

Go Vroom this Valentine's Day

Written by David M. Brown

Ladies: This Valentine's Day, Cupid's arrow should land your man, safely and sultrily, in a new 2013 Bondurant Corvette or Camaro SS.



If you're looking for the amorous gift that accumulates interest throughout the year, think about a course at the world-famous Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving at Firebird Raceway in Chandler.

Why tires and not ties?

"Guys are done with the cologne and ties and the same stuff. Once you get him a Bondurant gift certificate, that is one gift he will remember his entire life," says Pat Bondurant, president of the world-famous school, which celebrates its 45th anniversary this Valentine's Day.

Since its founding in 1968, nearly 500,000 students have attended the school to become more proficient drivers: movie celebrities such as Clint Eastwood, Tom Cruise, Paul Newman, Bruce Jenner and others; almost 90 percent of NASCAR drivers including stars Jimmy Johnson, Tony Stewart and Jeff Gordon; kart racers; car enthusiasts; housewives; teenagers; military specialists; and chauffeurs.

"Everyone, even the best of the best, learns something at Bondurant," says Bob, the legendary racer, teacher and founder of the school.

"Valentines is an exceptional time for the Bondurant School because men love gifts as much as women do — and we women love our men," adds Pat, noting that women are the largest consumer at the school year round. "And Valentine's Day is just the time to give him the gift he wants — a gift he will never forget."

Men love their cars, and they'll love you for acknowledging that on Feb. 14 as well as on his birthday, your anniversary, the holidays or any time you want to express your love. "They want driving courses so they can drive their other wife like crazy — that is, their cars," explains Pat, who celebrates her third anniversary with Bob this April.

"After all these years, I finally deciphered the relationship between men and their cars," she adds. "It's a love affair that women must no longer ignore but embrace. His other woman is his car," she says with a big laugh.

The Bondurant course menu begins with introductory half-day courses up to four-day Bondurant programs with world-class school instructors, many competing at the highest levels of professional racing. Even super-gifts are available, such as the four-day Johnny O'Connell Experience, with the multi-Sebring and Le Mans winner, GM's most heralded company driver in history and one of this year's inductees into the National Corvette Hall of Fame.

If your man has already enjoyed a Bondurant course, he's ready for the next advanced level of driving, Pat explains. "Now that I've had a role at the school as a woman, I've realized that every single course at Bondurant is just as necessary as the next," she says, noting that her experience in the four-day course not only made her a better driver but gave her a better understanding of Bob, and men's, love of performance cars and speed.

Two years ago, she even had a vintage 1966 Ford GT40 transported from New York for him — a car much like the ones he won in more than four decades ago. Among his many racing achievements, Bob won the west coast SCCA B Production National Championship in 1959, Le Mans in 1964, Sebring in 1965 and, also that year, driving for the legendary Carroll Shelby, he notched seven of 10 races to help bring the 1965 World Manufacturers Cup to Ford and Shelby. He later competed in Formula 1 for Enzo Ferrari — his favorite moment in a career of highlights.

In addition to driving the school into new markets such as rebranding the Bondurant car insignia and colors, global franchising and adding Bondurant facilities in the United States, Pat is showing women the many roads to cars — as students, corporate planners and often frustrated gift-buyers for husbands, dads, sons and boyfriends.

She's also encouraging women to see the Bondurant opportunity as a relationship accelerator and enhancer, too: "I would like to remove the veil of fear women have of driving on a track," she says. "I think that the women should continue to buy the courses for their men, but they should also attend the school with their guy."

A great course to romance, Bondurant courses are aphrodisiac: "Our men are saying: 'I want to share my car with her and watch her drive with confidence,'" Pat says. "Men tell me all the time: 'If my wife or my girlfriend would do this class with me, I would be in love with her forever.'"