

## CALIFORNIA | LIFESTYLE



# Life in the Fast Lane

Learn how the other half drives with these luxury-car experiences

By Matt Alderton

**C**ALIFORNIA AND CARS NATURALLY go together, but driving in the Golden State is a head with two faces.

You can see the first on any given day in Los Angeles, where the average resident spends 128 hours in traffic every year. An exasperated grimace, it snarls like the motorists on the 405 Freeway, who spend rush hour crossing town like snails through a garden.

If one face is enraged, the other is elated. An

uncontrollable grin, it emerges while driving a sports car through the Hollywood Hills, a convertible down the Pacific Coast Highway or a classic car down Beverly Drive. Or better yet, while burning rubber at the BMW Performance Center West in Thermal, Calif., 30 miles south of Palm Springs.

I experienced the latter on a sizzling Thursday in July. Although the temperature outside was a skin-searing 115 degrees, the air conditioning was utterly arctic inside my BMW M3 Competition — one of four BMWs I sampled during my

two-hour visit. Still, I sweated through my shirt. Blame it on the G-force, which at speeds of up to 120 mph agitated the adrenaline in my body like a cocktail in a shaker. Under its hood, the car's engine was wrestling the laws of physics. Under my own hood, however, the only thought my brain could muster was, "This is crazy fun."

That's what the luckiest drivers experience every time they get behind the wheel of their high-performance luxury vehicle: fun. If your commute typically elicits any other 'f' word, it might be time to learn how the other half drives.

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**PORSCHE EXPERIENCE CENTER  
LOS ANGELES**

**Carson**

Driving a Porsche is a quintessential bucket list item for many car enthusiasts. You can cross it off yours at the Porsche Experience Center Los Angeles, where showcasing the Porsche ethos while molding safer drivers is the goal.

Opened in 2016, the 60,000-square-foot facility features a rotating race car exhibit, a fine-dining restaurant serving Porsche-inspired cuisine, a simulator lab where visitors can experience world-famous racetracks from behind the wheel of a virtual Porsche, and a 4.1-mile driver development track where visitors can learn new skills while putting late-model Porsches through their paces.

The driver development track features eight training modules, including two handling circuits, an ice hill, an off-road course, a dynamics pad for agility training, an acceleration straight for full-throttle driving, a low-friction handling circuit, a low-friction circle and a hydraulic kick-plate for skidding and spinning. During personalized 90-minute experiences with a professional instructor (\$350 to \$995), visitors can choose any Porsche and any combination of modules.

The Porsche Experience Center “is like an adult theme park except there are no long lines, and the food is exceptional,” says center manager Jennifer Malacarne.

► [porschedriving.com/los-angeles](https://porschedriving.com/los-angeles)



Simulator lab



911 on hydraulic kickplate



Restaurant 917

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M Track Drive

**BMW PERFORMANCE CENTER WEST**  
**Thermal**


For more than 40 years, BMW's motto has been "The Ultimate Driving Machine." The BMW Performance Center West was designed to show consumers why.

Opened in 2015, it now occupies 32 acres of The Thermal Club, a private motorsports country club. Its members

generously share with BMW three professionally designed racetracks. There's also a dedicated BMW track; a polished wet skid pad; an 8,500-square-foot building with classrooms and a café; and a fleet of 100 BMWs and 20 MINIs.

Visitors can enroll in a one- or two-day car control school (\$849 to \$1,699) or purchase a two-hour Performance Drive experience (\$299). The former are all about the drivers, who receive instruction in areas like vehicle handling and accident avoidance. The latter, on the other hand, are all about the vehicles, which strut like models on a runway as they show off their superior engines.

During the two-hour BMW Performance Center Drive, visitors choose from a menu of high-speed programs. They can zip around a handling course in four different BMW models or enter a timed autocross, where they compete to get the fastest lap. There's also the one-hour M Track Drive (\$299), which includes six circuits around one of the Thermal Club's professional tracks. Each program ends with a "hot lap," during which visitors sit in the passenger seat as a professional driver races around the track at top speeds.

"This is about as much fun as you can have in a car," says operations manager Stephen Seward. "BMW's can perform all day long with a high degree of performance, safety and responsiveness. You can't necessarily capture that on a test drive at a dealership."

► [bmwperformancecenter.com](http://bmwperformancecenter.com)

**LAND ROVER EXPERIENCE DRIVING CENTER**
**Carmel-by-the-Sea**

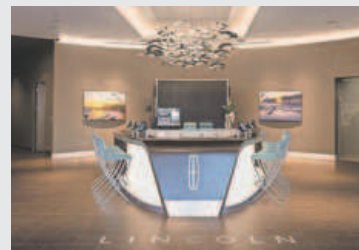

If brands were people, Land Rover would be a brawny outdoorsman with impeccable style — at once rugged and refined. At the Land Rover Experience Driving Center at the Quail Lodge & Golf Club, visitors sample both power and panache during off-road driving lessons and adventures.

The first Land Rovers "weren't really about luxury and comfort," says instruction manager Justin Demayo. "They were used heavily on farms and ... off-road for hunting and fishing. They became luxury vehicles over time, but they have not strayed away from their heritage."

Land Rover proves it every day to center visitors, who can book one-hour, two-hour, half-day or full-day experiences (\$275 to \$1,200) in any current model, as well as half- or full-day "Heritage" experiences (\$1,200 to \$1,500) in a 1997 Defender 90.

Whatever the program, expect equal parts education and adventure as your instructor guides you over wooded off-road trails packed with steep inclines and descents, hairpin turns, rocks, logs, water crossings and mud — obstacles that begin to look like opportunities from behind the wheel of a Land Rover.

► [experience.landroverusa.com/california](http://experience.landroverusa.com/california)

**LINCOLN EXPERIENCE CENTER**
**Newport Beach**


Luxury driving isn't all — or even mostly — about horsepower. It's about creature comfort and exceptional service.

That's what Lincoln showcases at its Lincoln Experience Center on Newport Beach's Fashion Island. The facility features a lounge, a café, a "Story Wall" that teaches about the brand,

an interactive studio where visitors can design their own vehicle and a listening room where audiophiles can experience the Revel audio systems that make Lincoln vehicles sound as good as they drive.

The center also offers complimentary 30-minute test drives in the latest Lincoln vehicles. For out-of-towners, this provides an ideal way to experience not only Lincoln, but also Southern California, as test drives can take visitors on the iconic Pacific Coast Highway, through Newport Beach and up scenic Newport Coast Drive.

"We seek to bring local California experiences to life," says Lincoln Client Experience Manager Becca Anderson. "There's so much more to our brand than our vehicles. We also want people to experience our effortless service and hospitality."

► [lincolnexperiencecenter.com](http://lincolnexperiencecenter.com)