

Notes To New Autocrossers by Ed Fisher

You folks that are relatively new may have heard the saying, “You’re legal until you beat someone who cares.”

I don’t think this is correct. I want to warn you away from thinking like this. This is not NASCAR.

If your car has modifications beyond what the class allows, or if you’ve misclassified your car, it’s illegal. Plain and simple. How much someone cares about it is a different consideration.

This is an amateur sport self-policed by us. We are here to have fun, which for some of us, means good, intense, but fair competition. There is a protest system but we generally take you at your word. When you enter your car in a specific class everyone at the event is taking you at your word that the car is legal for that class.

I want you to understand this because these people you see around you are going to become your friends. Your stiffest competition may even become your best friend. This is a sport where when a car breaks at a national competition three people from the same class get their tools and spare parts and fix the car right there in grid or that night so that person can go out and maybe beat them the next run.

Of course we always show leniency with those new to the sport. The classing rules are not easy to understand. We know that. But we hope you’ll do your best to be legal. At the pointy end of the sport where all the drivers are fast, a small, illegal feature on a car can make the difference. So, in a certain sense, the faster you get the more important it is to be legal.

Now, if you are doing something wrong, expect someone to mention it. That’s the custom, even in national competition. Talk it out first. File a protest only as a last resort. Protests are not fun.

What happens if someone says you’re doing something against the rules? Maybe you don’t think it’s a big deal. Maybe you don’t even realize it. This has happened to me, in fact. In a national competition you either withdraw, or offer to withdraw or have the runs up to then DNF’ed. Why? Because this is what honest people do when they make an honest mistake.

In a local competition maybe you promise to fix it before the next event. If you already know you have something minor that’s not right go to the people in your class and ask them if they care. If you have their permission, you’re golden.

But if you’re a win at all costs person including whatever cheating you can get away with, then we really don’t want you here.

A few years ago a guy was suspected of having tuned his Corvette in street class that doesn't allow tunes. People could see his car accelerating harder, revving higher and shifting later in first gear than others of the same model and he won the class. He was talked to. He denied everything. For two days he was talked to, assured that if he didn't admit it and withdraw he would be protested, which means his car would be impounded and examined. He forced the issue and a protest was filed. On Monday morning they hooked his car up to the computer at the dealership. The mechanic explained to him that once he pressed the button and it came up non-factory the extended warranty he'd bought through GM would be void. Only then did he admit the car had been tuned and withdrew.

That guy is not in the sport any more. It had been a big part of his life for more than a decade. No one wants to run against him.

Don't be that person. Be the person that, when your car breaks, your competitors rush to help.

Thank you.