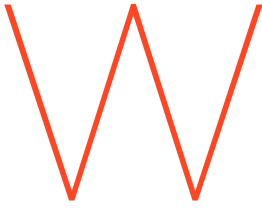




THERAPY SESSION

Ron Simon, founder of track day supremos RSR, could be considered the “Godfather of Spa”. He offered MSD Editor Ben Whibley a unique insight into this ferociously fast circuit, a favourite of many Formula 1 drivers, before sending our man out for some heart-pounding laps on his own.



When RSR Spa's invitation arrived at Motorsport Days, offering the chance to head across the Channel to experience a day with one of Europe's biggest

track day organisers, there was a clamour to go. Who wouldn't want to drive around the fear-somely fast Belgian racetrack?

I stayed at La Source Hotel, ideally positioned just off the circuit corner. From my room I could even see the famous Eau Rouge corner.

Next day's briefing started at the track at 8.20am with Ray Shepherdson, who was excellent at delivering both information on the day and safety. This included overtaking on both sides and without consent. This was surprising and made me think "OK, I will treat this as a race session". But you are quickly bought back down to earth with Ray saying "know your limits" and "you don't want to be that guy who crashes", but more importantly, "it is a track day not a race day".

At 9am, we had a track walk with ex-racer Ron Simons, the man behind RSR (Ron Simons Racing). At this time at other tracks you are usually getting set to go out for your first session, but with RSR there is a full hour to walk and learn the circuit. As a newbie to the circuit (hard to believe I know) I really enjoyed this and would be keen to see other circuits do the same thing. It helps to get a different view.



We only had time for a few corners and Eau Rouge was first, with about 50 punters ready to listen. There was a lot of advice for this corner – or the three it is split into. Ron was quick to reveal that the corner has three facts too: *1. You're in top gear; 2. It's blind; 3. It's off camber.*

We moved on to Pouhoun, or “500m of sex” as Ron puts it! It's a favourite for many Formula 1 drivers, but I was surprised how steep it was down to the first double apex corner. A brilliant, hold your breath and hold on corner and I'll admit it moved up in my corner rankings. Unfortunately, we didn't get time to visit more, especially as Ron has a mountain of knowledge.

It was now time for me to take to the wheel of a Renault Megane RS 265 Cup, which was great fun. I also got Ron to take me out for a few laps too – he may be an ex-racer but has lost none of his commitment.



MSD: What inspired you to race and why?

RS: I always was interested in engines and speed, everything mechanical. So I was already tuning a little go-kart and little bikes, very small ones – 50cc stuff – and then went into off-road endurance bikes and go-karting before I started racing.

I got infected by the Alfa bug at first so we raced Alfas for a long time and then Ferraris.

That's how I got involved with Ferrari for driver and training stuff.

I was living in Eindhoven, which is close to Zolder and Spa, so this was my back garden. It was also near to the Dutch track at Assen and the mighty Nürburgring.

It was here that we took RSR to the next level. We always had a very international customer base, but they wouldn't be asking "When do you want me? When can I drive?". They would

be saying "I am here and I want to drive today". That is only possible at the Nürburgring because it is open every day of the week, and if it is not open during the day, it will be open in the evenings.

So that is how it all started. We allow our clients to drive the Nürburgring even if they cannot bring their own car – so is ideal for our international customers. Now we have slowly expanded into Spa because this is a place where you can drive five days a week. There is the odd day where Audi or another manufacturer is on the track, but it's not like Nürburgring where there is 12 weeks of industry testing. Spa is mostly track days, so you know that it is either on or off. You can drive here almost every day of the week, but

“I played in a rock band and was the supporting act for Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis”





not weekends. Not many people know that we also have two-hour sessions in the evenings. Sometimes we compare a bit with the Nordschleife - the tourist session in the evening - but these are not tourist sessions.

MSD: Where is RSR based?

RS: We were based at the Nürburgring originally, but now we have four or five different locations there because we have so much stuff that we need - houses and staff - and it's the same here at Spa. We have a gas station workshop up the road and another house over there. We also have the villa in Spa town and three or four years ago we bought a 10,000sq²m compound just outside the track, plus a 4,000sq²m facility which we are starting to build in eight

weeks. That is going to be the bigger version of the Nürburgring. So where there's wheels involved, then we are involved. We do a lot more than just the track days though. We have just had the launch of the new 217 Nissan here - we pushed through 350 journalists from all over the world, all arriving in new GTRs. And I still fly out to all the corners of the world, carrying out instruction tips for customers. RSR is much bigger than everything you can see here, and the investment in the new building is going to be €3 million or more; it's a very serious operation. It's not that Nürburgring is going downhill, or that there's no future there, but Spa is a much more serious place for driver training and we are starting work with Radical

next year - a serious car for a serious track.

MSD: So what inspires you?

RS: Hardworking, motivated people.

MSD: OK so if you got a scratchcard and won £100 million, what would you do with it?

RS: Buy more cars! Oh and music - I love music. I was a musician for a long time, played in a rock band and was the supporting act for Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis all over Europe. I am not into rock & roll, but was playing music which we made money from. I'm into jazz. I like Jimmy Coltrane and the big names from the past. But what I really like are guitar players like John Schofield and Pat Metheny - they are my heroes.