



# BIMMERLIFE



RE:START  
2022





**BMW Car Club**  
of America  
Connecticut Valley



## Connecticut Valley Chapter

Hartford, Connecticut

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### Visit Us

ctvalley.org

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## Chapter Events

An up-to-date event listing is posted on the chapter's website, CTValley.org. Event notices go out via our Facebook page, @ctvalleybmwcca, and to those on the chapter's email list.

Monthly business meetings rotate locations each month or take place via Zoom. Check with any board member for the month's date and location.

Visit CTValley.org for updated information and events.

## ABOUT THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY CHAPTER

The Connecticut Valley Chapter is one of the earliest BMW CCA chapters, dating to 1973 and named for the Connecticut River Valley. Our approximately 1,700 members come from all over Connecticut and western Massachusetts, making us one of the largest BMW CCA chapters. Our corner of New England encompasses a wide variety of geography, ranging from rolling countryside to ocean coastline, with plenty of rural highways and byways throughout. CVC members of all ages come from varied walks of life and drive everything from the latest M models to many classic BMWs—completely stock to highly modified, and daily drivers to prized garage queens.

Our members engage in a wide variety of activities, including driving and social events, as well as visits to interesting destinations both automotive and otherwise. Our driving events include high-performance driving

schools on area tracks such as Lime Rock and Palmer Motorsports Park, skid-pad and autocross schools, and a variety of tours and rallies. Our social calendar encompasses everything from ice-cream socials to our yearly holiday party and the annual dinner-meeting gala. Our annual Humpa Picnic is believed to be the longest-running continuously-held BMW CCA chapter event! We also hold open houses at area BMW dealers and local businesses of interest to the BMW community.

For several years we have organized the BMW CCA Days Car Corral and hospitality tent for the IMSA races at Lime Rock Park. We also organize and staff two Tire Rack Street Survival driving schools each year to help young drivers build a better foundation of skills to become safe, accident-free drivers—and future BMW CCA members!

## COMPETITIVE EQUALIZATION

BY TORSTEN GROSS

People describe cars in many ways; I describe them as equalizers. Most would consider this an odd descriptor, and for many the hope is that their car far exceeds equal, especially one used for competition.

To better understand my perspective, allow me to provide a bit of background. I was the quintessential American male, obsessed with lacrosse, soccer, tennis, and anything else competitive. However, that all changed when at fifteen I dived into the ocean and shattered the C6 vertebrae in my neck, drowned, and was clinically dead for 2½ minutes. Since that day in July 1994, I have been a quadriplegic in a wheelchair—thus the end of what I had known as “normal” competition.

What did *not* end was my need for sports and the adrenaline born of competition. In the last 27 years I have accomplished things that have surprised even me, things like completing twelve marathons in twelve months, skiing, skydiving, and becoming the world's only quadriplegic rescue scuba diver. However, my ability to compete is on a scale of limited to nonexistent; I can compete with other quadriplegics, of course, but that field is tiny. What's more frustrating is that I can't compete with my friends, the majority of whom are able-bodied. Objectively, I can be proud of laurels like “world's only,” but in my heart the satisfaction is diminished. No matter how fit I am, participating in those activities always means getting hands-on help from others.





It did, that is, until my first experience in a car on a race track.

I arrived at Lime Rock Park in my heavy non-track-prepped everyday Audi A6. I was fitted with a helmet, left my wheelchair in the paddock, and set off on an experience many only dream of. After an exhausting day of ripping around that gorgeous circuit, I felt something which I had missed since July 11, 1994: equality. The track didn't care if I was in a wheelchair when I wasn't behind the wheel. The other drivers didn't know that I was using only my hands to drive. Don, my instructor, barked at me the way he would at anyone else. There was no pity and no excuses, nothing other than the search for the perfect line—as it was for everyone else on the track.

That day I came home with a new obsession; I felt something I needed to feel again. The problem was how to make it happen again. Most people test the waters by starting small, whether it's by doing driving schools with their own car, renting an arrive-and-drive track-prepped car, or participating in programs like the Skip Barber Racing School. The latter two were not options, because those only have foot-pedal cars. While it was possible to continue to use my everyday car for a driving school, the chance of damaging my only car without a fall-back option made that an unworkable plan. After all, temporarily borrowing a friend's car or renting one easily from Avis or Hertz is a huge obstacle for someone like me.

If I was going to do this, I realized what must be done. Much to my wife's chagrin (but not to her surprise), I bought a dedicated track car, an E92 M3 Lime Rock Park Edition. That kicked off a two-month exercise in creatively making a race car that worked for me. The hand controls were easy, because

the Veigel Classic II hand controls I have used for 27 years are perfect for racing. But things like racing seats, a roll cage, and even figuring out how to stabilize my legs when significant cornering G-forces were throwing them around needed to be brainstormed. While the search for the perfect car configuration is a perpetual journey, I can proudly say that after numerous schools, time trials, and the completion of the SCCA racing course at Lime Rock, I have reestablished my competitive drive (pun intended)!

The difficulty I faced in getting to experience this sport is not confined to motorsports. There is a metaphorical "disability tax" which manifests itself in the inability to rent sporting equipment. Consider a scenario in which an able-bodied person wanted to go running: They'd buy a pair of \$100 running shoes and open the front door. Someone in a wheelchair needs to buy a \$2,000 (or more) racing chair. If one were to go biking, they can rent a bike for \$50 a day; those of us incapable of using leg power have to buy a \$3,000 (or more) handcycle. A typical seasonal ski rental will run perhaps a couple of hundred dollars, but we in the disabled community must shell out \$4,000 (or more!) for a mono ski. The same issue applies to motorsports, but with even larger price tags.

This disability tax, combined with my unbridled need to share this amazing feeling of being on a track with others in wheelchairs, led me to start a 501c3 foundation, the Just Hands Racing Foundation. The mission is simple: Enable the disabled community to experience independence and competition on the same level as every human—and have fun in a



track car! In short, we want to get people who drive hand-controlled cars into high-performance driving events.

Having only whispered this fledgling idea to a few people, I was blown away by the immediate and positive response from so many sources wanting to be involved. Lime Rock Park, AutoTechnic, Sharon Autosport, Mobility Innovations, and HMS Motorsports have all offered their support in a variety of ways. I will be looking for a 3 Series automatic to transform into a track car. While there is still much left to do to ensure a smooth entry into the remainder of the 2022 season, I have no doubt that you will see more Just Hands drivers in the future. Despite driving with just our hands, we are all ears for any thoughts and ideas you have for us—and keep your eyes open for us on the track next year!

Whatever you drive—with whatever appendages—I look forward to calling you my equal. Actually, who am I kidding? I look forward to finding out which one of us is faster!

*To read more about Torsten Gross and the Just Hands Racing Foundation, visit [justhandsracing.com](http://justhandsracing.com) and [justhandsracingfoundation.org](http://justhandsracingfoundation.org).*

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