

HOW TO

RACE ON THE NURBURGRING

DRIVER TRAINING EXPERTS RSRNURBURG TAKE AMATEUR RACERS AND TURN THEM INTO *RINGMEISTERS*



Bernd Schneider once said that the Nürburgring Nordschleife should only ever be driven at 98%. “If you need 100%,” the five-time DTM champion remarked, “it’s getting dangerous.”

Danger has always been an intrinsic part of the Nürburgring’s attraction. First opened in 1927, the 12.93-mile circuit is long and narrow, and packed with vertiginous sweeps, blind crests and relentless corners – 73 in total.

Bearing remarkably few changes since the time of Sir Jackie Stewart’s pomp, the ‘Green Hell’ is rightfully regarded as being the ultimate driving challenge and every year attracts people of all nationalities and levels of racing experience hoping to conquer it – from young professionals hoping to impress a manufacturer, to enthusiastic amateurs living out their dreams.

As proof of the ‘Ring’s international appeal, among their number is IMSA Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge regular Facundo Chahwan, heralding from over 7000 miles away in Buenos Aires. An engineering student from ITBA, Argentina’s leading technical university, the 22-year-old aims to follow in the footsteps of his father Alejandro by contesting the Nürburgring 24 Hours, but it’s not as easy as bringing a well-stocked wallet.

For would-be Ringmeisters without an intricate knowledge of either the circuit or its complex licensing rules (see right), getting to race on the Nordschleife can be a frustrating process – but approaching driver training experts RSRNurburg can simplify the steps and make a sizable impact on the learning curve.

RSRNurburg offers a linear pathway from trackday rentals all the way through to racing, with a dedicated in-house Driving Academy to learn techniques and teach newcomers the various pitfalls to avoid.

After booking onto an RSRNurburg trackday to learn the circuit and attending a seminar with instructor Luis Ramirez, Chahwan was entered in an RCN event the very next day, with the same race-spec BMW 235i he had rented for the trackday.

A mix of regularity rally and time trial, RCN is the ideal bridge between trackdays and competitive motorsport for hobby racers with limited circuit experience – and free from the enormous closing speeds of GT3 cars in the more professional VLN Series. After setting an opening benchmark on their first lap, drivers must alternate between pushing as hard as possible and matching their original time, encouraging consistent driving and building gradually up to the limit. Crucially, instructors are permitted to sit alongside and provide another set of eyes to minimise the chance of an incident.

Ramirez, himself a regular in VLN races, believes there’s no better method for improving confidence and circuit knowledge.

“RCN is a perfect introduction to racing on the Nordschleife – it’s always safer because you are competing more against yourself, not so much all the other people around you,” he says.

“Also, there are fast cars and slow cars, so it’s good preparation for the VLN. For an amateur, I always recommend to do at least 45 RCN laps so they can understand how the traffic works.”

Chahwan’s first RCN race was dogged by heavy

SIDIRAS/RSRNURBURG

DMSB LICENCES NO SHORTCUTS TO SUCCESS

Following a spate of accidents involving factory GT3 cars and amateur drivers in slower vehicles, Germany's motorsport governing body – the DMSB – introduced a licence system for 2016 to ensure a base standard of competency for all drivers racing on the Nordschleife.

The prized DMSB Permit Nordschleife grade A is required for drivers to enter the 24 Hours or race in the fastest class – SP9 – in VLN, but can only be achieved by finishing two VLN races within the top 75% of each respective class (with a minimum of three race starters) and completing a minimum of 18 laps in doing so.

Regardless of reputation or experience

elsewhere, Nordschleife rookies must start in the lower classes – DTM ace Jamie Green steered a Porsche Cayman to 72nd overall in VLN 8, but failed to finish VLN 9 – in which Mercedes GT gun Raffaele Marciello claimed 83rd overall in a Toyota GT86.

To enter a VLN race, drivers first require a grade B Permit. International C licence holders can pay to take a training course and receive this immediately, but International D/National A licence holders have to contest three RCN races, again finishing within the top 75% of their class.

An e-learning course provided by the DMSB Academy is mandatory for all.



SIDIRAS/RSRNURBURG

rain and fog, making Ramirez's presence in the passenger seat all the more valuable.

"I had very few laps before, so it was actually the only way I could do it!" Chahwan says.

"Luis knew it was my first time there and every corner, every brake, every full gas, it was constant communication, so now I have it printed in my mind.

"It's really helpful because you can have those laps where you go slower and every other car is also slower – you don't have that pressure from the VLN of cars passing you at 300 km/h. It's a very good starting point and it's safer when you don't have to sprint every lap."

Chahwan has since gone on to race in VLN alongside his father, driving for an RSRNurburg-affiliated team. The RCN experience is not only a useful educational tool for the driver, but for the instructors, too, informing decisions on whether they can handle racing solo.

"Trust has a lot to do with racing, especially when you are with a person going 215 km/h on the Dottinger Hohe straight – because if they lift at the wrong moment, it could end very badly," says Ramirez.

"Facundo already had racing experience, so for him it was a little bit easier, just teaching him the track properly. When the student trusts the coach, the coach can trust them in return and can help them reach their goals. But if there is no trust between the driver and the coach, then there is no point.

"Sometimes we have a responsibility to protect the customer from themselves. When a coach doesn't feel

“RCN is safer because you are competing more against yourself”

comfortable with a driver, you can't rush and put them directly in a racing situation – even if it damages their ego a little bit. This is where an intensive RSRNurburg Driving Academy course can really make the difference."

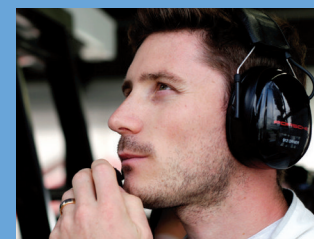
Argentina may not be adding another name to the roster of German Grand Prix winners alongside the great Juan Manuel Fangio and Carlos Reutemann, but Chahwan is now well on his way to the 24 Hours and agrees that guided coaching is the way to go.

"If you want to go and race on the Nurburgring then that's the process you need to do," he says.

"You can't get in there only with a simulator because it's not like any other circuit in the world.

"I advanced four years of experience in one weekend – it really helps you get done those steps you need to do much faster."

JAMES NEWBOLD



TRIENTZ/LAT

PRO TIP TAKE YOUR TIME

It's not just amateurs that can benefit from driver coaching on the Nordschleife.

With so little margin for error, it pays to learn the circuit prior to a race meeting as any accident can heavily compromise the weekend, so RSRNurburg offers its services to professional drivers too. World Touring Car Championship racers Nestor Girolami (Volvo) and Daniel Nagy (Zengo Motorsport) were among those to receive training before the Nurburgring round earlier this year.

Twice a winner in VLN this year, Porsche factory ace Kevin Estre has rented cars on several occasions from RSRNurburg to show personal sponsors around the 'Ring. The Frenchman holds the lap record for the combined Nordschleife and GP circuit and agrees that taking the time to learn it at a reduced pace is key.

"Before you start to think about the traffic, knowing the track is important," he says.

"For an amateur trying to learn, it's definitely important to start with a small car there."



WTCC race winner Girolami learned the 'Ring with RSRNurburg

GOODEN/DPPI