



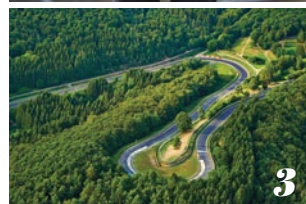
# THE BUCKET LIST

*Cityscape hits the road with our resident Stig on a high-end European automotive jaunt worthy of its own chapter in the Boy's Own Annual.*

**R**on Simons casually pulling out from under the barrier is the last time the big Nissan GTR seems to be entirely comfortable with what the pro racing legend and Porsche and Ferrari test driver is subjecting it to. I'm riding shotgun and Simons is tearing the world's most formidable racing circuit, the Nürburgring Nordschleife (AKA Green Hell), a new one. As bucket list tick-offs go, it's a biggie.

Squealing tyres, expertly gathered up slides and brutal early accelerations out of every corner give us a masterclass in car control, as well as a tour-de-force highlights reel of Nissan's wonder car. What a track! Anything other than complete

commitment sees you shedding valuable lap time, and after experiencing it in all its brutal glory alongside Simons, I can see why manufacturers regard a Nürburgring lap time as such a badge of honour. The former GP track was famously excluded from the F1 championship in 1977 for being too dangerous (it has a body count of over 200), and its 20.8 kilometres through the Eifel forest is both beautiful and deadly, with little in the way of run off even now; this makes the late Stefan Bellof's fastest ever lap of 6 minutes and 11 seconds, set in 1983, an abject lesson in bravery. Still used for endurance and GT3 racing today, the 'Ring is open at selected times to the general public, and when we



*“...brutal early accelerations out of every corner give us a masterclass in car control...”*

fronted up the VLN (German endurance championship) race was in progress. And while I had seen plenty of YouTube laps, actually viewing the elevation changes and the narrowness of the section of the track from our viewing position made Bathurst seem flat and expansive.

In an ideal world, I would have been behind the wheel; given the complexity of the track and our lack of time though, the prospect of explaining to Europcar how our diesel Golf came to a sticky end was very unappealing. Instead we take the Golf back to Hotel am Tiergarten. Crammed with racing memorabilia, it's owned by the parents of race car driver and sometimes *Top Gear* presenter Sabine Schmitz, and has been the perfect base from which to plan our Nürburgring experience.

As a self-confessed enthusiast of all things automotive, my bucket list incorporates a fair number of car and motorsport experiences and, along with a mate (to make things properly epic, these things are always best embarked on with a mate!), I managed to tick several more off on this trip. We had hit the road in Florence, picking up our supposed-to-be-Fiat 500 (are they ever what you ordered?), and headed north to Bologna and on to Modena. About now you're probably thinking Ferrari, but we were headed to a masterful workshop of carbon fibre and beautiful automotive works of art, Horacio Pagani's factory complex. Pagani hand-builds hugely expensive supercars. Bespoke and made from the latest materials and technologies, their cars are both a glimpse into how the Italian artisans of yesteryear might have worked, and how a US\$1.5m price tag is justified (kind of).

From there it was onto Ferrari; however, German politician Angela Merkel's visit on the day we had intended to check in threw a proverbial spanner. But it all worked out alright when we deviated to Sant Agata's Lamborghini Museum and clapped eyes on what is one of the most beautiful cars ever made – the Lamborghini Miura. Conveniently, the Italian sports car makers are all clustered together, making a trip easily achievable in one or two days either on tour, or independently. The Italian highlight? Pagani.



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Our Italian journey, however, was just a teaser for the real event – Germany! While our wives headed south to the Amalfi Coast, we flew to Munich. The German car museums are famous the world over for charting our love affair with their automobiles, with each manufacturer putting their unique mark on their presentation. BMW, in Munich, is very much about the brand and their evolution, including a very open (if not often favourable) section dedicated to the war years and their contribution.

In Stuttgart Porsche are all about innovation, engineering and their motorsport success. And with a staggering number of fabulous and significant motorsport cars on display, we were left wide-eyed and open-mouthed. From 917ks to 911 RSRs through to epic Rothmans-liveried Le Mans 956s, they were all there and looked immaculate.

The German high point though, without a doubt, is the Mercedes Benz Museum (also in Stuttgart), a futuristic space where, over nine levels, you can track the continuous

timeline of more than 130 years of automotive history, starting in 1886 and through to the present day and into the future – a must see! What's more, the buildings the museums occupy are architectural masterpieces in their own right, with each subsequent museum building trying to upstage the last.

From here, it was on to Green Hell, where our experience on the 'Ring served to perfectly finish off a trip that by any measure had been a car enthusiast's dream.

- 1 – Ron Simons' Nissan GTR on the Nürburgring Nordschleife  
Image: RSRNurburg
- 2 – Ron trackside  
Image: RSRNurburg
- 3 – The Green Hell  
Image: Robert Kah
- 4 & 5 – Nine levels of history at the Mercedes Museum  
Image: © Daimler AG
- 6 – Pagani Museum showpiece  
Image: Lamborghini
- 7 – Lamborghini Museum  
Image: Lamborghini
- 8 – Porsche Museum  
Image: Porsche