

# Autos

THE BOSTON GLOBE, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016 | BOSTON.COM/CARS

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SATURDAY 10/15

## Thrills for Weekend Auto Racers, 90 Minutes from Boston



PHOTO: PRECISION TRACK TIME, LLC

**VROOM WITH A VIEW:** The new track is called Whiskey Hill Raceway at Palmer Motorsports Park.

**By George Kennedy**

"Racing is life," Steve McQueen famously said. "Anything before or after is just waiting." I first encountered this dedication to speed at Lime Rock Park in the distant northwest corner of Connecticut. The rolling hills and lush greenery leave the track feeling like Great Woods with gasoline. But Lime Rock is almost three hours from Boston, making any trip out there a production.

Fret not, Boston-area racers: Palmer Motorsports Park is a challenging new racing circuit just 90 minutes west of Boston. Though Lime Rock will always hold a special place in the hearts of enthusiastic racers, Palmer's 14 turns and 200 feet of elevation change make it the ultimate playground for any weekend racer.

Palmer has only been open for two seasons and Road & Track has already named the 2.3-mile course one of the top 10 racetracks to drive in North America.

According to park manager Fred Ferguson, the track was a dream decades in the making. "Back in the late '90s, early 2000s," explained Ferguson, "many racers were afraid Lime Rock was going to close."

Thankfully, that didn't happen, but the threat of neighbors fighting the track was enough for a committee to form in 2004 to look for property in Massachusetts on which to build a track. One of the big setbacks about Lime Rock is that you can't race on Sunday, but with the parcel of land that was eventually purchased in Palmer, no such restrictions exist.

Ferguson comes from the tech world, and was the Chief Information Officer of a publishing company. In the late 1990s, he became involved with BMW club racing, and as Steve McQueen was well aware, racing is an infectious disease. Ferguson attended the Skip Barber Racing School, continued racing through the 2000s, and even became an instructor for several driving clubs.

When the Sports Car Club of America was initially reaching out for potential investors, Ferguson was among several asked to walk the Palmer property to determine whether a racecourse could be built. "You couldn't really tell that much," said Ferguson, "but it had a lot of hilly terrain. It was dramatic."

In 2011, Ferguson formally became

involved with the group behind the track. "It was costing us money for the permits on the land," explained

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- 8 new and used cars for under \$15,000
- What car experts say about the 2017 Cadillac XT5

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# Herb Chambers

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| <p><b>New 2016 Honda CR-V LX AWD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automatic</li> <li>• Air Conditioning</li> <li>• Up to 31 HWY MPG***</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>0.9% APR<sup>†</sup></b> UP TO 60 MOS. <b>OR 1.9% APR<sup>†</sup></b> UP TO 72 MOS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lease for <b>\$88*</b> 24 Mos. <b>OR</b> Lease for <b>\$208<sup>††</sup></b> 36 Mos.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$2,999 cash or trade down <b>\$0</b> down payment</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 10px;">Model# RM4H3GEW, Stock#44054, MSRP \$26,045, 115 CR-Vs Available</p> | <p><b>New 2016 Honda HR-V LX AWD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automatic</li> <li>• Air Conditioning</li> <li>• Bluetooth</li> <li>• Backup Camera</li> <li>• Up to 32 HWY MPG***</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>\$168*</b> 39 Mos. <b>OR</b> <b>\$258<sup>††</sup></b> 39 Mos.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lease for <b>\$2,999</b> cash or trade down <b>\$0</b> down payment</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 10px;">Model# RU6H3GEW, Stock# 44433, MSRP \$22,215, 100 HR-Vs Available</p> | <p><b>New 2016 Honda Odyssey LX</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automatic</li> <li>• Up To 28 HWY MPG****</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>0.9% APR<sup>†</sup></b> UP TO 36 MOS. <b>OR 1.9% APR<sup>†</sup></b> UP TO 60 MOS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lease for <b>\$178*</b> 36 Mos. <b>OR</b> Lease for <b>\$258<sup>††</sup></b> 36 Mos.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$2,999 cash or trade down <b>\$0</b> down payment</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 10px;">Model# RL5H3GEW, Stock# 42422, MSRP \$30,450, 125 Odysseys Available</p> |
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\*Burlington location

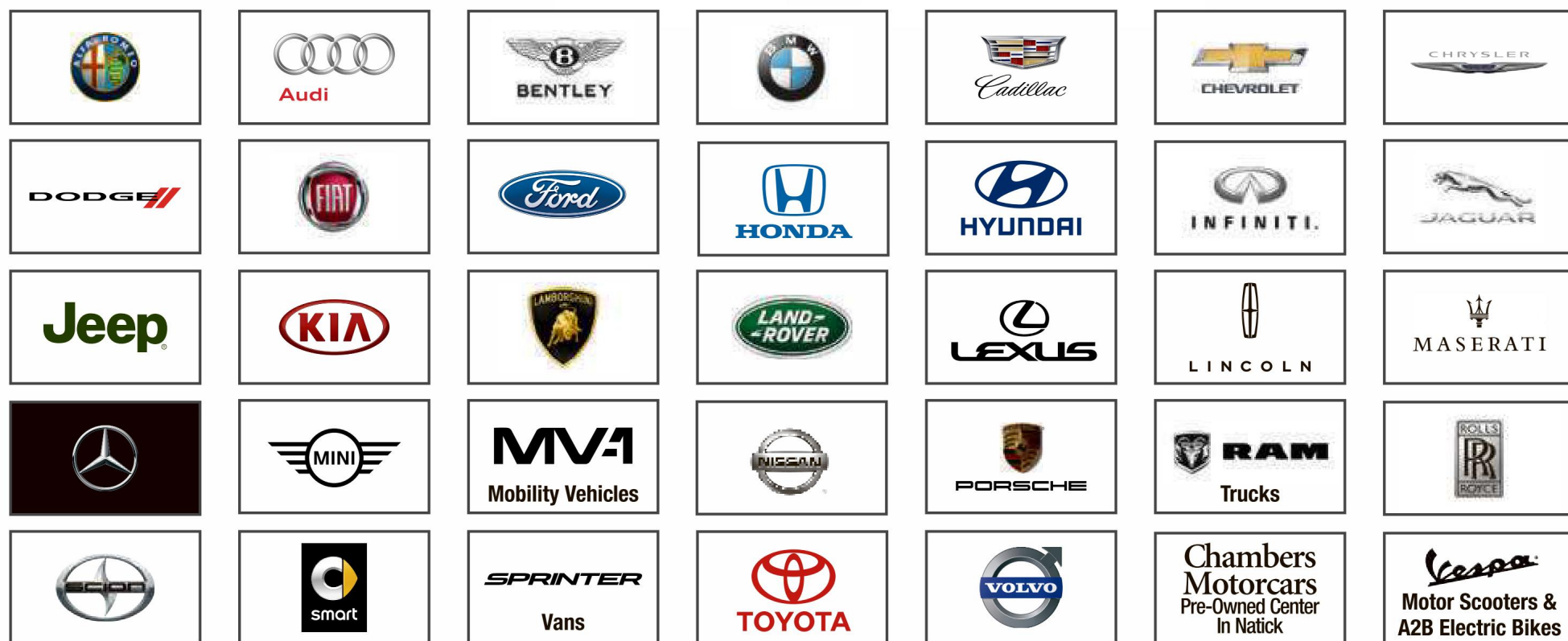
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\*\$2,999 down leases 24 mos. (36 mos Odyssey, 39 mos HRV) with 12K miles per year, 0.15¢ per mile excess and require bank-approved credit. Security deposit waived. \$2,999 cash or trade down due at signing, plus 1st payment, \$595 acquisition fee, \$349 doc fee, sales tax, registration extra. Excludes all prior sales. 24 month Residuals: 16 Civic LX 67%, Accord LX: 64% residual, CR-V LX: 68% residual, Fit 69% residual, Odyssey 55% residual, HR-V 61% residual. \$0 cash or trade due at signing, plus 1st payment, \$595 acquisition fee, \$349 doc fee, sales tax, registration extra. Excludes all prior sales. 36 month Residuals: 16 Civic LX: 61%, Accord LX: 58% residual, Fit residual is 63%, Odyssey LX: 55% residual, CR-V LX 62% residual. † w/ approved credit. †.9% up to 36 & 1.9 up to 60 months on Accord. †.9% up to 60 months on the CRV & the Odyssey. \*\*Ratings determined by EPA. Use for comparison purposes only. Your MPG and range will vary depending on driving conditions, how you drive and maintain your vehicle, lithium-ion battery age/condition, and other factors. ^^Based on 2015 EPA mileage ratings. Use for comparison purposes only. Your mileage will vary depending on how you drive and maintain your vehicle. \*\*\*Based on 2016 EPA mileage ratings. Use for comparison purposes only. Your mileage will vary depending on how you drive and maintain your vehicle, driving conditions and other factors. Offers only available on in-stock vehicles. Pictures are for illustration purposes only. Must finance/lease through Honda Finance. Excludes prior sales. See dealer for details. Offers expire 10/23/16.



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## At Last, a Worthy Racetrack Close to Home in Palmer



PHOTO: GEORGE KENNEDY

**UP TO THE TASK:** Auto writer George Kennedy found the BMW M2 a perfect companion on Palmer's winding, 2.3-mile track.

*continued from page 1*  
Ferguson. "They decided they needed an outside person to build the track."  
Ferguson brought in Greg Read of J. Read Corp of Hingham, whom he met through racing. Read had experience building malls and golf courses in the challenging New England turf and such experience was invaluable when it came to working with designers to create a dramatic roadway on a New England hillside. The group broke ground in 2013 and the track opened early in 2015.  
The track could easily be described as a drive-it-yourself roller coaster. According to Ferguson, designers took inspiration from various sections of famous tracks around the world. "The downhill corners that lead into the front straight," explained Ferguson, "are inspired directly by the 'Corkscrew,' from [Mazda Raceway at] Laguna Seca." The challenging Turn 7 on the track is inspired by the "Monster," a particularly tricky (read: dangerous) turn in Canada's Mosport track.  
I was lucky enough to take to the track in a brand new BMW M2, which was the perfect machine for the task. It's a 365-horsepower, rear-drive coupe with a manual transmission, and is representative of the type of cars that will take to this track. Palmer has become the flagship track of the New England Region of the Sports Car Club of America. As such, the M2's combination of tight cornering and power complemented the track. The various changes in elevation really push your skills to their limits, but if you can navigate turns properly, you're in for one heck of a ride.  
The track has also made an impression with local members of the racing community. Safi Barqawi is president of AVI Boston, a custom shop that does audio/video work on supercars

and luxury vehicles. Safi's weekend ride is a bright blue Porsche 911 GT3, and he has taken it out on the track several times.  
"The first couple sessions at the track really humbled me," said Barqawi, "Every aspect of the track presented a challenge and required the understanding of vehicle dynamics and running a 'proper' line."  
The Palmer track is a challenge that Ferguson hopes many more will step up to. Membership to the eventual country-club-like facilities incurs a \$20,000 initiation fee, but there are many more ways to race here at an affordable price. The BMW Car Club of America hosts weekend events for \$295. With its close proximity to Boston, track organizers have every right to be hopeful and ambitious for the future of the facility.  
"My goal is to see this track being used not just for competition," said Ferguson, "but for testing and academic research." In fact, MIT has already tested solar cars there and the track aims to be a proving ground for technologies like autonomous vehicles.  
Racing isn't cheap. As NASCAR legend Junior Johnson put it, "The best way to make a small fortune racing, is to start with a big one."  
But these days, the weekend racer has many ways to get out on the track, and Palmer shows great promise for both racing enjoyment and technological advancement. With a thriving community of racing enthusiasts spread over southern New England, the mystique of Palmer's challenging, technical twists and bends is sure to grow.

George Kennedy is a freelance automotive journalist. He can be reached at [George.H.Kennedy.iii@gmail.com](mailto:George.H.Kennedy.iii@gmail.com) or on Twitter @GKenns101.

## Ask the Car Doctor



- Q.** I have a 2003 BMW 325i four-door sedan that is only rear-wheel-drive. The car needs two front tires. Should I have them put the new tires on the front or on the rear? The rear tires look to be in decent shape.
- A.** The best place to put the new tires is on the rear. There are several reasons: The new rear tires help the driver more easily maintain control on slick roads; getting a flat tire/blowout on the rear is much harder to control; and the preferred placement for new tires, which are more puncture resistant, is the rear.
- Q.** My husband has a 2007 Volkswagen Passat and is ready to buy a car. He's looking for one with a cushy ride. What do you think of the Lexus ES and the Lincoln MKZ? He needs back seats that fold down to accommodate his bicycle.
- A.** Both are good cars, but my choice would be the Lexus ES. It is comfortable, very quiet, and rides well. He might also consider a trailer hitch-mounted bike rack to avoid possibly damaging the interior with a bike.
- Q.** I have a 2012 Ford Escape Limited that I purchased new. About nine months ago I started having problems filling the gas tank. When I try to fill the tank, the gas pump shuts off after about 15 seconds. I have gone to different gas stations and used different pumps, but the problem persists. Currently, to fill the tank as much as possible, I leave the key in the ignition with the battery on and the driver's side window down and try to read the gas gauge while filling the tank. Every time the pump shuts off, I pull the nozzle out a bit, reinsert it, and squeeze the handle again. The most I have been able to get into the tank is approximately one gallon before having to repeat the process. Needless to say, this is annoying, and probably not safe. I have looked online and at a number of websites but have really found nothing. Any thoughts?
- A.** The tank is not venting properly or there is some sort of obstruction in the fuel fill pipe. I have heard of some gas nozzles losing the protective end cap, which gets lodged in the filler neck on these cap-less systems. The vent system can also get clogged with dirt or, in some cases, spider webs that prevent proper operation. A technician will need to test the system for proper operation to find the problem.
- Q.** I recently inherited a 2009 Honda Civic that is set up for auto-door lock when the speedometer reaches about 10 miles per hour. The doors then unlock when I put the car in park. I am the sole driver, so I usually only unlock the driver's door. Sometimes, when the mechanism locks or unlocks, it squeaks/squeals. I've taken the car to the dealer, but they haven't been able to duplicate the noise and, hence, can't fix it. Would you have any idea what is causing this and what can be done to remedy it? Anything you can suggest would be appreciated.
- A.** I have heard this complaint from other Honda owners and the repair seems to be replacing the door lock actuator(s). This can be a fairly costly repair to a seven-year old car, which may be why the Honda dealer didn't suggest it.
- Q.** I drive a Toyota Venza and love it. Unfortunately, Toyota discontinued the model. I am now in the market for a new or slightly used car similar to the Venza. Legroom is a priority as I am 6'4". What other cars would be similar to the Venza?
- A.** I would look at two cars. The Toyota Highlander could work and the controls and overall operation will feel very similar to your Venza. The other vehicle is the Subaru Outback. The Outback has a smaller footprint than the Venza but, when comparing the Outback cabin specifications to a Venza, the Outback seating is slightly bigger in every dimension. I recently drove the 2017 Outback and found it to be quiet, economical, and roomy.

John Paul is AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over 40 years' experience in the automotive business and is an ASE certified master technician. He answers readers' questions each Saturday. You can tune in to his radio program Saturday morning from 8:30-10 on am950 WROL or [www.wrolradio.com](http://www.wrolradio.com). Email your car question to [jpaul@aanortheast.com](mailto:jpaul@aanortheast.com). Follow John on Twitter @johnfpaul and friend him on Facebook [mrjohnfpaul](https://www.facebook.com/mrjohnfpaul).