

What Drives

Robert Ford?

Robert Ford's involvement in motorsport led him into working with racing drivers at Brands Hatch. Working with one client there changed his direction and now he works with people whose lives have been affected by serious road (and race track) accidents – and gets them driving with confidence again. Andy Coote talked to him.

The effects of a serious accident whilst driving go far beyond the (often) severe physical injuries. The mental scars can remain much longer and be far more debilitating. Many people have difficulty resuming driving or driving in certain conditions (night, wet, motorways) and some have problems even getting into a car again.

Motorsport has become much safer over the years but still has its serious accidents (or 'offs' as they are sometimes referred to). So it seems logical that a motorsport instructor should develop a skill in helping people to overcome these problems.

Robert Ford (also known as Bob or Bobby) has been a fan of motorsport since he was 8 years old. After competing in off-road motorsport and running an off-road owners club for several years, he took the opportunity of a chance meeting at Brands Hatch to secure a job there as an instructor. Over 12 years there he instructed on driving the circuit, on rally driving, 4-wheel drive and other specialist driving activities.

Motorsport instructing requires an insight into people and their motivations. As Robert comments, "as an instructor, sitting with a driver at race speeds with no dual control, you need to understand how people work. You quickly get a better understanding of that and learn the danger signs." People come to the race track for many different reasons. "In a year the race track might get up six people who aim to kill themselves. As an instructor, you need to be able to pick up on that." On one occasion, a driver, who had already caused some suspicion, was seen putting something under himself as he sat down. "We asked him to get out of the car and he refused. We persuaded him that we needed him out so that we could adjust the seat belts. When he got out there was his suicide note on the seat."

Assessing a client when they arrive at the track is therefore critical. "If a client turns up with their own crash helmet, we might have concerns. If they come with all the gear, they may either be too good, or more likely, clueless. There is a saying - "all the gear -no idea".

So it was that when one client turned up with all the gear, Robert's heart sank a little. "Walking to the car, he said "I suppose you wonder why I'm wearing all this gear?" It turned out that 8 years before he had an accident at Brands and hadn't been able to get into a car unsedated since". Whilst driving a kit car he had lost control and 7 other vehicles

had ploughed into him. It had taken him seven years to get his motor skills back and to start walking unaided again. "But his main problem wasn't physical. He was reliving the accident every time he got into a car. Following the accident, his wife had learned to drive and now drove him everywhere. He would take sleeping pills, get into the car in a darkened garage and only start the journey once he was asleep".

Robert worked with him, starting by getting him to sit in the vehicle in his own time. Seeing that this process could take longer than the usual instructional slot, Robert got someone to cover him whilst he worked with the client. "I was using techniques natural to me - calming techniques mostly". After calming him down, Robert asked what he was trying to achieve. They began by analysing what made the client avoid getting into the car. In the course of a 3 hour session, he got into the car, started it and then drove a short distance. Finally, he drove around the circuit including the place where he'd had the original accident. "The client's goal had been to get into the car and we surpassed that. He and his wife were booked overnight in a hotel so that he could be sedated for the drive back. After the session he told me that "the only thing stopping me driving the car home is that I'm not insured". It was then that I realised that this is what I wanted to do."

The opportunity to do more began to present itself. "A person turned up at Brands Hatch and asked for me. He had had an accident and every time he heard the squeal of brakes, he remembered it in detail. My original client was running a self-help group and referred the guy to me saying, "He knows how to do this".

Since then, Robert has treated over 100 people for crash therapy with a complete record of success. "I have always been able to help people move forward". Since training in NLP, Robert now uses the Fast Phobia cure and believes that he could have got the original client to the same place in 15 minutes. "I could have worked on so much more in 3 hours."

Robert also works with racing drivers, coaching them for performance. He has been working with Liz Halliday for over 2 years. "Liz is a Le Mans driver and also a top functioning rally driver. As a visual person, when she moved from an open topped car to one with an enclosed cockpit, her performance suffered. We worked on reframing, enabling her to 'see' the interior in a different way. She went from qualifying 12th

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to 14th and finishing there, to qualifying 3rd and finishing 4th overall". Liz is also an Olympic 3 day equestrian hopeful for the 2012 Olympics and, notes Robert, "equally professional at riding and driving. She got back into a race car for Le Mans last year, having been out of sport for a year after her horse threw her and then stepped on her, breaking her collar bone". Robert is also now working with a young polo team. "For them, falling off is a regular occurrence. We are concentrating on working as a team and being fully focused on the game."

Robert now uses NLP techniques with some Behavioural Kinesiology. His NLP Practitioner course was with Zetetic in Falmouth, Cornwall and his Master Practitioner course was with Paul McKenna and Richard Bandler in London. He uses a wide range of skills to work with his clients. "The aim is to take learned behaviour and rewrite the software. If you change how you feel then you change how you function. When dealing with trauma, it is a matter of changing how they see that. It is truly life changing and the reward is watching people smile again. It is often the relatives who see the most difference." Robert uses hypnosis to check that NLP has done its job and to apply some deep consolidation. "Reframing is very important. Working with sound, vision and/or the feeling of pain associated with the traumatic event, we create a new sound, picture or feeling by turning the elements up and down."

Robert also uses Timeline Therapy™ to go back and rewrite client experiences to reduce the effect of the trauma on their life. "There is no point in reliving the experience so we keep well above it and join the timeline where it is away from anything sensitive. We can then move along the timeline using the impetus of anger and aggression to push bad things out of the way and to savour the good things. Then the client can look back and often can no longer see the problem."

"I also use Circle of Excellence quite a bit. By taking good and positive

experiences into the circle and anchoring them we can create triggers to allow them access to positive feelings such as confidence and laughter and to allow pain and fear to disappear. One client told me that when she touched two fingers together, she found she was giggling out loud and couldn't relive the pain. "I should be feeling nervous, all I want to do is smile and laugh".

Robert needed all of his skills when his partner had a big accident leaving Mevagissey in Cornwall in February, 2007. Her car overturned and she was rushed to hospital with serious injuries. She is now back driving but still undergoing long-term treatment for injuries sustained in the accident. Looking back on the experience, Robert reflects, "I never expected to work with someone so close and I found it much harder to do. I was so much closer to the experience of the pain and trauma". The mental consequences of the accident affected Robert, too. "A fault with the car caused the accident and I had been driving the car the previous day. I felt guilty that, as a professional driver, I should have spotted that there was something wrong. I wished it had been me driving at the time and I suffered 3 months of self blaming. NLP helped to overcome the blaming and allowed me to get my head together."

Being able to drive a vehicle safely is a skill that for many people is essential – for both social and business reasons. It is a sad fact that, though UK statistics indicate a small reduction in serious injury accidents, there will be no shortage of people who will need Robert's services. Getting people back behind the wheel is what drives Robert Ford and his passion for doing that was clear throughout our conversation. ●

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www.livinglifenlp.co.uk/index.html