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## Create your own Nürburgring

If you have a bunch of nutball car-geek friends—and which of us does not?!—then eventually, usually after a certain amount of drinking to the point of nostalgia, somebody will bring up the Nürburgring. As topics go, it's a good one, because fistfights can break out over any number of related beliefs.

First of all, somebody is bound to exclaim, "You have to drive the Nürburgring before you die!" This usually means that the speaker himself—generally, women are above this sort of buffoonery—has managed to spend the mortgage payment on a trip to Germany in order to drive the legendary track in the Eifel Mountains. Or else he is madly in love with a wistful chimera, a magic Brigadoon that appears every so often on his PlayStation 4 console. (I am not making this up; I once found myself in the company of two hombres who had never driven the track, but who were sure that they would have no difficulty because they had "driven" it many times over on their video-game monitors.)

In either case, the intent is pretty much the adult equivalent of, "Nyah, nyah! I've been there and you haven't!" Okay, not so adult.

Now, I am entirely in favor of worshipping race tracks, if you need a nostalgic cult; and if you're one of those curmudgeons who bemoans the passing of the Good Old Days, then I recommend AVUS. That's another long German track which also happened to employ the first Autobahn, near Berlin; the track was not as long as the famous Nürburgring, with its 142 turns in something over 14 miles; in fact, AVUS was only about 12 miles around—but it was basically two six-mile straights connected with U-turns at the end. And to make it interesting—that is, to create the fastest track in the world—the enterprising Germans built the northern turnaround into a 43-degree banked curve.

It didn't take long before it was named the Wall of Death.

But AVUS is long gone, and the Nürburgring is still with us—and yes, you may indeed pay your money and drive the course—that is, the *Nordschleife*, the North Course; the *Südschleife* has been gone for years. And the Nürburgring is now down to something over 12 miles, while many of the exciting features—you know, the ones that killed people—like the humps that sent cars flying and the blind corners that led directly into other blind corners, have been tamed over the years.

Maybe my problem is merely concentration.

There are certainly drivers who have learned every inch of the Nürburgring, and my driving cap is off to them. If I lived there—and didn't

have to pay for every lap—I am sure that I could eventually learn the track well enough to get around it with some facility, or at least faster than some guy on a Vespa. (Don't laugh; I've seen it. I was too startled to remember that I was holding a camera.) But that would take some time.

I have certainly learned a track or two in my day, and I suppose that I might have a favorite. Of course, that would be a track with which I was very familiar. And to get boringly familiar with a race track, you have to spend a lot of time there—you know, *racing*, or spending money on a driving school or something.

So the frugal side of my nature prefers what the Nürburgring has been all along: a public road.

Now, I would be the last to suggest the dangerous, illegal sport of street racing. I'm talking about the quiet joy that draws drivers to the Nürburgring: the satisfaction of driving well, of knowing that you have just covered some tricky territory with efficiency and dispatch. The drivers at the Nürburgring who pay their money on the public days are not racing, yet they come in droves; they must be getting something personally satisfying out of these pilgrimages.

Years ago, there were midnight racers—some achieving legendary status—on Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles. I know an Angeleno or two who still counts that hill as a personal treasure. And I suspect that you might know one, too.

I don't think I am giving away any secrets if I mention California Highway 33 out of Ojai, and I confess that I would rather commit its geography to tire-scorching memory than learn the Nürburgring. Closer to home, there are some wonderful roads that would put my pulse above a hundred; I recommend the Palms to Pines Highway through the San Jacinto mountains, although it is difficult to find a time when it is not clogged with timid drivers who cannot seem to read the SLOW TRAFFIC MUST USE TURNOUTS signs.

And then there's—oh, you're right. This conversation could go on all night, with all of us detailing our favorite roads. I know you have one, too—or a dozen. And your choicest miles of asphalt have no doubt been learned and honed and admired as much as any fabled circuit in the world.

It's not that I don't think you should aspire to drive the Nürburgring, that legendary "Green Hell" in the Eifels. It's that I would much rather be the master of a handful of roads that you can't learn by Xbox. At some point, you know, you have to get out and *drive*. 🌐