

Brianne Corn gets ready to compete during a rally car race at her namesake track, the Brianne Corn Raceway in Maxwell, 8 miles east of San Marcos.

Rodolfo Gonzalez photo



Stay calm, Drive fast

Brianne Corn loves racing, and has the awards and racetrack to prove it. Her other passion: sharing the Zen of safe speed.

Brianne Corn doing what she loves: skidding around the dirt of her private racetrack. 'Racing was the one thing I felt compelled to do,' she said.



By Pam LeBlanc

I start slowly, easing my foot onto the accelerator of a nimble white Miata at the first bend of a half-mile dirt track surrounded by sunflowers in rural Caldwell County.

Brianne Corn, buckled into the passenger seat, asked me what makes me nervous about driving a rally race car. I think about that for a second. I'm still panting slightly, after the high-voltage, 3-minute ride I just took around the track as a passenger with Corn, a champion rally car driver and coach, at the wheel.

The engine had whined as we skidded through turns and kicked up a stampede's worth of dust. Corn knew exactly how much gas to give her rocket ship of a car and where to point it. But me? Anytime the back end of a vehicle I'm driving loses its grip on the ground, bad things are bound to happen.

"I'm afraid I'll spin out of control," I told her.

But we're driving on dirt, she pointed out, and the car is so low to the ground it's nearly impossible to roll. Also, we're going so slow that Corn's sweet rescue dog Korben can run as fast as we're moving. Besides, she told me, she's only flipped a car once in 20 years, and even then, no one got injured.

I press a little harder on the gas. We zip through a corner. I tell her I want to kick up some dirt. I want to make this little car skid sideways, too.

"Look farther ahead," she said. That advice, she added, applies in many aspects of life, not just driving. "The farther off you can see and plan, the better off you'll be. If you're looking right in front of you, your ability to influence what's going to happen is almost nil."

For a flicker of a moment, I feel what she's talking about. I look way down the track, and things smooth out. Soon I'm moving fast

Get Going WITH Pam LeBlanc

One in a series of stories on fitness, recreation and outdoor adventure in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region.

enough to surf through some corners. It feels like I'm floating.

"I'm distracting you from yourself," she said. "The most important thing is to get to a space where you're confident. Then, like a lobster, I'll turn up the heat a little bit at a time until you're sliding around and you're not scared."

It turns out that coaching a race car driver is as much about psychology as it is mechanics. "I find I'm more of a sports psychologist than a driving instructor," she said. "I'm always trying to figure out what's going on with you."

Corn, 53 and 6-foot-2, grew up in San Antonio. She was always

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Sarah Beal photo



‘I kept thinking, “Am I crazy? Am I delusional? Or am I really good at this?” I’d never raced a car before, but I think there’s something different about me.’

— Brianne Corn on her first experience of driving very fast — on a mountain road in Italy, under pressure from several race car drivers behind her



Writer Pam LeBlanc feels the fear of riding shotgun with a champion rally race car driver and coach for the first time. *Pam LeBlanc photo*

WHAT IS RALLY RACING?

Rally race drivers pilot road-legal or modified mass-produced cars through a series of cones set up on a twisty, unpaved single-lane track. Brianne Corn designs a unique course for every event, so there's no single ‘track record.’

Competitors try to record the fastest time, skidding and power sliding through the course one at a time.

Drivers can compete in three classes:

Each category has two divisions: two-wheel drive and all-wheel drive cars.

STOCK

Only minor vehicle modifications such as safety equipment and cosmetic accessories are allowed

PREPARED

Allows special tires, exhaust modifications and shocks and struts

MODIFIED

Any cars ready for the first two classes, but also allows major weight reductions and wings or splitters to improve aerodynamics

“Most cars raced here are also driven to work on Monday,” Brianne Corn said of her namesake raceway in Maxwell, not far from San Marcos.

However, “some of the cars have been modified to the point that they are no longer legal to drive on public roadways. Those show up on trailers,” she added.

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intrigued by car racing, but not enough to devote her life to the sport. Driving fast came later.

Corn quit school as a teen but later earned a high school GED, and at age 21 enrolled at what is now Texas State University in San Marcos. During the final semester of a prolonged education in 2004, she studied abroad in Italy. One weekend, she and two friends headed out for a day trip, with Corn at the wheel of a Volkswagen Golf turbo diesel.

“We got lost in the mountains,” Corn said. “I pulled onto this road and four or five race cars pulled in behind us. I started speeding up.”

Corn’s passengers began to protest as she fell in behind the pack. “I think we were having a safety debate,” Corn said. “Eventually they quit talking. We were running at a pace not fast enough for the race cars, but not slow enough for my friends.”

When Corn finally pulled off on the side of the road, her hands shaking, she gathered her thoughts. “I kept thinking, ‘Am I crazy? Am I delusional? Or am I really good at this?’ I’d never raced a car before, but I think there’s something different about me.”

She wanted to drive — and fast. Just a month later, she drove in her first race.

Corn graduated with a degree in photography and went to work running the donation center for the Hays-Caldwell Women’s Center. Later she returned to the university, working in the photography and multimedia departments for 17 years.

She started racing cars when she was 30. “Most people say if you don’t start at 12, you’re a has-been,” she said. “Racing was the one thing I felt compelled to do.”

Good eyesight helps (Corn has it), as does a background in riding dirt bikes or motorcycles. “I grew up with a big empty field and a lifetime supply of dirt bikes. My day care was a field and a motorcycle,” she said.

Today she lives in an RV next to the half-mile Brianne Corn racetrack she built 10 years ago as a practice track in Maxwell, 11 miles east of San Marcos. More than



An assortment of vehicles, tools and knickknacks fill every inch of a warehouse next to Brianne Corn's track. She lives in an RV next to the half-mile racetrack she built a decade ago. Sarah Beal photo

BRIANNE CORN'S 10 TIPS FOR RACING

1. Practice in an environment that is an emotionally and physically safe place to make mistakes
2. Eliminate distractions
3. Look ahead, well down the road
4. Look where you want to go, not at what you want to avoid: Where your mind goes, everything follows
5. Be smooth on the throttle
6. Don't panic
7. Make sure your vehicle is properly maintained. Wear a seat belt and helmet
8. Do your own car maintenance so you understand how your vehicle works
9. When everyone says you can't do it, do it anyway
10. Believe in yourself

50 cars, some of them stripped down, are parked around the property, and an assortment of vehicles, tools and knickknacks occupy every square inch of a warehouse.

"I am not a car person as much as I'm a driver," she said. "I love to drive."

What sets certain drivers apart, she says, is their mental fortitude and ability to quickly recover. Really good drivers don't implode if they make a mistake.

Corn has proved that over and over.

She set a land speed racing record — traveling 86 mph — on a 1948 Triumph

motorcycle at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah in 2008.

In 2011, she became only the second woman in 83 years to win a class (in this case the AWD Time Attack) at the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb in Colorado. That same year, she won the modified open class at the SCCA Solo National Championship, became the Rally America Open Light Shootout Champion, and was named the Sports Car Club of America's Driver of the Year. She also navigated for a driver in a Class C truck at the Baja 1000 in Mexico,

the world's longest point-to-point car race, but the vehicle broke down and her team dropped out.

A slew of accolades has followed. In all, Corn has won four SCCA rally car championships. But those wins don't bring big bucks.

She's largely self-taught. Over the years, Corn has purchased dozens of old cars off Craigslist.org, and taught herself how to maintain them: "If there was a Subaru for

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less than 500 dollars, I ate bread and water and bought it to use for parts.”

She once removed the radio from one of her race cars and tucked a copy of Douglas Adam’s “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” in the empty space. When she races, she uses number 42, which was, in that book, the answer to “the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.”

And she still loves to go fast. “It is one of the favorite things in my life. Driving a vehicle that is pointing in a different direction than it is traveling is a very special place for me,” she said.

Today she co-races with Peter Dozeman, a Phoenix-based driver she met at a race in California three and a half years ago. When she saw a Miata he owned, she knew she’d be unstoppable in it. “I turned to him and said, ‘I’d like to be your co-driver.’”

Corn and her brother Kevin Corn produce the Lone Star Rallycross series of races, hosting monthly events at her racetrack in Maxwell.

One at a time, cars weave through cones set up on the track for time. To race at the track, a car must be in good working order. It can’t be taller than it is wide. Other than that, she said, “there are no rules, just



Brianne Corn is both a race car driver and a driving teacher, helping others learn in a controlled environment how to handle dangers like skids and swerves. Sarah Beal photo

guidelines.”

Corn teaches drivers to race — and teenagers to drive defensively — too. She believes new drivers should experience skids and swerves in a controlled environment, like her track, so they can handle those threats when they happen unexpectedly on a public road.

As for me, I’m getting plenty of thrills.

And something has happened inside my head. The wanna-go-fast voice is out-shouting the this-speed-is-freaking-me-out one. With Corn at my side, egging me (safely) on, I’m revving the engine and swooshing through the zigzagging dirt runway.

This day at the track has given me more than some new driving skills — it’s given me a confidence upgrade. ■



Brianne Corn’s rescue dog, Korben, runs along side the car through the racetrack, almost as if he anticipated her every move before she turned the wheel. Sarah Beal photo

WHERE TO WATCH — OR DRIVE — RACE CARS IN OUR REGION



Rodolfo Gonzalez photo

BRIANNE CORN RACEWAY

1116 FM 1984, Maxwell

The half-mile dirt track with 11 turns holds a monthly series of rally car races and serves as a training ground for drivers who want to learn how to race. It also hosts the Lone Star Rallycross series. Races are scheduled for Dec. 18-19. For more information, go to lonestarrallycross.com



Photo courtesy Cotton Bowl Speedway



Matthew Wetzler photo



Photo courtesy Harris Hill Raceway

COTTON BOWL SPEEDWAY

1175 County Road 202, Paige

The Cotton Bowl Speedway holds an annual summer showdown series, as well as special events. Races are scheduled for March 4-5, 2022.

For more information go to cottonbowl Speedway.com

CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS

9201 Circuit of the Americas Blvd., Austin

This 3.41-mile racetrack with 20 turns is home to the only Formula 1 and MotoGP races in the U.S. The U.S. Formula 1 Grand Prix was Oct. 24 and the next is scheduled for October, 2022. The track will host NASCAR on March 25-27, 2022 and MotoGP April 10-12, 2022. The public can race go-carts on the track Tuesdays through Sundays unless events are scheduled.

For more information go to circuitoftheamericas.com

HARRIS HILL RACEWAY

2840 Harris Hill Road, San Marcos

This 1.8-mile, 11-turn asphalt road track is a members-only location for those who want to race their cars or motorcycles. For a basic membership, a driver pays a one-time fee of \$3,000, plus \$300 monthly dues for unlimited track access on members' days, as well as special member events like a track-racing series. For more information go to harrishillroad.com

6 takeaways from Bluebonnet's sixth annual Solar Day

By Alyssa Dussetschleger

THIS YEAR, Bluebonnet's Solar Day wasn't just about solar panels. The live webinar included information on electric innovations in battery storage and vehicles, too.

The sixth annual event, on Oct. 16 this year, showcased a presentation from Micah Jasuta of the Texas Solar Energy Society; information and ideas from Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members Aaron Contreras, John White and Jeff Nelson; and a Q&A about the installation and benefits of solar power systems and battery storage.

If you couldn't join us online that day, watch the recording at bluebonnet.coop/solar. Here are our top 6 takeaways from the day:

1. When you're ready to choose a solar power system installer, the U.S. Department of Energy recommends you get at least three bid proposals. Be skeptical and ask questions of installers before you choose. Talk to friends and family with solar panels, search the business member page at TXSES.org, and read review websites like the Better Business Bureau, Yelp, solarreviews.com and North America's board of energy practitioners at nabcep.org. It's a good idea to ask an installer if they are certified by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners. Don't just go by star ratings, either. Read the comments and reviews.



Battery storage units like the Tesla Powerwall can save your solar array's overproduction. Photo courtesy Tesla Motors, Inc.

2. Research battery storage options that suit the solar energy you produce. A battery's storage capacity determines how long it can power parts of your home. Common energy capacity ranges from 5 to 15 kilowatts. Battery storage can provide a lot of power in a short time or less power over a long time. Apps and online portals can help you monitor your solar production to maximize its

use throughout the day.

3. Bluebonnet inspects your solar array to ensure it is safe before we connect it to our electric grid. You'll be put on the cooperative's distributed generation rate and get paid for overproduction, which is when you produce more power than you are using and the excess is returned to the cooperative's grid.

4. Battery storage can save your overproduction of electricity for use when the sun isn't shining or during a power outage. Place your battery backup near your breaker panel or in the garage to protect it from the elements. Depending on the brand and size of your battery storage, it may hold enough power to charge all or part of your home from one to seven days.

5. The federal Solar Investment Tax Credit remains at 26% through the end of 2022. It's a credit that can be claimed on your federal income taxes for a percentage of the money you paid to install a solar array. The credit is available in every state and is scheduled to decrease to 22% in 2023.

6. Thinking about an electric vehicle? Consider your driving habits and distances. Avoid "range anxiety" by charging up your vehicle before the power level gets low.

Applications available for Board seats open in 2022

MEMBERS INTERESTED in serving on Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors can run for one of three seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 10, 2022.

Candidates can be nominated in two ways: either by presenting a completed Application for Nomination of Candidate form with at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or by paying a \$250 filing fee in certified funds.

Bluebonnet's Board is made up of nine directors who serve staggered three-year terms.

Directors represent one of seven districts in Bluebonnet's service area.

There are three seats up for election in 2022: District 1, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales and Hays counties; District 3, Bastrop County; and District 5, Burleson County.

Candidates must be at least 21 years old, a co-op member in good standing, agree to a background check and meet other qualifications outlined in Bluebonnet's bylaws, which are available at bluebonnet.coop. Hover your cursor over the About tab on the home page, click on Leadership in the drop down

bar and then click on the Becoming a Director link.

Application for Nomination of Candidate forms are available at the co-op's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor and online at bluebonnet.coop, under the About tab, then Reports & Forms.

All candidate applications by petition or filing fee must be delivered to any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 9, 2022. For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.

GOVERNMENT YOUTH TOUR, SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are available for the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, which offers two 11th or 12th graders the opportunity to explore our nation's capital from June 12-21, 2022, and receive a \$1,000 scholarship. The application deadline is Jan. 21, 2022. Bluebonnet will also award 60 \$2,500 scholarships to graduating high school seniors who plan to pursue a higher education. The deadline for those applications is March 4, 2022. Get applications at bluebonnet.coop: click Community, then Scholarships.

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 23 and Dec. 24 for the Christmas holiday and Dec. 31 for the New Year's Day holiday. If you have an outage, you can report it by texting OUT to 85700 (to register, text BBOUTAGE to that number), online at bluebonnet.coop, via our mobile app or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay bills any time online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (press option 2 when prompted).