

# Drifting: New motorsport is coming to a curve near you

by **DEVIN COMISKEY**  
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As NASCAR quickly becomes the most popular sport in America, fans of the traditional smoky victory lap burnouts — and those who decry the series for only turning left in a big circle — have another motorsport to look forward to courtesy of the Land of the Rising Sun: Drifting. Never heard of it? Most non-motorsport junkies haven't, so don't feel left out.

So what exactly is "drifting?" Ryan Stevens of Velocity Racing Team Japan explains that drifting "is getting your car sideways down a road." That sounds fairly simple, but there's a lot more technique involved.

"Instead of a drifter causing a drift and then countering to straighten out, he will instead over-counter so his car goes into another drift. That is the reason many drifters do it in the mountains, because there are many sharp turns strung together. So in essence a good drifter has the ability to take five or six opposing turns without having traction at any point in time," said Mr. Stevens on the [www.streetracing.org](http://www.streetracing.org) website.

"To cause a vehicle to exceed its tires' limits of adhesion, exhibiting a lateral slip, resulting in an oversteered condition," is the definition given on [driftsession.com](http://driftsession.com).

Drifting began in Japan roughly 10 years ago in the underground racing scene. It has since evolved into a professional racing series, thanks to the media company that organizes the annual Tokyo Auto Salon for aftermarket car part manufacturers.

At first glance, drifting seems like a silly activity designed to burn out tires until they explode — one step above dropping the clutch on a Mustang GT at 5,000 rpm in a high school parking lot. In fact, it requires an enormous amount of car control and driving skill. Drivers are required to navigate around a specially designed road course, sliding the back end of their cars around each and every curve, reaching speeds upwards of 100 miles per hour. It's not a lazy drive in the

park and can be extremely dangerous, even for the well-trained. Some of the best drivers have wrecked cars with hundreds of thousands of dollars invested into them.

Drifting is expensive — as are all other forms of auto euphoria. Most professional drifters burn through a set of rear tires in fewer than 15 minutes, so tire expenses will add up in no time.

Setting up a car for drifting also takes plenty of skill and labor, in addition to wads of cash. The first caveat of creating a drift car is finding one with rear-wheel drive. With the popularity of front-wheel drive sport compact cars in the U.S. like the Honda Civics, Toyota Corollas and VW GTIs to name a few, that's not an easy task. Unless you drive backwards, getting those cars to drift is nearly impossible. And your father's brand new SUV certainly isn't the drifting answer.

Gobs of horsepower combined with rear-wheel drive are essential to creating a car capable of drifting as you need to break the rear wheels free easily. Older model Toyota Supras, Mazda RX-7s and Nissan 240SXs are some of the more popular choices, as are the new Nissan 300Z, Mazda RX-8 and Pontiac GTO.

There are also a number of other modifications needed for drift cars like special wheel alignments, tuned front and rear brake biasing, car (and driver) weight reduction and, of course, as much horsepower you can squeeze out from under the hood. Several different techniques are used while drifting a car. But for the not-so-auto savvy, let's just say there's plenty to learn about hand-eye-foot coordination, braking and clutch and throttle control.

While drifting is becoming quite popular with the street racing "Fast and Furious" crowd, it's actually drawing plenty of attention from serious drivers and hard-core racers. So much so that several prominent racing and driving schools and driving clubs around the country are now teaching drivers how to drift properly in a controlled environment, including Danny McKeever's Fast Lane Racing



**All smoke and no mirrors, "drifting" is a relatively new motorsport where the driver goes as fast as possible without traction. Kids, don't try this on those windy, Fairfield County backroads.**

School, the A2 Racing Car Control School and the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA). Believe it or not, behind the smoke and fury, there is an elegance to the way a drifter moves his car around each corner.

Automobile manufacturers have jumped into the game, too. Pontiac is investing an estimated \$300,000-400,000 in a drifting program for its new 350-horsepower GTO in the Formula D Drift Series.

Drift competitions are also the

new rage. The D1 Grand Prix USA, the first professional drifting competition in the United States featuring famous drivers from Japan and some up-and-coming pros from the U.S., was held last Labor Day at Irwindale Speedway in California in front of about 10,000 fans. The D1 Grand Prix USA is now a fledgling race series, holding several events along the west coast this year. Las Vegas is also the home to a new drifting series. Look for drifting to become more popular

in the east in the coming year, especially at import car shows.

Drifting is not something any driver should mimic without the proper instruction. It's not something to be learned on the back roads of Fairfield County and, at best, could lead a driver holding a reckless driving ticket or, at

worst, lead to serious accidents. It's cool. It's flashy. It's exciting. It's entertaining — but it should also be taken very seriously.

For more information about drifting, visit these websites: [www.driftsession.com](http://www.driftsession.com), [www.drifting.com](http://www.drifting.com), and [www.d1gp.com](http://www.d1gp.com).

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