

10 Years Off the Wheel

A No-Fluff iRacing Starter

A no-fluff cheat-sheet for
sim racers dusting off the wheel.

BUSTAWRENCH

01 -- Mindset: New or New Again

Whether you've never turned a sim lap or you're coming back after a long break, the first month decides everything. The wheel's been in a cupboard, or it's still in the box -- either way, somewhere in the back of your head there's a version of racing you think you should be doing. Forget that version. The sim you're joining is a different animal.

iRacing has moved on. New tyre model, new damage model, new physics, new tracks, new fields of drivers who've been grinding while you were doing school runs and firewall rules (or while you were busy not owning a wheel yet). Walking in expecting old pace -- or expecting to be instantly quick -- is the fastest way to get frustrated and quit in three weeks.

Accept where you are, plan around it

Being new isn't a character flaw, it's a fact. Your reaction time is fine. What's missing is the calibration -- the unconscious feel for how much brake, how much steering, how much patience. That only comes with laps. Not through YouTube, not through forum reading. Laps.

Give yourself a realistic runway: four to six weeks before you judge yourself. In that window your only job is consistency, not lap time.

Set goals you can actually hit

Bad goal: "get to a target iRating by next week."

Good goals, in order:

1. Ten clean laps in a row, no offs, no spins. Pace irrelevant.
2. Finish a race without an incident-limit DQ.
3. Finish inside the top half of your split.
4. Then worry about iRating.

Tick those in order and the number climbs on its own. Chase the number first and you'll wreck yourself out of races trying to make a pass that isn't there.

Ego is the real tyre killer

The two things that end racing careers: overdriving the car to prove you've still got it, and rage-quitting after a rookie punts you at turn one. Both are ego. You will get punted. You will be slower than a 19-year-old on a \$200 wheel. Neither is a referendum on you.

Reset each session. One race is one data point. You're not defending a reputation -- nobody in that server knows who you are. That's actually the good news: you get to be a rookie, and rookies are allowed to be slow.

Slow, clean, and improving beats fast and wrecked every single week.

02 -- Car Control: Where the Lap Time Lives

Whether you're brand new or ten years off, your hands learn faster than your feet. Steering comes quickly. Braking and throttle? That's where the lap time lives, and that's where most

drivers -- new or returning -- leave it on the table.

Braking points. Forget what you "know" about where to brake -- whether that's from an old sim or a YouTube video. The cars and tyres are specific, and your reference needs to be too. Pick a marker -- a board, a kerb, a shadow that doesn't move -- and brake early for ten laps. Then walk it in a car-length at a time until the car starts complaining. That's how you find the real point instead of guessing and binning it at turn one.

Threshold, not stomping. iRacing punishes lazy braking. Hit the pedal hard initially, then bleed off pressure as speed drops and the aero/weight stops helping you. Locking fronts on entry means you were still at 100% when the tyre could only give you 80.

Trail braking. This is the one skill that separates mid-pack from top-split, and it's simpler than the YouTube gurus make it sound: carry a little brake pressure past turn-in, easing off as you add steering. Brake and grip share the same tyre budget -- as you ask for more cornering, give back some braking. Practice it in a slow car first. The Mazda will teach you; a GT3 will just spit you into the wall.

Throttle modulation. The throttle is not a switch. Squeeze it like you're wringing out a rag -- progressive, matched to the steering unwinding. If you're correcting oversteer on exit every lap, you're not "fast and loose", you're slow and lucky.

Weight transfer. Every input moves weight. Brake: weight forward, rear goes light (why you spin on entry). Throttle: weight back, front washes wide (why you understeer off the exit). Smooth inputs keep the platform settled. Jerky inputs are you fighting a car you unsettled yourself.

Twenty minutes of deliberate brake-and-throttle work beats two hours of angry hotlapping. The rust comes off one corner at a time.

-- Bustawrench

03 -- Setup Basics: Stop Blind-Tweaking

Here's the truth nobody selling you a \$30 setup subscription wants printed: below about 2000 iRating, the setup isn't your problem. You are. But you still need to know what the knobs do, because "I changed something and now it's worse" is a hole every new driver falls into.

Rule one: drive the baseline first. iRacing's default setups are genuinely good these days. Fixed-setup series exist for exactly this reason -- run those while you learn the car. In open-setup series, grab the iRacing preset or a shared tune from the series forum/Discord and put 50 clean laps on it before you touch anything.

What the big knobs actually do:

- Tyre pressures -- lower generally means more grip and more temp; too low kills the tyre mid-stint. Small changes, one end at a time.

- Anti-roll bars -
shift balance with

Rule three: if the car feels evil, check yourself first. Overheated tyres from overdriving feel exactly like a "bad setup". Cool down, do three tidy laps, then judge the car.

Setups are seasoning, not the meal. Learn to cook first.

-- Bustawrench

04 -- Racecraft: Finishing First Requires Finishing

iRacing keeps score. Incident points (those little "x" numbers) hit your Safety Rating, and your SR gates your licence. Fast and wrecked gets you nowhere -- the ladder rewards the driver who keeps it clean, no matter how new they are.

Incident points, quick and dirty: 1x = off-track, 2x = loss of control, 4x = contact with a car or wall. Rack them up and your SR bleeds; keep them low and you'll promote out of Rookies before your pace even deserves it. Clean driving IS the meta.

Overtaking. You're not owed the corner because you got a nose in. Make the move done and dusted by the apex, or don't make it. The safest pass is the one you set up two corners earlier with a better exit and a proper run. Dive-bombs win one position and lose you two seasons of goodwill -- and 4x when it inevitably goes wrong.

Defending. One move. Pick your line early, take it once, and don't weave. Blocking under braking -- moving in reaction to the attacking car -- is how netcode contact happens and how you end up in the barrier together. If they're genuinely quicker, lose one position cleanly and follow them. You'll learn more shadowing a faster driver for five laps than fighting them for one.

BustawrenchFlags. Blue means a leader's coming through -- hold your line and lift on a straight, don't leap off the road. Yellow: back off, no passing until it's clear. Meatball (black with orange dot): your car's damaged, pit or park it. Black: you've been penalised, serve it.

BustawrenchEtiquette. Say sorry when it's your fault -- a one-line apology after the race defuses 90% of grudges. Don't rage-quit; drive your damaged heap back to the pits. Don't park on the racing line after a crash. This is a small community with long memories, and your name follows you split to split.

Position one, lap one, is worth nothing. Position at the flag is everything.

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Bustawrench05 -- The 30-Minute Routine: Practice Like You've Got a Job

You have a job. Kids, dinner, a lawn. You are not doing four-hour sessions like you did at 22, so stop pretending you will and build something you'll actually do five nights a week. Thirty minutes, done properly, beats a three-hour Saturday bender where you burn the first hour being angry.

Here's the block I run.

BustawrenchMinutes 0--5: warm-up, no stopwatch. Same car, same track, all week. Roll out, run laps at about 90%. You're waking up your feet and re-learning braking references, not setting times. Do not look at the delta bar. If you spin here, good -- better now than in a race.

BustawrenchMinutes 5--15: one thing. Pick a single corner or a single skill and drill it. Turn 4

entry. Trail braking. Getting on power earlier out of the last corner. Ten minutes on one problem will move you further than a hundred laps of general driving. Use practice mode and reset to pit whenever you want -- you're training a movement, not preserving a lap.

BustawrenchMinutes 15--22: hotlap. Now the stopwatch matters. Push for a clean personal best. Seven minutes is enough for five or six real attempts. Note the time. Write it down somewhere -- phone, notepad, whatever. Trend over a week tells you more than any single lap.

BustawrenchMinutes 22--30: race sim. Load a race, or run laps on used tyres with a full tank. This is the bit everyone skips and it's why they qualify P3 and finish P14. Racing is managing a car that's getting worse while people lean on you. Hotlap pace with no race pace is a party trick.

Ratio, over a week: roughly 60% skill drilling and race sim, 40% hotlapping. Most new drivers run it 90/10 the wrong way and wonder why they're slow when it counts.

One night a week, skip all of it and just race. Have fun. That's the whole point of the hobby, and burnout ends more driving careers than lack of talent ever has.

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Bustawrench06 -- The Five Mistakes That Kill Pace

I've made all of these. Twice, some of them.

Bustawrench1. Overdriving. You feel slow, so you attack harder. Brake later, turn in sharper, mash the throttle. The car gets upset, you lose the exit, and you're a tenth slower with double the effort. Slow hands are fast hands. When you're genuinely trying and the time won't come, back off 5% and watch the lap time drop. It's infuriating and it's true.

Bustawrench2. Force feedback set on vibes. Half the drivers I talk to are running FFB so high the wheel is clipping constantly -- meaning the strongest signals all flatten out and you can't feel the front tyre letting go. Open the FFB overlay, drive a lap, and turn the strength down until you stop clipping through the fast corners. Use the auto button as a starting point. Turn off any "smoothing" or "min force" nonsense you added years ago. You want information, not a workout.

Bustawrench3. Skipping the rookie work. Your licence system doesn't care about your ego. Run the rookie and D-class series properly. Cheap cars, low pressure, and you'll learn racecraft against people who also aren't very good yet. Buying a GT3 in week one is the classic new-driver blunder -- expensive, fast, and completely unforgiving of mistakes.

Bustawrench4. Ignoring telemetry. You don't need to be an engineer. Load a free tool, overlay your lap on a faster one, and look at exactly two traces: brake and throttle. You'll see it immediately -- you're coasting between the pedals, or getting to full throttle half a second late. That's free lap time and no amount of "just driving more" will show it to you.

Bustawrench5. Chasing setups instead of driving. Section 03 covers the knobs. The mistake here is the shopping: buying tunes, hoarding files, running a different setup every session. You never build a reference feel, so you can't tell whether the car changed or you did. Pick one setup, live with it for a week.

Bonus: racing angry. If you're swearing at the monitor, get up. The session is over, you just haven't admitted it yet.

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Bustawrench07 -- Where to Actually Look: Free Tools and Channels

The sim racing internet is 90% noise. Here's the short list I'd give a mate starting out. All of this is

free or free-tier.

BustawrenchTelemetry

- iRacing's own telemetry -- it's already there. Enable telemetry recording in the sim (Options -> the disk icon, or Alt+L in car), and you get .ibt files you can open in a viewer. Costs nothing, records everything.

- VRS Telemetry
and stare at the k

- Suellio Almeida -- coaching-focused, explains why, not just "brake here". Best for rebuilding fundamentals.

- Driver61 (Scott)
on the internet, s

- The iRacing forums, specifically the series-specific subforums. Setup threads and "what car should I start in" posts are gold.

- r/iRacing -- go

Paid coaching in month one. Setup marketplaces before you can drive a baseline consistently. Any video titled "SECRET setup trick pros don't want you to know". Buy nothing for thirty days -- drive the Mazda, use free tools, and see where you land. Then spend money on the specific thing that's actually holding you back.

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