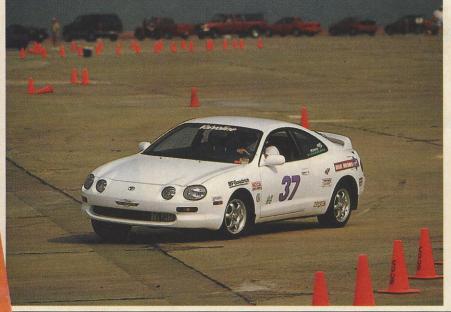(ABOVE) There are different ways to make the path at top. In the two examples given, one becomes a sea of cones. By removing some of the gates and adding some critical pointers, the intended path of the course becomes much clearer from the driver's seat. (BELOW) Some of the best courses are found at the Tire Rack Solo II National Championship in Topeka, with a wide mix of maneuvers in the two courses.

> "MAKE IT TECHNICALLY CHALLENGING SO THE TRULY SUPERIOR DRIVERS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RISE TO THE TOP."
>
> Karen Babb

speed or direction. Not everyone enjoys "technical" courses, but everyone seems to like good "flow"!

Matt Murray, the A Stock champion in 1998 in a Porsche 968 and runner up in H Stock in 2001 driving a BMW 318is, agrees that a course needs to have good flow, in addition to the technical challenges. "If the course doesn't have flow, it can really take away from the driving experience," he says. That doesn't necessarily require a big site: "Slow or small courses can have flow and be fun."

Danielle Engstrom, who has won two titles in F Modified Ladies and now competes in A Modified, was able to articulate some of the characteristics she enjoys in a course. "Some courses can be too technical, and some can be just too much 'hee-haw.' Too much technical can be dull and so demanding that you never really enjoy yourself. Courses that are too 'hee-haw' for me are usually too simple and don't require enough technique in order to be fast. A good balance between these makes for the perfect course.

"Roger Johnson has done some awesome Nationals courses that I totally enjoyed for their good balance of technical and fun," Engstrom adds. "I really like a course that has subtle secrets, which you try to unlock, run by run. On a course like that, you may be able to drive it one way, but then you discover another way that makes it work better or faster."

Since autocrossing is the one motorsports venue in which no practice runs are allowed, every run becomes a seat-of-the-pants learning experience, something Johnson has in mind when he designs courses.

"The fun factor depends on what level of driving skill you are. Some folks like to find the 'carrot,' or the secret fast line. Obviously, if you are new, you won't find that most of the time. Others like to mash the pedal to the floor—so I allow sections for that. A trick in my designs is to find the straights—any area where the pedal can go to the floor, and not necessarily in a straight line. Still others like to drive through what visually appear to be slow areas but are not.

"The course should be flowing, have tricks that the skilled can find to go faster, a minimal amount of DNFs and, most of all, fun to drive," Johnson elaborates before defining flow. "If its sections do not seem to relate to each other, or feel choppy and have no rhythm, it will be more laborious to drive. Envision a river flowing down a river bed. Even when the water is moving rapidly and encounters an object, it will find a way to flow around the object smoothly. Your course should have the same characteristics. If a car cannot be maneuvered through the obstacles smoothly, the course does not flow." ▶