



REVIEW: "Think Fast: The Racer's Why-to Guide to Winning"

by [Tony Johns](#) on [Jun 14, 2010 12:06 PM EDT](#) in [Reviews](#) 0 comments



THINK FAST: THE RACER'S WHY-TO GUIDE FOR WINNING
by Neil Roberts (Self-Published)

Target Audience: Racers, engineers, crew
Overall Grade: A

Swift Engineering's Neil Roberts' new self-published tome on achieving success in racing has three distinct pluses:

1. It's written conversationally instead of reading like a lecture.
2. The author's current race car design work prevents him from getting too far into the arcane technicalities of race car physics.
3. It's very short and has large type.

The feeling you get reading "Think Fast: The Racer's Why-to Guide to Winning" is that you're sitting in the paddock, talking with a fellow racer - maybe over a beer or a Red Bull - about how to be a better racer. It's got a peer-to-peer feel to it that many "How-to" books on racing completely lack, and the book is far better for it.

Before I continue with this review, let me state for the record: I am not a racer... I just play one on the computer. The extent of my racing career is limited to a couple of three-day racing schools, some karting, and a whole lot of simulation racing. In my limited experience, I have only acquired the most basic understanding of race car engineering and physics.

Consequently, there are several sections in "Think Fast" that make me feel like I'm auditing a class that is just outside my realm of understanding. I've never heard of the Navier-Stokes solutions for multi-million cell models that are a by-product of current CFD theory. I only barely understand the briefest fundamentals of the benefits of improving chassis torsional stiffness. And I haven't done any of the real-world racing that would focus my attention on tire slip angles enough to follow some of Roberts' discussions on the topic.

In fairness, Roberts makes sure to say that the book builds on assumed knowledge from the very start, so I knew what I was getting into.

With that all said, I was eminently surprised at how readable and understandable the book was even for a relative neophyte like me. That is because "Think Fast" is more of a philosophy book than it is a training or technical manual.

One of the downsides of the "How-to" genre of racing books is that each author usually tries to convince his or her readers that the path to success follows a certain path that the author is specially qualified to illustrate. Roberts, on the other hand, makes clear that *his way* of doing things is not necessarily *the way* to do things:

My goal in this effort was to present my philosophy and approach for developing the two major elements of your racing program: yourself and your car...

...there is no way to cover every detail of every driver/car combination. So, it's up to you to take what is in this book and adapt it to the specifics of yourself and your car so that the two of you can function together most effectively. Learning how to do that is far more valuable than just following someone else's specific directions.

Now it is your turn to **think for yourself**. No one in the world cares as much about your pursuits as you do, so take full ownership of them.

Think Fast: The Racer's Why-to Guide to Winning, p. 173

Roberts' racing paradigm is to distill motorsports down to the barest possible essence - not simply in car setup and preparation, but also in driver goals and attitudes. Much of what he says on both topics seems like basic common sense to a reader like myself who is distanced somewhat from the business of motorsports. But with the "fog of war" that consistently surrounds racing as a hobby and a profession, even the simplest advice can sometimes be lost in the pursuit of more speed and better results.

Hence the value of "Think Fast" - it is less concerned with the arcane and more concerned with simple and pointed advice from someone who has made mistakes and learned from them during his own career. And it is good advice, albeit skewed towards the author's personal preferences - as all "How-to" books are, of course. It is to the book's benefit that Roberts' own preferences and experiences (such as with the use of bump steer - "None for me, thanks.") are still subordinate to a higher-level idea that even his own advice is useless if it does not lead to a balanced race car... as well as a balanced driver.

The overarching theme is not so much changing procedures or parts as it is to change the whole approach to being a successful racer. With every bit of technical advice there is a corresponding piece of direct personal advice ("Cheating? No."). Not to spoil the ending, but the philosophy of "Think Fast" is codified in the penultimate sentence:

The significance of race results pales in comparison to the amazing personal transformation that is available to every racer.

That philosophy is what sets this short 183-page self-published book apart from its more glamorous and far thicker peers. There is plenty of information to be mined from "Think Fast" on both a philosophical and technical level, but racers may find themselves coming back to it simply to give themselves a reality check and bring themselves back to earth. And that is as valuable as any technical manual could be.

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