

**HAGERTY**  
Motorsports

# Insiders Guide to the Nürburgring

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“If you’ve harbored any sort of desire to do this type of thing, don’t wait. Stop talking yourself out of it. Allow yourself to experience your dreams for once; I can guarantee you won’t regret it.”

- JG Pasterjak, *Grassroots Motorsports* magazine





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# Introduction



# Introduction

On the wall of my office at MotorsportReg headquarters hangs a piece of paper with three handwritten goals: learn to kitesurf, travel to Cuba and compete in the 24 Hours of the Nürburgring. Let me tell you how the third item joined that list.


As the company's founder, one of my "jobs" is to attend motorsport trade shows. I say "jobs" because I travel the world and meet people involved in all aspects of motorsports, and that certainly fits better into the "play" category. The Professional Motorsport World Expo in Cologne (Köln, in German) was one such trade show, and it happens to be close to both the Nürburgring and Spa-Francorchamps. This event focuses on professional motorsports, so it turned out not to be a great show for what we do at MotorsportReg, but traveling to Germany came with fringe benefits.

The event was in November, right on the cusp of the Nürburgring closing for the winter, but the motorsport gods serendipitously scheduled the very last *touristenfahrten* of the year on the weekend after the PMW Expo. *Touristenfahrten* is a German word that ultimately means you will encounter motorbikes, school buses, work vans and Porsche 911 GT3s on each lap around the Nürburgring because it's open to any road-going vehicle the public can drive.

It was a beautiful fall day. Beneath blue skies and spectacularly changing foliage, the lightly-attended circuit exceeded my very high expectations by an order of magnitude. The first time I crested *Flugplatz* and felt the car get light, I immediately pictured the great 1980s DTM battles between BMW and Mercedes where all four wheels would go airborne lap after lap.

This is why the Nürburgring is our mecca: No matter what era or type of racing you love, a piece of its epic history can probably be tied to the 154 corners along the 12.9 mile *Nordschleife* circuit winding through the Eifel forest. And this is why I knew I would return someday to race in the 24 Hours of the Nürburgring.

You undoubtedly feel a connection to the Nürburgring, too, and that's why you are reading these words, so thank you for downloading my guide to the Ring. There are no superlatives of the Ring that haven't already been said, so if you've read this far, I'm going to assume "if" is not a question of your Nürburgring adventure, but rather "how" and "when." Let's begin by answering those two questions.



## Who should go to the Nürburgring?



# Who should go to the Nürburgring?

**Anyone who loves driving.**

You don't need to be a racer to love the Nürburgring – in fact, approaching your first visit as a “racer” may even be detrimental to your experience and your pocketbook – but even a casual driving enthusiast will not leave disappointed. If you enjoy spirited backroad driving, autocross, track days, time trials or wheel-to-wheel racing, one or more of the options detailed ahead will interest you.

Germany is an easy country to visit as a North American because 70% of Germans speak English and there are no travel requirements beyond a passport. In addition, there are a range of accommodations and cuisine throughout the region at varying price points that will suit any enthusiast or group.

The hardcore traveler might fly in and spend every day at the circuit, but you can just as easily – and wisely – make the Nürburgring part of a broader European vacation. Later, I'll detail how I added a track day at the legendary Spa- Francorchamps to my short trade show trip to maximize the bucket list factor (yes, *Eau Rouge!*).



# The Nürburgring ladder



# The Nürburgring ladder

Similar to the way racers move up through a ladder system from junior categories to the top levels of racing, I have outlined a ladder to experience the Nürburgring, starting with free and casual and culminating in the hardest and, arguably, most fulfilling. It's a choose-your-own-motorsport-adventure for all skill levels and budgets.

## 01 Spectating

**Cost:** free, or a few euros

**Time:** few hours to a day

**Requirements:** none

Other than the fuel required to get there, the Nürburgring has a number of corners that are freely accessible from public roads. The day I turned laps, there were dozens of people standing at Brunnchen watching cars blast down the hill, all for what is essentially a track day. If you've ever seen a YouTube crash compilation from the Ring, you know you won't be alone should you choose this route. Incidentally, the three best corners to watch from are Adenauer Forst, Brunnchen and Hocheichen.

The Nürburgring is used by the automotive industry for testing approximately eight weeks out of the year. On days when the track is privately booked, evenings typically allow for a few hours of open track time. Otherwise, the track is either run as a *touristenfahrten* date or an organizer is running a private track day. None of these events have cost associated with spectating.

A must-do item is to find your way to the public pit lane, which is essentially a parking lot, where pedestrians and exotic cars mix – there you'll find all of those cool European versions of German sports cars that we don't get in North America. The Devil's Diner is a restaurant where you can sit and watch the cars exit and enter the track. If you choose to go on course, this is also where you will buy your Ring card and load it with laps. Next to the restaurant, you'll find the headquarters of the famous Ring taxi where you can score a thrilling ride from one of their professional drivers. More on that later.

If you want to watch one of the races at the track – the RCN (Rundstrecken-Challenge Nürburgring, similar to time trials), NLS (Die Nürburgring Langstrecken-Serie, middistance endurance races) or 24 Hour race, there are legions of fans who come to spectate. The 24 Hour in particular has its own lively atmosphere around the track. Dates are usually announced January to March and a list can be found [here](#).



“Mountain biking the trails around the Nordschleife circuit is not only great exercise, but a fantastic learning experience. There's a perspective you get when looking at the various corners from outside the track that you don't get so easily when in the car, and this helps you learn the circuit more deeply. You see nuances that might take hundreds of laps in the car to notice, and these help you understand what it takes to be safe and fast around the Ring. It also gives you an overall understanding of where you are at any moment when in the car, which is not an easy thing to learn without this perspective. Oh, and it's a beautiful ride, too – the scenery is worth every minute of it!”

– Ross Bentley, *Speed Secrets* author and driver coach

**TIP →** Are you a cyclist? You can **rent a mountain bike and ride near the course**. This gives you exercise and the chance to see as much of the Ring as your legs will allow. If nothing else, you will certainly appreciate the more than 1,000 foot elevation change around the circuit.







## 02 Rent an exotic for spirited country road driving

**Cost:** €100s; or €1,000s to drive a Ferrari F12

**Time:** One to three days

**Requirements:** none

Maybe you want to witness the wonder of European motorsports, but only from a distance. How about wandering the twisty hillside roads for wine tasting and beautiful vistas behind the wheel of a Honda Civic Type R, BMW M2 Competition, Porsche 911 GT3 or Ferrari F12 Berlinetta? Well, you're in luck – within 90 minutes of the Ring you can find:

[Ahr Wine Valley](#)

[Unlimited speed sections of the Autobahn \(map, legend\)](#)

[Spa-Francorchamps and the Ardennes forest](#)

[Nürburg Castle](#)

[Porsche Stuttgart museum \(three hour drive\)](#)

The roads in the area are – unsurprising for Germany – in excellent condition, making sightseeing a pleasurable endeavor. The area around the Ring tends to look like a rolling “Cars and Coffee” event with a great mix of exotics and tuned sports cars, with a healthy dose of hot hatches and tourings (station wagons), too. Just being on the road in something sporty will get you in the mix with other enthusiasts.

## 03 Ride in a Ring taxi

**Cost:** €300-500 per lap, per car

**Time:** About eight minutes

**Requirements:** a strong stomach

Few of us have the time, money or commitment to become masters of the Ring. The rule of thumb is you need 100 laps under your belt before you try racing on the circuit, so it certainly won't happen on your first visit. Luckily, there is a great option to affordably experience the thrill. If you want to experience the Ring at speeds in excess of 160 MPH, your best option is a Ring taxi.

A few years back, the Germans broke up the monopoly BMW had on Ring taxis, so there are now five concession holders featuring these vehicles: Honda Civic Type R, BMW M2 Competition, Porsche 911 GT3 or Ferrari F12 Berlinetta. On top of that, some of the Ring taxi drivers are both experienced and skillful. Sabine Schmitz (who later joined the Top Gear crew, and whose family owns the The Pistenklause Restaurant in Nürburg, the Ring equivalent of Siebkens in Elkhart Lake, for Road America fans) came to fame driving a Ring taxi.

When people hear about Laguna Seca, their eyes grow big as they ask what it's like going through the Corkscrew and dropping the height of a five-story building. Indeed, the Corkscrew is fun, but it's also a slow second- or third-gear turn. A Ring taxi lap of the Nürburgring is the equivalent of experiencing 30 or 40 Corkscrews, seamlessly strung together by a professional driver in a 500hp supercar going flatout in fourth, fifth and sixth gears.

Ring taxi laps are also available at Spa- Francorchamps from RSRSpa. While the laps are shorter (and the cost is less), a proper blast through Eau Rouge, Pouhon and Blanchimont will command your attention.

**WARNING** → *Whether you calculate it by the minute or the kilometer, a Ring taxi is not cheap; it is, however, one of the most affordable ways to experience an insane lap of the Ring. With some Ring taxis (e.g. BMW M5), you can squeeze friends into the backseat and split the cost.*





## 04 Touring laps in a rental car

**Cost:** General Weekday (M-Th) 25 €, General Weekend (F-Sun) 30 €

**Time:** about fifteen minutes

**Requirements:** not for the risk-adverse

Taking a standard-issue rental car from Avis or Hertz onto a racetrack these days is dangerous. Thanks to GPS tracking and savvy rental agencies, doing so can instantly violate your terms and conditions, potentially subjecting you to penalties. That said, if you were to tool around the Ring once at highway speeds or slower, obeying all German road rules and sticking to the right side of the track, the consensus is that you wouldn't be any worse off than a [schoolbus](#), [station wagon](#) or [delivery van](#). The biggest risk associated with taking a rental car around the Ring, however, will be you: Do you have the willpower, as a driving enthusiast, to run a lap of the Nürburgring and not push the limits just a little bit?

But fear not, there is a better option. A cottage industry of track car rental operators have sprung up around the Ring offering everything from a VW Polo to a Porsche 911 GT3. If you're going on track with the intention of hitting elevated speeds, renting a car prepared to see track duty is for the best. Remember, the Ring is 12.9 miles long, meaning each lap is just shy of six laps around Laguna Seca. Tires and brakes wear accordingly.

## 05 Performance lapping

**Cost:** €27 per lap, plus €100s to €1,000s for rental

**Time:** 10-12 minutes, or as many days as you can manage!

**Requirements:** common sense

There are two ways to experience a track day at the Ring like you would in North America. There are pros and cons, which will be explained below, but you're fundamentally choosing between cost and quality.

## 06 Public Touristenfahrten days

**Cost:** General Weekday (M-Th) 25 €, General Weekend (F-Sun) 30 €

**Requirements:** almost none

The Nürburgring runs its own anything-can-drive-the-Ring days for €27 per lap loaded onto an RFID card at a little building in the parking lot. On weekdays, when the circuit is booked privately, the Ring is usually open to the public from 5:00PM to 7:30PM, so most days have some public availability.

My experience there was on a late-announced, final *touristenfahrten* of the year in November, so traffic was light. But on a busy Sunday during tourist season, it's not uncommon to have to wait in a half-mile line for 45 minutes to get on the track to run one lap.

Multiple sources report that drivers with common sense and purpose-built cars have returned, resulting in less mayhem compared 2010-'15. Shoulder season and rainy days both create low-traffic conditions, but the main challenge is the inconsistency when on a fixed timeline. Based on that, a private day might prove superior for most enthusiasts traveling from North America.

*Touristenfahrten* days have strange dichotomies. There are some strict rules, such as only passing on the left and large fines for hitting guardrails or shutting down the track (legend says that the Nordschleife guardrail contractor buys new GT3 Cup cars each season because business is good), but there are absolutely no limits as to which vehicles can go onto the closed circuit, nor how fast or slow they must go. It is the racetrack version of caveat emptor. Expect to see a wide variety of driving and vehicles, including motorcycles, and don't be surprised if the track is closed frequently or for long periods of time in order to clean up crashes.





## 07 Privately organized track days

**Cost:** €600 to €3000 per day, depending on car count and format

**Requirements:** generally few

Just like in North America, event organizers rent the Nordschleife and run private track days ([here's an article I wrote](#) detailing the rental fees of tracks from around the world, including the Ring.) The requirements and accoutrements run the gamut from budget days with tons of cars to exclusive days. Unlike in North America, however, most track days in Europe are run with an "open pit lane" format, meaning there are no run groups; the drivers decide when to go out and when to come in.

A major advantage of the private day format is that you do not have to stop each lap and swipe your card, allowing you to string together multiple laps, thus enjoying the full-speed fifth- or sixth-gear run down to Hohenrain. However, be mindful of both yourself and your car if you are going to run multiple laps. Two or three laps is the equivalent of a 20 to 30 minute track day session, but with 154 corners it is extraordinarily mentally demanding. RSRNürburg is a frequent track renter whose days are slightly more expensive but focus on high quality with cool cars and experienced drivers. No \$500 race cars dropping oil everywhere. Their events feature useful extras for out-of-towners like track walks as well as coaching and advice from expert racers. The higher price point filters out the drivers looking for the absolute cheapest track time, which has a strange correlation to fewer crashes and track stoppages. If you lived in Germany and went to the Ring 10 times a year, you might want to save a euro or two, but if you're flying all the way from North America, spend the money for a high quality experience you'll enjoy.

**TIP →** *I strung together back-to-back track days on the Nordschleife and Spa-Francorchamps by renting a BMW M235i from RSRNürburg's sister location RSRSpa - they regularly run track days back-to-back allowing you to rent from one company and get the same experience at both facilities. The two circuits are just 90 minutes apart, allowing you to tick two items off your bucket list in a single week or weekend.*



## Touristenfahrten days

## Privately organized track days

No limit on the number of people on track (up to 10,000 visitors with 3,000 turning a lap on busy Sundays and Holidays)

Limited to people who have pre-registered (usually around 120, with 60 on track at once)

General Weekday (M-Th) 25 €, General Weekend (F-Sun) 30 €

You pay one entry fee and do as many laps as you want

People just turn up and drive, not everyone knows the rules

Drivers have strict safety briefings and everyone must wear safety helmets

Anyone can drive (16-year olds, Uncle Bob, inexperienced drivers)

Like-minded drivers at a higher price point

Any road legal car can go on (e.g., vans, buses, station wagons)

People drive more track-focused cars

Motorbikes allowed on track at the same time

Cars only

Stoppages happen often and can take hours to clean up

Stoppages still happen, but rarely. Clean up happens quickly and efficiently

You can only do one lap before stopping to swipe your RFID card

You can keep lapping

You can't run the whole Döttinger Höhe Straight.

Full use of the 2.8km long straight

Good for a more casual experience or just trying a few laps

Good for getting to know the circuit in detail or maximizing your time in Nürburg

Track charges tow costs per kilometer in the event of crashes or breakdowns

Tow is usually included in the entry price

Passing officially only on the left side (in reality, it's a bit of a free-for-all)

Passing rules clearly defined and much more respectful











## 08 RCN (time trial)

**Cost:** approximately €3,000/seat for arrive-and-drive rental

**Time:** two days

**Requirements:** International C racing license obtained with SCCA or equivalent club racing experience, plus enough laps to know your way around the Ring

First is the Rundstrecken-Challenge Nürburgring, which roughly translates to the Circuit Challenge Nürburgring – RCN for short. The RCN has been around since the 1960s and is known as Germany’s oldest touring car championship. As it is more of a rally-style time trial than a mass-start race, the RCN is probably the best way for a Ring rookie to learn the ins and outs of racing at the Nordschleife. It is essentially a time trial, but instead of only counting your best lap, all of your laps contribute in some way to your overall score. Generous time allowances are given for out laps, cool-down laps and pit laps, but aside from that, it’s hammer down.

RCNs are structured so that cars are sent off at five-second intervals. The objective is to run laps within two seconds of a reference lap, with penalty points for lap times outside of that margin. The first great thing about the RCN is that it’s a time trial event, freeing drivers from the pressure of fighting for position, thus substantially reducing the danger of contact. But even then, with nearly 20.8km of track to cover, the front of the field is almost within sight of the starting area when the last of the nearly 150 entrants leave the paddock. This density of cars means that you are essentially always near other drivers.

The second benefit is that, much like in rally racing, you’re allowed a co-driver. This co-driver can be a fellow driver or a pro driver/instructor who can show you the quick way around the circuit for the first several laps. At the first pit stop, the pro switches positions with you and talks you through your first laps at a race pace.

**RCN Licensing:** American and Canadian citizens racing in Germany require an International FIA race license. See Appendix A for more details.

**RCN Tech:** Tech may present a challenge for American racers in Germany. To compete in the RCN, all driver gear must be FIA certified; in the U.S., sanctioning bodies often allow FIA or SFI certification. Although much of the premium race equipment on the market today is both SFI and FIA certified, not all is so double-check before getting on a plane.

A special thanks to JG Pasterjak for much of this information.

## 09 NLS (wheel-to-wheel racing)

**Cost:** approximately €4,000/seat for arrive-and-drive rental, generally split between two or three drivers for three to six hour races

**Time:** two days

**Requirements:** DPN Permit B based on experience (see appendix A)

The far more intense option for track time at the Ring is the famed Nürburgring Langstrecken-Serie / Nürburgring Endurance Series (NLS). Formerly known as Veranstaltergemeinschaft Langstreckenpokal Nürburgring/ the Association of Nürburgring Endurance Cup Organizers (VLN), NLS’ are open to everyone from local amateurs driving street-legal Renault Clios with roll cages to Audi, Porsche, BMW and Mercedes factory teams with Le Mans-winning pro drivers and the latest FIA GT3 cars.

The thing that makes NLSs – or any wheel-to-wheel racing at the Nürburgring – so intense is that the track is very fast and very narrow, with 154 corners packed into a single lap. Passing is an exercise in bravery. In fact, overtaking is so difficult that it’s possible for one of the slowest cars in the field to hold up the overall race leader for well over a kilometer simply by staying on the racing line.

A typical NLS race is four hours long and is usually split among two or three drivers. In addition, there is usually one six-hour endurance race, which is considered the highlight of the NLS season. Each event is held on a single day to help keep costs down; practice and qualifying are combined in a single morning session, followed by the race’s green flag at noon. Since Germans take racing seriously, the atmosphere at a NLS race could best be described as rowdy, with much pre-race beer and bratwurst consumed by the tens of thousands of spectators in attendance.



### NLS Sprechen sie Deutsch?

“Without question, even for a guy with 20 years of racing under his belt, this is a big track and a big adjustment. Many of the processes [for getting on track] can be handled in English, but it helps to know some German – and the lower levels, like RCN, are handled in German only. And when the language is English, the processes are very German. It definitely helped me to have people to lean on – and to have fun and success, I strongly suggest a seasoned American Ring racer as a companion.”

– James Clay, BimmerWorld

### NLS Corner Workers

“I attribute part of [my] comfort to the exceptional corner workers at the track. There are over 130 corner stations, each with at least two workers, and every single one of them is hyper-vigilant in communicating the situation on track to the drivers in an effective fashion. Rather than just standing there and waving flags, the marshals communicated through body language, eye contact and highly expressive use of the flags. A glance at each corner station gave me as much information as a look in my mirror, and sometimes more.”

– JG Pasterjak, *Grassroots Motorsports* magazine

A special thanks to Robb Holland and his article in *Grassroots Motorsports* magazine for much of this information.





## 10 24 Hours of the Nürburgring

**Cost:** €8,000-14,000/seat for arrive-and-drive rental split between four to six drivers, e.g. BMW up to the M240 spec. More expensive spec cars such as the BMW M4 GT4 are in the €26,000-30,000 range. For GT3 cars, if you have to ask, then...

**Time:** three days

**Requirements:** Nordschleife-specific A permit obtained from three completed NLS races with at least 18 laps driven

When I first started racing, a friend asked me to share his BMW M3 in a three-hour night endurance race at Buttonwillow Raceway Park. I hadn't driven his car, I hadn't raced in the dark and my longest race time was just 30 minutes. This was the equivalent of using the high dive board to jump into the deep end – at night. It was an intoxicating experience. Winning the race overall in mixed conditions was a big part of it, but the challenge of driving at night, of mixing aggression with conservation, of working as a team, were all things that ignited a passion. Since then, I've run the 25 Hours of Thunderhill five times with two class wins, plus competed in 8-12 hour contests at Circuit of the Americas and New Jersey Motorsports Park. To take one lap of the Nürburgring – without question the most difficult circuit in the world – and repeat it for 24 hours straight as part of a team is the ultimate challenge. And while that part is a challenge, finding a car to drive is not.



### Don't take the 24 Hour lightly

“In Germany, the 24-hour race at the Ring is akin to the Super Bowl. While it's possible for amateur drivers to race in the 24, it's only recommended for drivers who have substantial experience racing at the Ring. And before you think, 'Oh, I've raced in Grand-Am, ALMS, the Rolex 24 and the 12 Hours of Sebring, I can talk my way in,' let me share this anecdote. A factory driver for a U.S. manufacturer was loaned to a German team, running the manufacturer's car at the 24. When the driver attempted to register for the race, the organizers turned him down. The manufacturer stepped in and tried to convince the organizers to change their stance, arguing that this driver was not only a paid factory driver, but had also won the 24 Hours of Le Mans the year prior. The organizers replied, 'Yes, but he has not yet raced the Nordschleife.'”

– Robb Holland, professional racer and managing partner of Rotek Racing, offering RCN and NLS solutions



# How to prepare to tackle the Ring



# How to prepare to tackle the Ring

To put the Nürburgring into perspective: Thunderhill Raceway Park, one of the longest race tracks in North America, is 5 miles in length and features 25 turns; people have a hard time adjusting to Thunderhill's size and its 3+ minute lap times, yet this facility pales in comparison to the Ring's enormity. Thus, comprehensively preparing yourself to drive the Nürburgring is vital. Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities online, allowing the learning to begin at home. When I learn a new track, I always start with in-car video from a competent driver. RSRNürburg's YouTube channel features excellent videos of seasoned drivers at the Ring captured with multiple camera angles and audio explaining how to navigate the track. The commentary covers turns, surface characteristics like bumps and camber, sight lines and reference points. The videos are very well produced which makes it easy to focus on learning.

The next step is a simulator to build muscle memory. PC titles iRacing and Assetto Corsa both feature laser-scanned versions of the Nordschleife and Spa with realistic physics models. Assetto Corsa even comes with tips from professionals. The Nürburgring wasn't yet available when I visited, but I used iRacing to learn Spa and was immediately comfortable running a BMW M235i around the track, even in the rain. Both tracks have laser-scanned replicas available in iRacing and Assetto Corsa.

## TIP →

*Wish you had a simulator but don't want to dedicate an entire room to it? Try my approach: get a collapsible wheel and pedal stand, some quality pedals and an Oculus Rift VR headset. The whole thing hides in a corner but unfolds for an incredibly realistic 360° virtual reality learning environment. Since I've returned, I've continued to run laps to keep practicing until my next visit.*

*You'll be most comfortable on the track and enjoy the experience more when you can visualize every corner. This level of intimacy with a track means you can focus on the subtleties while feeling the inputs, recognizing mistakes and managing traffic. When learning a track as complicated as the Ring, the importance of a simulator to reach this level of comfort should not be overlooked.*

*Once you're at the Ring, there are other options. RSRNürburg, for example, offers individual and group coaching and training. With this, coaches will either drive you around the Ring or ride with you on a per-lap or per-session basis.*



## Consider Spa instead

At the Ring, one tiny mistake can introduce you to the guardrail. At Spa, it will just make you slower. If you are an advanced track day driver or racer and you really want to push the limits during your German adventure, you're best to do it in a car that is similar to your own – and do it at Spa. Remember what was said about it taking 100 laps around the Ring to learn the circuit? Well, even in a supercar turning eight minute laps, this would take nearly 13 hours. The point is, it's not you. Even with a ton of prep and on-track experience, Spa is a better choice. Spa features more runoff, better sightlines and is easier to learn. But if you're looking for a recipe for disaster, jump from your Spec Miata into a GT3 Cup rental car at the Ring and pull up a laptimer on your phone.

## Do simulators work?

There's no better substitute for experience than learning about someone else's experience – for that, I talked to a handful of drivers and racers who tackled the Ring. When it came to preparation, there was an overwhelming theme: simulators work. "I used Gran Turismo before my first trip," says club racer Rylan Hazelton. "Do a lot of laps – it really helps to know what corner is coming."

Dale Sievwright also suggested spending time on a simulator. "Sim time helped give me the general idea of where I was going and helped prepare me mentally," he says, noting that while simulators help you learn the track, it missed some real world dynamics. "It was more physically demanding than I thought," he says, adding, "No sim or track map can prepare you for the elevation changes."

JG Pasterjak's experience also indicates the importance of simulators. "All the hours I spent in the Gran Turismo and Forza re-creations of the track were not wasted hours," Pasterjak recounts. "Modern games and sims are extremely faithful reproductions of the track, down to a lot of the off-track visual cues that you will use for reference during a lap."

iRacing and Assetto Corsa both have laser-scanned re-creations of the Nordschleife that will develop your muscle memory. But let's not forget that even though you can go flat through a corner in the sim, perhaps real life is different.





## How many laps to be safe?

With the right mindset and respect, no one should get into trouble at the Ring. However, here's a rundown on accidents in relation to track experience from Ron Simons at RSRNürburg.



## 0-25 laps

Without simulator preparation, this is a risky experience level since you shouldn't push the limits – it's even more difficult for capable drivers lacking track-specific knowledge. Accidents typically happen in the slow corners and very late entry corners such as Hatzenbach/Hocheichen, Adenauer Forst, Wehrseifen and Eiscurve. With simulator preparation, be patient and wait until you start recognizing corners and straights. Without respect, accidents happen on the high-speed straights.

## 50-100 laps

The biggest mistake is thinking you know the track. Due to the concentration levels needed for such extended periods of time, you tend to relax on the straights – but nothing is straight or flat at the Ring, and this leads to problems.

## 100-1,000 laps

This is by far the safest period for most drivers. You know where you are going and you can enjoy the track at increased speeds without losing respect. Your car control and track knowledge are in line and you can start attacking corners.

## 1,000-10,000 laps

You can now drive the Ring almost effortlessly. Speed comes naturally and you can almost drive on autopilot while cruising at eight tenths. At real speed, however, the parts that seemed easy will become challenging. It's the increased speed and confidence but lack of knowledge on these sections that can lead to high-speed crashes.

## 10,000 laps +

It's not risk free – it's never risk free. It's not a matter of if you crash but when you crash. The marshals always say, *"Irgendwann trifft es jedem,"* or, "You just have to wait for your turn and it will surely come."







# Travel planning

## When is the best time to drive the Nürburgring?

The locals break the year down into three seasons. Prime driving is generally from May to September. These months offer the most track dates along with dry and sunny days. The shoulder season is from early March through April and mid-October until late November. There are fewer visitors and more locals with better driving standards, but the weather is more variable and can include rain, fog and even sleet or hail. The result is a much quieter Ring experience. The off-season is December through February. The track is still open but business hours can be unpredictable and change at the last minute – the track will even open Christmas day, weather permitting.

As the weather warms, more people visit the Ring. During tourist season, it's not unusual to have a line of traffic on the Ring itself. Another consideration is that the Eifel region is green for a reason – it rains a lot. The track does not close for rain, so *Touristenfahrten* sessions and car rentals happen as usual, but rainy days will see fewer cars and almost no motorcycles on track. The Ring only closes for snow, fog or to investigate an accident. These should all be factors when scheduling your trip.

**TIP :** February can be surprisingly good with cold but dry weather. Or it could be like [this](#).







## Traveling to and from the Nürburgring

Passport requirements for Americans and Canadians traveling to Germany are the same for entering any European Union country – your passport must be valid for at least three months beyond your period of stay. Flying in for your trip to the Nürburgring is best done through the two closest international airports in Frankfurt or Cologne. The [drive from Frankfurt](#) will take only marginally longer than the hour long [drive from Cologne](#), making either a reasonable option. You can also consider building in extra time before your Nürburgring adventure and take a train into Cologne for sightseeing, then return to the airport to pick up your rental car and start your drive to the Ring.

Air travel and vehicle rental can be logistically difficult, but traveling halfway around the world will cause other problems – namely, adverse effects with the time zone shift. I recommend arriving a couple of days early in order to recover from jet lag. That aside, there are tricks I've discovered while flying around the world twice, visiting 35 countries along the way.

Bring earplugs, an eye mask and a full bottle of water on the plane – you need silence and darkness to sleep, and you don't want to become dehydrated. On any international flight – but especially red-eyes – you need sleep in order to minimize recovery time so book a window seat to avoid people disturbing you as they get up for the bathroom. Eat a good-sized meal about 90 minutes before boarding that will hold you over for most of the flight. As soon as the doors close, I take an Ambien or herbal sleeping remedy to help me fall asleep and stay asleep. Most doctors will prescribe a small number of Ambien to assist with travel-related sleeping needs. If you've never taken it before, be sure to try it before you get on the flight so you know how you react.

Consider wearing eye and face masks. It keeps things dark and prevents you from drying out since you'll be breathing your own moist air. If you wake, drink water but skip alcohol or other liquids that will dry you out.

On arrival, spend time outdoors to aid in your body's adjustment to the new time zone – many people find that a half-hour walk barefoot on grass helps their body's circadian rhythm adjust. Regardless of when you arrive, these tips will make time zone hopping easier on your body.

For travel geeks, try the 'TimeShifter' app on your smartphone, or [jet lag calculators](#) are available, offering an idea about how much to offset your sleep prior to your trip. Going this route may upset significant others, but who cares, you're going to the Ring!

**TIP →** *Be aware that these are two different German towns on opposite sides of the country. Your Nürburg destination has a 53520 postal code.*

## Best places to stay near Nürburgring

You might be familiar with the relative lack of quality hotels near racetracks in North America – after all, not a lot of racetracks are next to really nice towns since noise and neighborhoods don't mix. But population density in Europe means racing circuits are commonly part of communities so many options exist.

For the most current listing of hotels and restaurants in the immediate and surrounding areas, check the [RSRNürburg](#) website. I like doing my own research, but you can also reach out to RSR for referrals.



## Using Airbnb

Don't be afraid of trying unique accommodations. My trip to the Nürburgring involved a hotel in Stavelot near Spa, but in Cologne and Nürburg I used Airbnb for both private lodging and shared lodging with locals and other enthusiasts. Airbnb can sometimes be unpredictable, but it's also fantastic when your host at the Ring drives an Austin Yellow BMW M4 and cooks you breakfast.

There are many other Ring enthusiasts who offer local lodging beyond a hotel. If you're on a budget, apartments with kitchen facilities and a nearby grocery store (always one of my favorite travel experiences anywhere) can help you save a few bucks.





# Resources

## Links to learn more

[Nürburgring website](#)  
[RSRNürburg Track Days](#)  
[Touristenfahren](#)  
[Nürburgring instructional videos](#)  
[Touring and track car rentals](#)  
[Grassroots Motorsports](#)  
[ACCUS](#)  
[SCCA](#)  
[iRacing](#)  
[Assetto Corsa](#)  
[Google Flights to Cologne/Frankfurt](#)

## Additional information

“Race The Ring” by J.G. Pasterak - 2016  
 “Nürburgring Guide” by J.G. Pasterak - 2015  
 Nürburgring calendars

# Credits

I wanted to create the ultimate guide to the Nürburgring but, as a Ring Novice working his way up the ladder, this book depends heavily on the contribution more experienced drivers and racers. This blueprint for how to visit and maximize your experience was made possible with help from:

Ron Simons at [RSRNurburg](#) for on the ground support, car rental and sage advice learned from tens of thousands of laps around the Nordschleife

Tim Suddard, JG Pasterak and the entire [Grassroots Motorsports](#) team for their content

Robb Holland from [Rotek Racing](#) for his content on racing the Ring

Ross Bentley and Robin Bentley at [Speed Secrets](#) for feedback and suggestions

James Clay at [BimmerWorld](#) for sharing his experience as a first time 24hr racer

Rylan Hazelton and Dale Sievwright for sharing their experience running RCN and NLS

Philip Royle for converting my collection of notes and thoughts into a readable guide





# Appendix: A

## Obtaining an international FIA license

In the United States, club racers are accustomed to obtaining a racing license from the sanctioning bodies they'll race with, such as SCCA or NASA; professional racers obtain their licenses from IMSA, SCCA Pro Racing, IndyCar and the like. Internationally, things are different.

The FIA determines a driver's ability to race in countries that are more tightly aligned with the FIA, with each of those member countries having their own Autorité Sportive Nationale (ASN), otherwise known as the National Sporting Association. In North America, the path to an FIA racing license is through the Automobile Competition Committee of the United States (ACCUS) and ASN Canada. These two groups will facilitate obtaining an International racing license required by the Nürburgring for competitive events.



# Appendix: A





In addition, there's the DMSB Permit Nordschleife (DPN) you'll need in order to race at the Nürburgring, but more on that in a moment. For now, let's figure out which license you need:

## German licensing requirements

Race	Minimum License	Minimum DPN	Notes
RCN (Time Trial)	German National A or International C	None, but changes may be coming at writing. Check <a href="#">here</a> for the latest information.	A National A License is directly obtained from ASN Canada, is comparable to an SCCA competition license in the United States, and can be converted into an International C license.
NLS	International C	Permit B	Technically, an International D license qualifies, but ACCUS states it hasn't issued an International D License in years; everyone applies straight for an International C License.
N24	International C	Permit A	New rules require every N24 competitor to have a <a href="#">full Grade A DPN</a>



FIA International Licensing can be found [here](#). Article 2 defines International Licensing Classes and what they are required for:

## FIA international licensing

What is this	And this
Grade D	Cars > 6.6lbs/hp (3kg/hp)
Grade C	6.6lbs/hp (3kg/hp) ≥ Cars > 4.4lbs/hp (2kg/hp), plus some specific inclusions such as Formula 5000, Group C, Can-Am, etc.
Grade B	4.4lbs/hp (2kg/hp) ≥ Cars > 2.2lbs/hp (1kg/hp)
Grade A	Cars ≥ 2.2lbs/hp (1kg/hp)
Super License	Formula One World Championship

A Spec Miata has a power-to-weight ratio of about 19lbs/hp (8.6kg/hp) while a Corvette is just over 7lbs/hp (3.2kg/hp). Just about every non-professional sports car racer could get away with a Grade D License to run NLS and then upgrade through experience, but in practice, most racers directly obtain a Grade C (more on that in a moment).





Once you have an International License, you now need to qualify for, or earn, a Nürburgring-specific license – these are issued in three grades. All levels require the racer to be at least 18 years of age regardless of International License status:

## DMSB Permit Nordschleife (DPN)

Permit grade	Criteria	Requirements
Permit C	Valid for all RCN races	Complete the E-learning and DPN-Lehrgang training course and track walk, aka "Ground School" (~€1,350) <b>Or</b> Have previous RCN competition experience in the past 2 years
Permit B	International C	International C License holders can bypass the RCN requirement and obtain a Permit B via completing the E-learning and DPN-Lehrgang training course <b>Or</b> German National A or International D License holders must complete three RCN races within two years and finish in the top 50%, plus complete E-learning and a track walk to get Permit B
Permit A (Required for all 24H drivers, even in cars > 9.9lbs/	Cars ≤ 9.9lbs/hp (4.5kg/hp)	Finish three NLS races, drive a minimum of 18 racing laps, finish in top 75% of class with ≥ three starters <b>Or</b> Finish one NLS race plus a 24H qualifying race, drive a minimum of 18 racing laps, finish in top 75% of class with ≥ three starters

Note: The Grade A License can only be obtained through NLS experience. This is intentionally designed to filter out people with insufficient experience from causing mayhem in the 24 Hour race.

## DPN-Lehrgang Ground School

For the impatient, you can bypass the RCN requirement by attending the DPN-Lehrgang Ground School. This is basically a class for experienced racers that, combined with an International C License, allows you to immediately enter a NLS race.

**James Clay from BimmerWorld describes his first VLN race after attending ground school as terrifying.**

"Terrifying during my first laps – and then just when I had my feet under me, it was terrifying when the GT3 cars cranked it up for qualifying," he says. "I left my first NLS weekend like a whipped puppy – but the second race weekend was worlds better."

## Obtaining an FIA International License

First, to obtain an International License from any ASN, you must either be a citizen of that country or obtain a permission letter from the ASN where you are a citizen. As such, events listed on the FIA International calendar require competitors to get permission from their home country to enter a foreign race.

Here's an example scenario: A German racing in World Challenge in the United States can apply to the SCCA (an ACCUS member) for an International C License. His or her racing experience is in the United States but, as a German citizen, that driver must first obtain a permission letter from the German ASN Deutscher Motor Sport Bund e.V. (or DMSB).

## International D License

There are no special requirements to obtaining a Grade D License – you basically need to be an active club racer in Canada or the United States. Here is what the FIA states:

"The Grade D Licence is issued by the applicant's ASN. In order to qualify, applicants must first serve a period of probation.

They must be observed to compete satisfactorily, with a provisional licence, in at least five ASN-sanctioned circuit races for cars within the two years prior to application, or hold a CIK International B Licence.

During this probation period, the applicant's ASN or the FIA has the right to withdraw the licence without notice. The Grade D1 Licence is issued by the applicant's ASN and does not require a qualifying period of probation. The Grade D1 Licence is valid for only one competition, the name and date of which must be indicated by the issuing ASN on the licence."

CIK is the FIA administration over karting, so unless you're a kart racer, ignore this option and pursue an International C. It also wouldn't make sense to try to jump straight from a kart to the Nürburgring as your first time in a touring car.





## International C License

### Canada

Because Canada has a more traditional ASN model, its qualifications for a National License are relatively straightforward:

“To qualify for a National Licence, the applicant must have held an ASN Territory Licence, have a Racing School Certificate issued by a professional or driver school recognized by ASN Canada FIA and have successfully completed at least six Territory or racing school races within the previous 24 months preceding date of application. (One day of observed driving at a racing school, with the chief instructor’s endorsement, may be substituted for one race only.)

Or, If the applicant holds an ASN Canada FIA National B or higher Kart Licence, has a Racing School Certificate issued by a professional or race driving school recognized by ASN Canada FIA and competed in six events within the previous 12 months, their application will be considered. To maintain qualification for a National Licence, the driver must compete in at least one event requiring a National Licence within the previous 24-month period.”

An ASN Territory License would be, for example, a CACC (British Columbia) or CASC (Ontario) license. Once you’ve earned a National License, these are the additional requirements to obtain an International C License:

“In order to qualify, applicants must have held a National Licence or the CIK International B Licence and have competed in at least five ASN-sanctioned circuit races for cars within the two years prior to application. Exceptionally, these races may be part of an international series, designated specifically by the FIA for this purpose and in which the candidate may participate with a National Licence for one season only. In this case, the applicant must be at least 16 years old (the date of the birthday being binding).”

To summarize, a driver must (1) hold a racing license from their province, have a Racing School Certificate from a recognized entity and have completed six races in the previous two years to earn a National License, and (2) once the driver has a National License, he or she can apply for an International C License as long as the driver has competed in five ASN-sanctioned circuit races in the previous two years.

For the most part, the International C License is issued based on experience. Importantly, the race history is only counted if the race was sanctioned by the ASN via an ASN-member organization – there are no performance requirements.

As of 2017, ASN Canada charges \$365 CAD for an International C License and \$125 CAD for International Authorization to race outside of Canada. You can contact ASN Canada at [asncanada.ca](mailto:asncanada.ca), (514) 350 8203 or [licensing@asncanada.ca](mailto:licensing@asncanada.ca)



## International C License

### United States

In the wild west of the United States, obtaining an International C License is more confusing because the ASN, ACCUS, does not directly issue competition licenses. Rather, to obtain an International License, you must go through one of the ACCUS member clubs: IMSA, IndyCar, NASCAR, NHRA, SCCA or USAC. Note that the FIA does not recognize NASA or racing experience from other sanctioning bodies.

In reality, though, the United States is more of a “trust, but verify” arrangement, where references and relevant experience can demonstrate equivalent competition history. When asked how American club racers qualify for an International C License, the response from ACCUS could be summed up in five points:

### 01

Any ACCUS member club can apply for an International License on behalf of a racer. This is effectively vouching for them, so they will want to know your background.

### 02

Compile a racing resume of the past 24 months, including results. The general experience requirement is five ASN-sanctioned races in the past 24 months.

### 03

Each member club can choose whether to accept applications from competitors who do not race with them. For example, IndyCar is unlikely to help a club racer, but SCCA or SCCA Pro Racing might be willing to do the processing for any club racer, including those who race with other groups.

### 04

Each member club has discretion as to which experience they accept, and letters of recommendation and observations by race officials can supplement races, as can experience from other sanctioning bodies or series. In other words, don’t submit the minimum amount of necessary information; make it easy for the member club to see you deserve the license.

### 05

Endurance racing experience does not necessarily count more than a sprint race. When asked whether competing in NASA’s 25 Hours of Thunderhill might count as more experience, the response was generally, “A race is a race is a race.”

At writing, SCCA Pro Racing charges \$325 USD for an FIA license and \$125 USD for an International Authorization to race outside of the United States. If you’re already an IMSA license holder, James Clay notes that an International C License is “an easy add-on at the time of renewal.” You may have noticed these instructions skipped the International D License. ACCUS could not recall ever processing an International D License for an American, so it’s advisable to instead just apply for an International C License. Also note that in addition to an International FIA license, drivers also need a minimum amount of NLS experience on the Ring to compete in a Ring race.







# Appendix: B

