

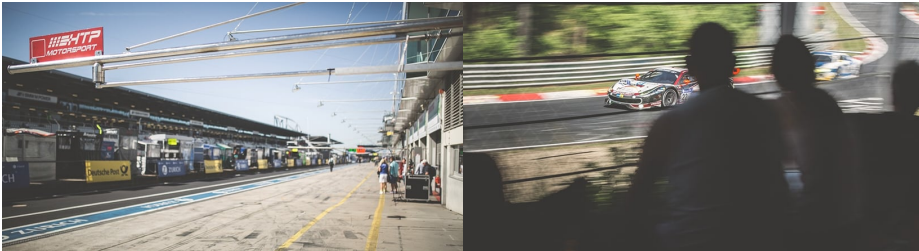
CLASSIC DRIVER

Behind the scenes at the Nürburgring 24 Hours with AMG and IWC

Lead

On a track heralded in automotive folklore, a devout following of racing fanatics assemble once a year to worship the chaos and sheer feats of endurance that define the Nürburgring 24 Hours. What is less documented, however, is the unique atmosphere of this event and the magic behind the scenes...

Superstar circuit



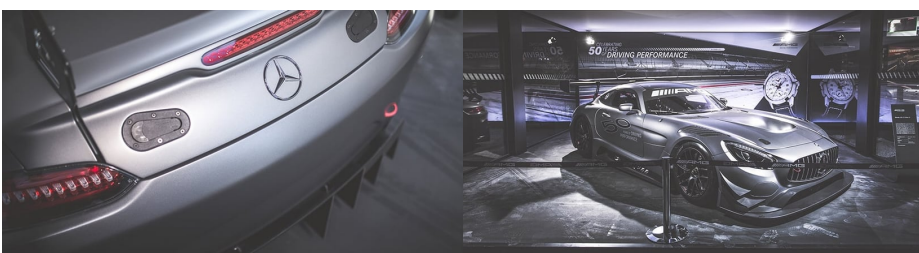
Whether it be memories of fearsome flared-arched DTM racers or more recent *Gran Turismo* games, everyone has something to say about the 'ring. Upon arrival at the circuit, you're immediately made aware there is something in the air: an intangible energy and a hum below the surface, as the history of this racing oasis, dropped in the middle of the sleepy German countryside, reverberates off the countless miles of storied tarmac. This feeling touches everyone, from the wide-eyed newcomers, such as myself, to hardened racers, like Bernd Schneider, who knows the track intimately from his time in 24-hour racing and developing Mercedes-Benz AMG products. As Bernd explained to me before the race: "The history of the Nürburgring is outstanding. There is no other racetrack in the world like this, and the 24 Hours is the highlight of the whole year in sports car racing — 24 hours, 200 cars on the grid, and 250,000 spectators."

Party time



It's also apparent that these spectators are something special — a collective responsible for an inimitable atmosphere that is felt by the drivers throughout the daylong race. “Normally, when you’re racing, you have tunnel vision and you get no sense of the atmosphere around the track, but at this circuit, you’re so close to the fans, you get a real impression of what’s going on. The race starts at 3:30pm, and by 4:00pm, you start smelling the barbeques. I remember the first time I drove here at night: I came up to the Carousel and it’s pitch black, unlike some race tracks which have lights around, and suddenly it was daylight because there were so many fans with flashlights.”

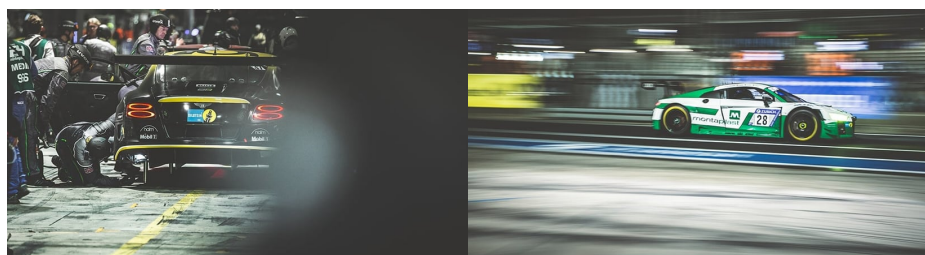
Golden gift



This exceptional atmosphere attracts manufacturers and makes the circuit the ideal venue at which to unveil their

latest and greatest. For Mercedes-AMG, this year's 24 Hours saw the unveiling of its anniversary gift to mark the 50th year of AMG: the track-only AMG GT3 Edition 50, of which just five will be made and all will come with a 50th Anniversary IWC Chronograph Sport Edition. Despite a price of 500,000 euros plus VAT, VIP sales specialist and the man tasked with the allocation of the Edition 50 and the upcoming Project One hypercar, Roland Geistlinger, reported strong interest, commenting that all five cars will likely be sold by the time he heads home tomorrow.

Fade to black



As night falls, yellow headlights blur, senses heighten, and tensions build. The pits showcase the melting pot of amateurs and professionals battling tiredness and blind corners in an epic battle against time and each other. Where else can you see an immaculately prepared, outrageously aerodynamic, snarling V8 AMG pit next to a privateer-entered Opel Manta fresh from a meeting with the barrier, that are lit by spotlights and the glowing faces of the best fans in the world? Only once a year, and only at the Nürburgring...

Photos: Robert Cooper for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

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