

THE RSR NURBURG EXPERIENCE

NISSAN GTR: DRIVING THE FUTURE LEGEND

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The Nurburgring Nordschleife, hallowed ground for motorsports, the Everest for lap times, the place where manufacturers come to prove the 'Super' in their supercars. It's rarely conveyed, but the famed expanses of the track itself are nestled in the "Nurburg" village, within Rhineland-Palatinate, which is one Germany's 16 states. European manufacturers do of course make up a majority of the visitors list, but ever since the late '80s, engineers from the Land of the Rising Sun have been equally fascinated by this 20.8 km long tarmac.





A string of Japanese cars have been tested out here by either manufacturers themselves or by Japanese auto magazines, but of all the prototypes, factory special editions and tuner cars to rock this circuit, one name in particular remains synonymous with the 'Ring - the GTR.

Nissan created headlines all those years ago by setting an incredible 8-minute 20-second lap time in their Nissan Skyline R32 GTR; a feat that's impressive even by today's standards, and it was one that sparked the birth of a legend. The R32, R33, and the R34 GTR's were benchmarks both on the road and track in their respective eras, and a thorn in the side of Porsche ever since day one. They were viciously quick in all conditions and despite various restrictions, the R32 just kept on winning in various supercar championships the world over. Today, over 20 years on and even after a bit of a name change, Nissan continues its best with a GTR that has proven to be the ultimate Japanese supercar.

As a big time GTR fan myself, I had always followed the development of the R35 Nissan GTR since its development was announced in 2002. Like any self-respecting fan boy, I kept tabs of every news scoop,

snippet, article, and videos detailing the latest iteration of the one they call "Godzilla". I think I spent more time thinking about this car than I did about my ex-girlfriend at the time. I think I just realized why she became an ex in the first place.

It took quite a while, but I did eventually manage to drive a GTR; and I must've accumulated a good amount of karma points because the

day that I was handed the keys to one of RSRNurburg's R35 GTR's occurred in the best place I could have asked for - the Nurburg region itself.

When RSRNurburg decided to get a Nissan GTR for their fleet, they found the car so incredible that they simply could not stop with just one; they had to get two. Ever since the purchase, I had been aching to see what the fuss was all about, and how it would work out



here, on some of the most demanding pieces of tarmac on the planet.

Perhaps the most impressive quality of the GTR is its ability to work in every environment. Leaving the transmission in auto and driving it at normal pace felt

like I was driving a really big coupe. It acted civilized, while its power never once overwhelming. The only sign of intimidation was the bellowing V6 twin turbo power plant that burred in a muffled disgruntled manner with each prod of the throttle. Even that barely

hints that it is one of the fastest cars you can drive.

The country roads around the circuit are pretty amazing, with most built in a common era, therefore they share

some of the circuit's architecture and elevations. Gloriously tight and twisty with high paced stretches, it's a scenic and rewarding drive in any car, and it's become a favourite for test engineers to run some off-circuit miles in their prototype cars. The "Test Driver's Highway" is what I'd like to call them. These areas are also where Toyota's respected former chief test driver passed way in an unfortunate accident while testing the Nurburgring Package Lexus LFA. With that in mind, having a GTR to toy around with on these roads felt slightly daunting, but ultimately, a pretty sweet affair.

Truth to be told, there is no need to get fancy with the GTR's "R" switches on public roads. The car barely needs to call upon the full potential of its 540 hp to do what it does, and I really wasn't ready for the onslaught of performance once I really started getting brave. The



pace while manually shifting through the gears at full throttle offers the same sensations as I'd imagine in a fighter jet being catapulted off an aircraft carrier catapult. The sense of speed isn't as pronounced if you're on something like the autobahn, but it becomes really thrilling around the country road's of the 'Ring, which are

no wider than the stretches between Raub and Fraser's Hill.

The GTR really does sort itself out superbly through corners, and all you have to do is pitch it into a turn and get on the power while progressively opening up steering angle. Even on unpredictable roads like the ones I

tested the car on, its technological talent just gets you from point A to B in a scarcely believable manner. All it does is grip, grip and go. I had never covered these roads quite so quickly, ever! And again, I never even touched the R toggles. These were public roads after all, and I didn't want to end up in jail, or make any headlines.



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Fortunately, I did manage to experience the GTR's true potential, and it was out on the Nordschleife track itself. The benefits of its front mid-ship layout, transaxle gearbox, and ATTESA-ETS 4WD system all make sense here. I believe there has been enough explanation on how all these gizmos work and what makes them tick, so I'm going to skip to the part where it really counts - what it felt like at the "Green Hell".

Simply put, you point, shoot and just hang on as Godzilla devours the horizon. Very few things can live with the GTR's sheer pace out on the Nordschleife's straights and surprisingly, the weight of the GTR works as added downforce, keeping the car rather stable in some of the bumpy sections; very helpful when you're clocking 250 plus kph heading towards the downhill left at "Schwedenkreuz". On high speed twisty sections is where the perks of having a rear-mounted transaxle gearbox comes to the fore; the car's weight distribution always feels well balanced, directional changes are highly responsive, and it demonstrates an agility that defies its mass.

Many have labelled the R35 GTR as nothing but a techno-berge that's too big, too heavy and too flattering to amateurs. Take my word for it; this car may be all the above, but it performs at a whole different level when driven by someone who really knows what he or she is doing. At least 90% of the people who've driven a GTR will ever really glimpse at its limits. Luckily, for ambitious folks like me, the GTR is a very safe car as the electronics do work efficiently to save you if you've gone a bit too far - an undoubtedly good thing when you're on a track that's as challenging as the Nordschleife.

Respect it and push it the way it was meant to be and this car becomes a proper workout, here especially; a track that offers almost every type of corner and straight around. It almost becomes a living creature

- you can feel the diffs working; the tyres scrambling for grip on different types of surfaces; the many mechanical noises of that 3.8-litre Twin Turbo V6; and it really is a proper experience. You don't get to really feel these things driving on some highway. It's unbelievable just how much convincingly and quickly the GTR takes on the Nordschleife and thanks to its brilliant 4WD system, you get to use most of its power much earlier than in most other machines.

For a someone like me who is so completely fascinated by the GTR, it was almost unreal to experience first-hand what the car can really do in an environment that would be correctly called its birthplace. One good thing I've found since I moved here in Nurburg is that I get front row seats to the development of pretty much every new model, and rumour has it the Nismo GTR which is still being improved, managed to clock an amazing 7-minute 4-second run. The non-Nismo version that we have only managed a 7:20 the last time it was tested. How they've managed to make it so much quicker is still a mystery. Rumour or not, I will personally testify that it is, hands down, one of the quickest things out here. Safe to say that the GTR legacy is going to carry on for much longer. For me personally, it was an absolute privilege to have been able to experience a car I'd been admiring for so long, and the wait was most definitely worth it. ■



Interested in driving the GTR on the Nurburgring? I suggest you pay www.rsrnurburg.com a visit.