DRIVING AMBITION

ROMAN LIFSON '92 has been fascinated by cars as long as he can remember. Growing up in Moscow, he took the long way to school so he could go by the hotel where Westerners parked their "huge" American cars. One Buick station wagon, he recalled, was several times larger than any car he'd ever seen.

Lifson learned to drive in a Datsun 200SX and drove an Audi coupe through college. By the time he got to the Law School, he had a 1987 Toyota Supra Turbo. He became interested in racing when a friend invited him to an event at Virginia International Raceway in 2006.

Soon he was hooked. He took his BMW M5 to a number of high-performance driver education events, reaching speeds of more than 160 mph. When he decided he needed something safer than a family sedan, he outfitted a BMW M3 with harnesses, a roll cage, a head and neck restraint device and fire system. Then came racing school with the BMW Car Club of America.

Road racing, which is his forte, is very different from a NASCAR race. The course includes varied turns and changes in elevation. His first road race was at Virginia International Raceway, an 18-turn, 3.27-mile course considered one of the best in the U.S. It was there, two years later, that he had his most challenging moment behind the wheel. His brakes failed as he came into the first turn at 135

mph. In a split second he had to maneuver the car into the least hazardous position. He veered off onto grass and hit a wall made of bundled tires. His car sank into the rubber all the way up to the doors, but he walked away without a scratch.

The demands of the sport, he said, are in some ways similar to those of practicing law—the need for strategy, sound and timely judgment, risk management in challenging conditions, and "perhaps more than anything else, the ability to thrive when the unexpected happens," Lifson said.

"In trial work, as much as we try to control what happens in court, we can never reliably control what judges, witnesses and juries do," he said. "It's in the unexpected that the greatest challenges, and often the greatest opportunities, exist. Being able to not only deal with the unexpected but to benefit from the challenge the unexpected presents often plays a large role in the outcome."

Lifson's passion for racing has also become a focus for his law practice. He is a partner with Christian & Barton in Richmond, where he represents racetrack operators, event organizers, racing teams and individuals, bringing his deep experience in the racing world to his work.

—Rebecca Barns