

Spie

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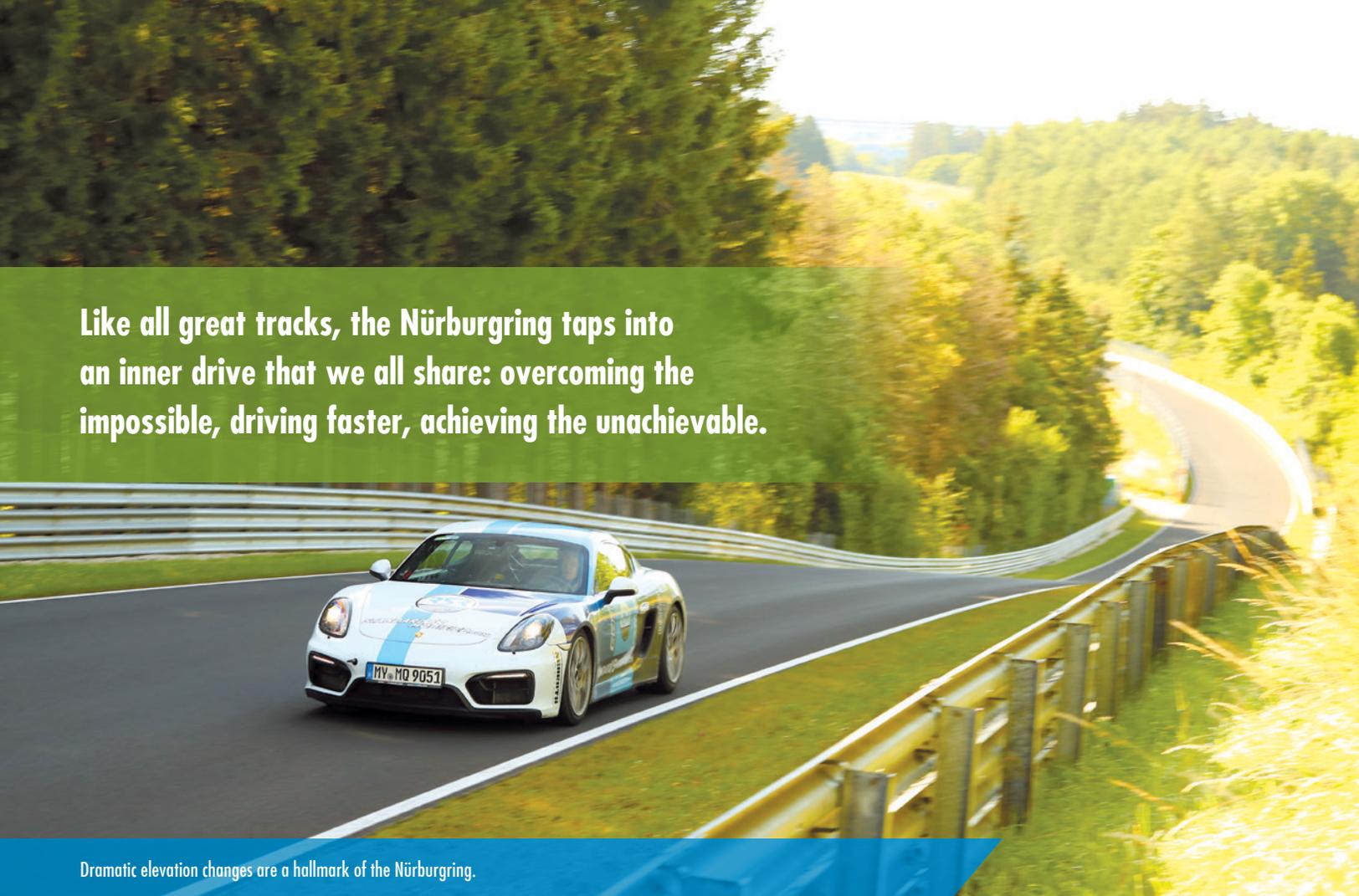
COVER
STORY

THE WORLD'S *TOUGHEST* TRACK

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The chicane of Les Combes, a very technical part of the circuit at Spa-Francorchamps



Like all great tracks, the Nürburgring taps into an inner drive that we all share: overcoming the impossible, driving faster, achieving the unachievable.

Dramatic elevation changes are a hallmark of the Nürburgring.

If you consider yourself any kind of performance driving aficionado, you likely keep a list of pilgrimage tracks – those once- (or twice- or more times?) in-a-lifetime destinations whose difficulty, history, or provenance makes them unmissable. And the Nürburgring Nordschleife is probably at the top of your list. Famous for triumphs and tragedies alike, it's known as the most challenging track in the world, and since I know you love a challenge, let's get you dreaming of your journey.

In the lush Black Forest of Germany, below an ancient castle, the Nürburgring Nordschleife is comprised of 12.36 miles of asphalt that's been evolving since it was first built in 1925. With blind corners and 1,000 feet of elevation changes, it's indisputably dangerous and difficult. Not only does it have a rich Formula One racing history, the Nürburgring is also where car companies like Porsche, Mercedes, and BMW all test their newest sports cars, setting record after

astonishing record.

In July, I joined a trip to Nürburgring and Spa-Francorchamps, organized by Seattle's own Tom Roberts and Ross Bentley. We've already established that you're quite a performance driving aficionado, so you'll be familiar with the impressive Speed Secrets series of books and podcasts by Ross Bentley, one of the world's top racing coaches. Tom Roberts, a professional driver and a notably exacting racing coach, whose knowledge of the Nürburgring is unsurpassed, partnered up with Ross to create a Speed Secrets trip to the Nürburgring Nordschleife. They joined up with RSR Nürburgring, a renowned local company



Auste Viesulas relaxing in the F1 paddock at Spa-Francorchamps after 57 laps



Big smiles on a break at the Nürburgring.



Graffiti in the form of fandom and tributes covers the Nürburgring.

spearheaded by Ron Simons, that can outfit you with a sports car from an incredible selection, including Porsches like the newest GT4 RS, GT3, and 718 GTs. These three “Ring Meisters” (Tom, Ross, and Ron) provided targeted driving coaching, corner-by-corner analysis of the entire track, and mindset framing to prepare all 25 participants to excel at Nürburgring Nordschleife and Spa-Francorchamps. As if driving these illustrious tracks, and with such accomplished mentors, weren’t enough, the Speed Secrets trip also included luxury accommodations, incredible meals and wines, and networking opportunities with other amazing guests.

The Pilgrimage

So how can you drive the Nürburgring Nordschleife?

While I highly recommend the Speed Secrets trip, there are multiple ways to approach this track.

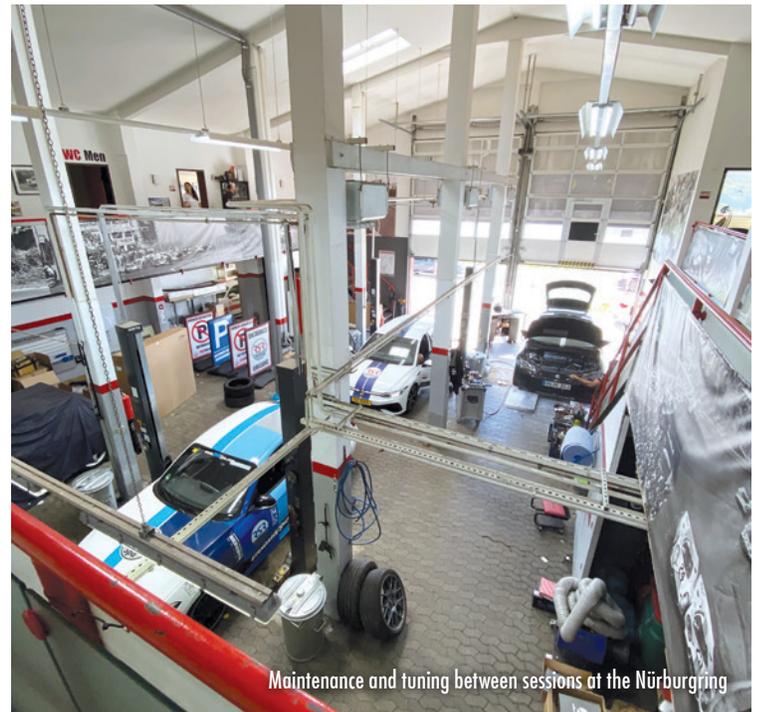
Believe it or not, the track is a historical treasure of Germany and is regularly open to the public for anyone to drive. One option, therefore, is to seek out a public “tourist day” on the calendar, when you can drive any type of car you want at the Nürburgring. Anyone living within driving distance can bring their vehicle (car, minivan, motorcycle, SUV, school bus, almost anything) to the track, and you’ll see

a whole range of nationalities (British, Polish, Russians, Italians, you name it) making the trip with their own cars. However, “tourist day” is nicknamed “terrorist day” by knowing insiders, who look down on the weekend warriors who have little knowledge and lots to prove. Notorious crashes have been known to happen during these public days on the Nordschleife.

So, if you choose the Speed Secrets trip or decide to organize your own journey, you’ll want to drive the Nürburgring on a private track day for experienced drivers. RSR Nürburgring or a few other high-performance liveries can hook you up directly with



Upstairs at the RSR Nürburgring clubhouse



Maintenance and tuning between sessions at the Nürburgring

renting a sports car of your choosing, and you can have an instructor who's an expert in the Nürburgring coach you on- and off-again during ride-alongs. RSR is situated just seconds from the entrance of the Nürburgring, and you'll have a home base where you can rest between laps in the clubhouse upstairs, regroup with your new friends, or refresh your practice on the simulator, all while admiring their open garage from above and bonding with the technicians who are keeping your car tuned up for all 27 turns that you've been mastering like a boss.

Most critical to having a great experience, however, is the time you spend preparing for the Nürburgring well before you even arrive. You'll want to memorize the track, including all the corner names and sections – all 12.36 miles. You'll want to prepare on a simulator. You'll want to watch videos. Why is this important? Without preparation, you won't have fun or,

worse, the world's most dangerous track will be, well, dangerous for you. Do the work. My suggestion is: don't even think about driving the Nürburgring unless you're ready to put in the time to really get to know it.

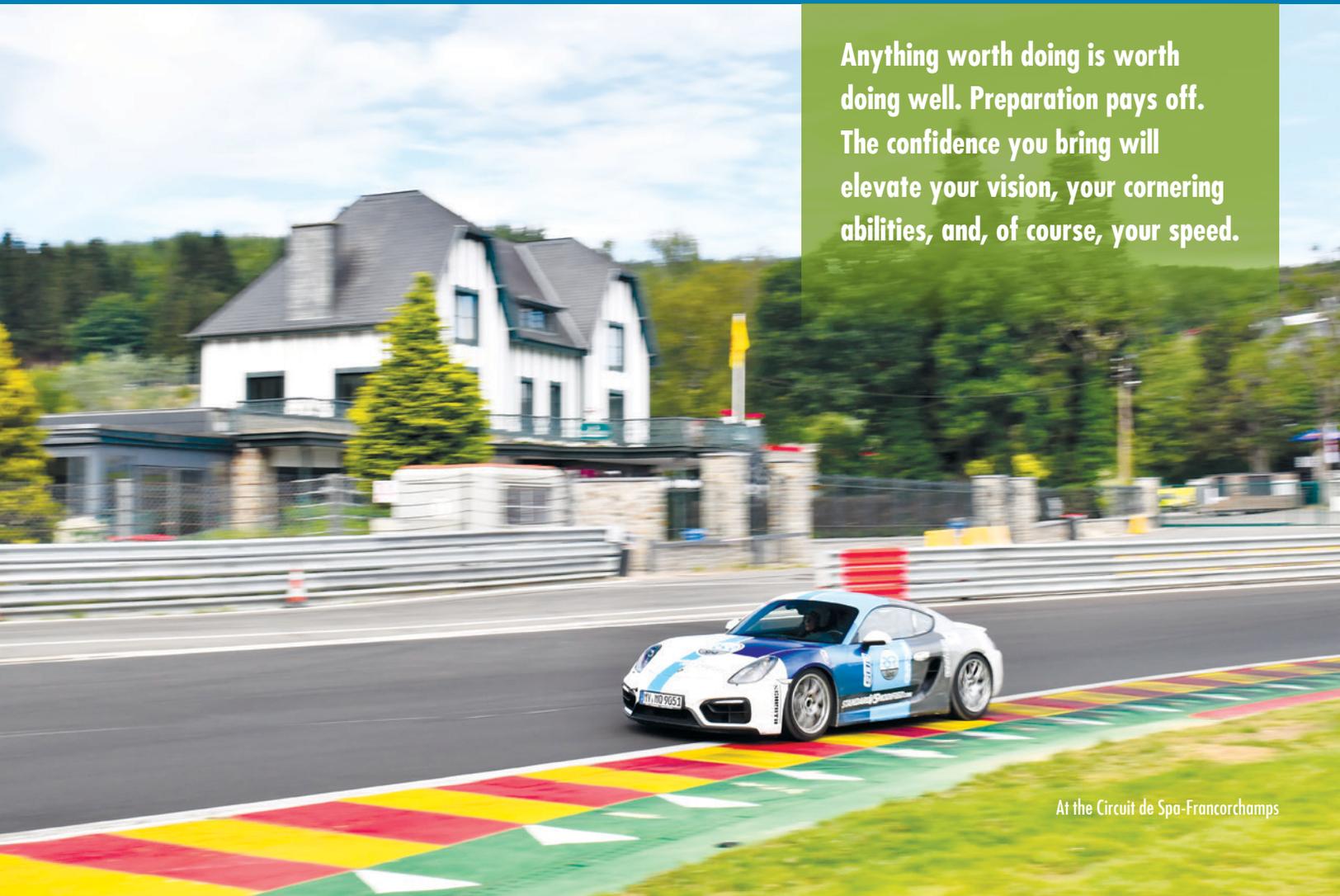
What does that mean? You have to understand the virtue of patience. To understand this well-known track, a driver needs to engage in an intensely physical and intuitive process, alone, for hours on end, combining work on a simulator, studying the track map, and watching videos. Weeks or months go by as that practice "takes" in your mind, and the distinctive topographies and track markings are burned into your memory, each turn presenting itself naturally, revealing now-predictable nuances of pace, grip, and camber. Turns become more beautiful the more you practice. You want to work with the elements, not against them.

The typical learning curriculum that Tom, Ross, and Ron recommend

takes at least 6 months. But since I joined the Speed Secrets trip late due to one of the participants canceling, I had just three months to study before hitting the asphalt. While I love a challenge, at first I found the preparation work overwhelming and frustrating. In particular, the entire back half of the track was a blur, and I felt disoriented the way many drivers do when simulating this section since the topography blends one turn into the next. On top of all that, I had to explain to my perplexed friends on several gorgeous Seattle summer nights, that I was going to stay home instead of coming out for drinks or dinner, because I had to study some bizarre-sounding racetrack on a simulator. "You can't come out because of WHAT?"

But anything worth doing is worth doing well. Preparation pays off. Once I knew the Nürburgring from memory, I fell in love with this track. The

Anything worth doing is worth doing well. Preparation pays off. The confidence you bring will elevate your vision, your cornering abilities, and, of course, your speed.



At the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps

Bringing people together, fostering community, this too was at the heart of the trip and is also true for anyone traveling to the Nürburgring.



confidence you bring will elevate your vision, your cornering abilities, and, of course, your speed. When added to the experienced coaching of someone like my RSR coach, Sarah Ganser (who races the Nürburgring professionally in series like the VLN), you'll be able to feel the track and your surroundings and achieve overwhelming feelings of pride and mastery, knowing that this track, which intimidates so many, is a track you can drive with pleasure and relative ease.

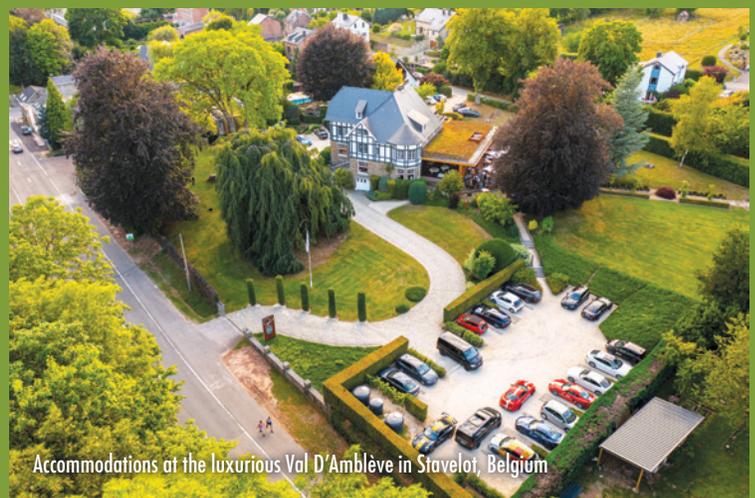
I'm tempted to play favorites and tell you about my most beloved corners, but that exercise quickly falls apart as I look back at my highly-annotated map. Like any track, it's a system that comes together as one single experience that will make your heart soar. Still, I'll give a shout-out to some of the most notable sections for me: flying through Fuchsröhre and feeling the track change completely at speed, a big throttle through Metzfeld to greet Kallenhard, getting

Bergwerk right and nearly straight-lining through to Karussel, thanking Hohe Acht for a little grassy excursion, full throttle through Phlanzgarten, and the transcendental feeling of reaching your top speed ever on the exquisitely long Döttinger Höhe straight.

My best recorded full lap time was 9:20. Sadly, very sadly, my last six lap times went uncaptured due to a glitch in the software, but I know in my heart that I went even faster. There will have to be a next time!



Celebrating with a toast on the final evening of the trip



Accommodations at the luxurious Val D'Ambève in Stavelot, Belgium



There's No Such Thing as a Blind Corner

Like all great tracks, the Nürburgring taps into an inner drive that we all share: overcoming the impossible, driving faster, achieving the unachievable. Once you prove that you can drive it, really drive it, break through and overcome your fear of it... perfecting it is no longer a fantasy. There are no blind corners anymore when your brain knows what's next even if your eyes can't see it. Ultimately, there's a spiritual connection you feel and something real underneath all of this: celebrating a legendary track, nearly 100 years in the making, and the dreams and fears and emotions of the drivers who came before you, while the tall Black Forest towers around you, a force of nature complementing the cars. The Nürburgring Nordschleife possesses every bit of technical and emotional engineering that one would expect from

a track that, since day one, has provoked challenges like F1 and inspired European car makers to develop and test their best cars right there.

In fact, the trek to the Nürburgring perfectly encapsulates what's so alluring about high performance driving: it's as much about the physical endeavor of driving as it is about the fulfillment of one's aspirations. As unimaginable a feat as it was to master such a difficult track before I started studying the videos and simulation, today, when I think back to the experience, I'm amazed at what each of us participants accomplished in pursuit of this wondrous goal. At the heart of that goal is asphalt, rubber tires, and the beloved intoxicating smell of gas. However, the experience resonates well beyond the physical aspects of being a petrol-head and elevates the rest of your life as well, proving to

you that you can achieve anything you set your mind to. Memories of the Nürburgring can transform an average day into one of perfection by simply closing your eyes and looking inside to replicate the feeling of a proud lap time and life-changing experience.

Bringing people together, fostering community, this too was at the heart of the Speed Secrets trip, and it is also true for anyone traveling to the Nürburgring. Even on tourist days, the sense of community surrounding the track is palpable, and you feel that this is your extraordinary, new track-away-from-home. It's important to note that because it's not easy, you feel a deep connection to everyone and anyone who has made the pilgrimage. Surrounded and uplifted by both amateur and professional drivers of the Nürburgring, it's a track that is brave and beautiful, and its power will move you in a most magical way. 🏁



The turn-in point for Kallenhard, a high-incident corner with a very narrow track-out.