

# See Better...Drive Better!

By Emil William Chynn, MD

As a Boxster-S owner, LASIK Laser Vision Correction surgeon, and LASIK patient myself, the two most frequent questions I encounter at track events from my fellow PCA members are: 1) “How can I see better to drive better?” and 2) “Can LASIK really help me see better?” The answers to these two questions are the focus of this article.

Performance driving is one of the most visually demanding activities any of us will encounter on a regular basis. Being able to see clearly far ahead of any approaching danger, is critical—as is being able to switch quickly to read important instrument clusters. These two visual tasks are, however, quite discreet, and may require different strategies for optimum vision.

Perfect distance vision, defined as a Snellen Visual Acuity of 20/20 (seeing at 20 feet what the normal population sees at 20 feet), should be achievable by the great majority of PCA members, if only with correction (glasses, contacts, or LASIK). The majority of people have some baseline refractive error—either nearsightedness (myopia), farsightedness (hyperopia), or astigmatism—which means that they would see better at distance with “driving glasses” or “driving contacts” if peripheral vision is an issue. I often prescribe such distance aids to the high-performance athletes in my practice, for use when engaged in their sport (including autocross or track events!).

Reading instrument gauges and clusters, in contrast, requires excellent near or intermediate vision—the same visual demand required for working on the computer. Unfortunately, after 40 years of age, 100% of people will gradually lose their ability to accommodate, or focus at near—the medical term for this

condition is presbyopia. As we become presbyopic, we can either remove our distance glasses to read (if we are nearsighted), or put on reading glasses or use bifocals (either with the line or smooth/progressive/VariLux models). Obviously, hitting the apex at Watkins Glenn at 100 mph is not the time to be searching in the car for readers, so most drivers use smooth bifocals at the track.

Another option to provide for both good distance and near vision is monovision, using either contacts or LASIK. Monovision means having your dominant eye corrected fully for distance (with a visual acuity of 20/20) and making your non-dominant eye minimally nearsighted to allow for some near vision ability (with a visual acuity of 20/40). With both eyes open, you will naturally adjust to the minor difference in your eyes—it sounds stranger than it is! I had LASIK myself five years ago for high nearsightedness and astigmatism (my prescription was -9.00!) and elected monovision, and am now still 20/20 without glasses or contacts!

LASIK laser vision correction is a good option for drivers who want better peripheral vision than is possible with glasses, those who are starting to become contact-lens intolerant, and for those who are becoming presbyopic and cannot see their instruments clearly anymore (they would have monovision LASIK in this case). Newer laser hardware and software, as well as surgical techniques, have virtually eliminated the problems we had with night glare and halos before.

It is possible to achieve better than 20/20 vision after LASIK, but this is certainly not guaranteed, as this occurs in a minority of patients, since many patients do not have eyes capable of seeing better than 20/20. As a surgeon, I tell my patients that what I am doing during the LASIK procedure is using the laser to polish your eyeglass or contact prescription directly onto your cornea. Only if you can see better than 20/20 with glasses or contacts preoperatively is there a good chance that you will see the same afterwards.

Finally, for all track events, if you choose to remain in your glasses instead of having LASIK, I highly recommend getting polycarbonate lenses for protection. Polycarbonate material is very strong and shatter-resistant, and will even stop a BB! Regular plastic or glass will shatter upon violent impact, and I have seen cases where the pieces have gone through the eyeball itself, which then leaks fluid and I have to go in there and stitch it up—not a pretty sight! So, please be careful and prudent, and protect your eyes as well as always buckling up when driving!

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