they are encouraged to ride in the back seat of other cars both to learn from the in car instructor and to provide feedback. Everyone learns from everyone else because people notice different things about a run.

Lastly - keep it simple. For example, the first year, we had printed name tags and holders for students and instructors. Being able to see names is important, having a custom name tag is not. Now we put tape across the helmet with the name on it. Identify what brings the most value to the day and let everything else go.

Women at the Wheel – Lessons Learned

SCR has only held two events to date but we already share many of the same lessons learned. We have learned that keeping a relaxed environment with no pressure is key. Our event is targeted for beginners and those who have never done an autocross so it has to be pressure free.

Because we try to keep the day stress free and laid back a timekeeper is very important. Each instructor is given a schedule, but you know how we all get around cars and racing. We are easily distracted by fun and someone keeping track of the day is super important.

We do love and encourage having our guys come out to help us, but that may not work for everyone. Your region should do what works for you, but if you can have women teaching other women you will be successful.

We not only have our own region supporting us we have Women coming in from the surrounding areas to help instruct. We have SCR, NCR Coastal GA and Tara Johns came in for our first event just to help out ALL the way from TN.

Chick School – Future

As I mentioned previously, club support is crucial. We are now asking all of the clubs in North Carolina to support the Chick School - both by sending money and instructors and students. In return, we put the club logo on the shirt and we move the school around the state so different clubs can host. The last school was hosted by Tarheel, but two other clubs provided support. I am working with Triad to host the next school and hope to pull in students and instructors from the central part of the state. It also gives us more site variety, which means more course variety.

Women at the Wheel – Future

We have now completed our second event and made the decision to run it every other year. With a core team supporting so many multi day events we decided to alternate years to keep the team from burn out. The Region is thriving and we have all of the support we need but due to schedule and finances alternating years makes the most sense for SCR.