

Almost ever since there were cars to drive, there were those who would drive them to the limit. Chasing glory and the sheer wild joy of speed, at first they raced on roads, dirt and sand. Soon purpose-built racetracks started to appear, and the drivers could really see what their cars were made of.

As racing spread, so did the tracks, but as with all things only a handful really shone. In time, a special few became legendary: thrilling crucibles of high-octane skill and courage, revered by drivers and spectators alike.

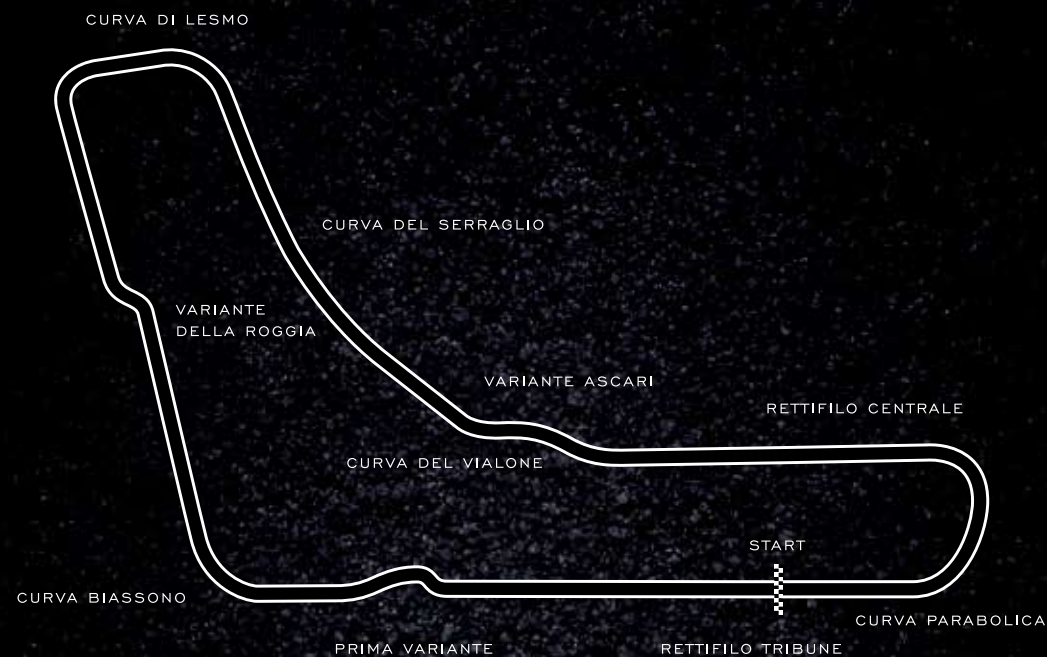
The Vertu Ascent Racetrack Legends Series is a celebration of six of the greatest. Each handset is designed to capture the essence of the track that inspired it: the thrill of Silverstone, the passion of Monza, the toughness of Le Mans, the spectacle of Indianapolis, the glamour of Monaco and the drama of the Nürburgring.

Together, these six epic circuits epitomise the spirit of Ascent. This is their story.

MONZA



MONZA



There's something special about Monza that's hard to describe; something very nearly religious. Surrounded by trees in an old royal park, it can have an almost mystical quality. Many think of it as the spiritual home of Grand Prix, the epitome of passion, bravery and sheer breakneck pace.

Dubbed the Cathedral of Speed, it was here that Achille Varzi and Alfieri Maserati hit 200km/h for the first time, way back in 1929. It was here too that Peter Gethin won the fastest and closest Grand Prix ever, slipstreaming Ronnie Peterson in 1971 and flashing out at the flag to win by a single hundredth of a second, at a blistering average speed of 150.754mph.

For its fans, Monza is a place of pilgrimage – and they come to worship the Scuderia. They are called the Tifosi, a word normally used for football supporters, and there are similarities. They are legendarily passionate, and ferociously partisan. Elsewhere fans follow drivers, but not here: the Tifosi are Ferrari red in tooth and claw. They swamp the grandstands with it, unfurling vast flags, while out in the woods shirtless hordes scream their lungs out. Some come two days early, partying the nights away, then climbing the nail-studded trees to get a better view.

When Ferrari wins, Monza erupts, though perhaps they are getting a little used to it now. Ferrari has won six times in the last 10 years, nearly as many times as in the rest of Monza's history put together. But they still talk of that September in 1988, when the invincible Senna, starting in pole for the tenth time in a row, clipped a backmarker and spun his McLaren into a sandtrap in the closing laps, leaving Berger and Alboreto to score a 1-2 for Ferrari.

They have long memories at Monza – they need to. It was built in 1922, when only two other permanent racetracks existed, Brooklands and Indianapolis. Construction took just 110 days, employing an army of 3,500 workers, 200 wagons, 30 lorries, and even a 5km railway. The original design was bold: 10km long, combining a 5.5km road track, with a 4.5km banked high-speed loop, the two intersecting via an underpass.

The course has switched around over the years, often as a result of accidents, but today's Grand Prix circuit is much the same as the original road track. The loop was abandoned twice, first after Campari, Borzacchini and Czaykowski, three of Europe's greatest drivers, died on the southern curve in 1933. The banks were ripped down in 1938, only to be re-erected in 1955, when Monza briefly returned to its original size. But drivers started boycotting the course, and in 1961, Wolfgang von Tripps' Ferrari cartwheeled into the crowd killing him and 13 spectators.

In fact, the accident had nothing to do with the banking, but they abandoned it anyway. You can still see it at Monza today, and it defies belief that anyone would have actually raced around it. But that's Monza for you, a track for heroes that can, at times, seem gladiatorial. Yet if you're looking for passion, for electric atmosphere, for the wild joy of racing that rolls back the years to when cars were young and anything was possible, go to Monza, and you'll understand why they call it La Pista Magica – the magic racetrack.

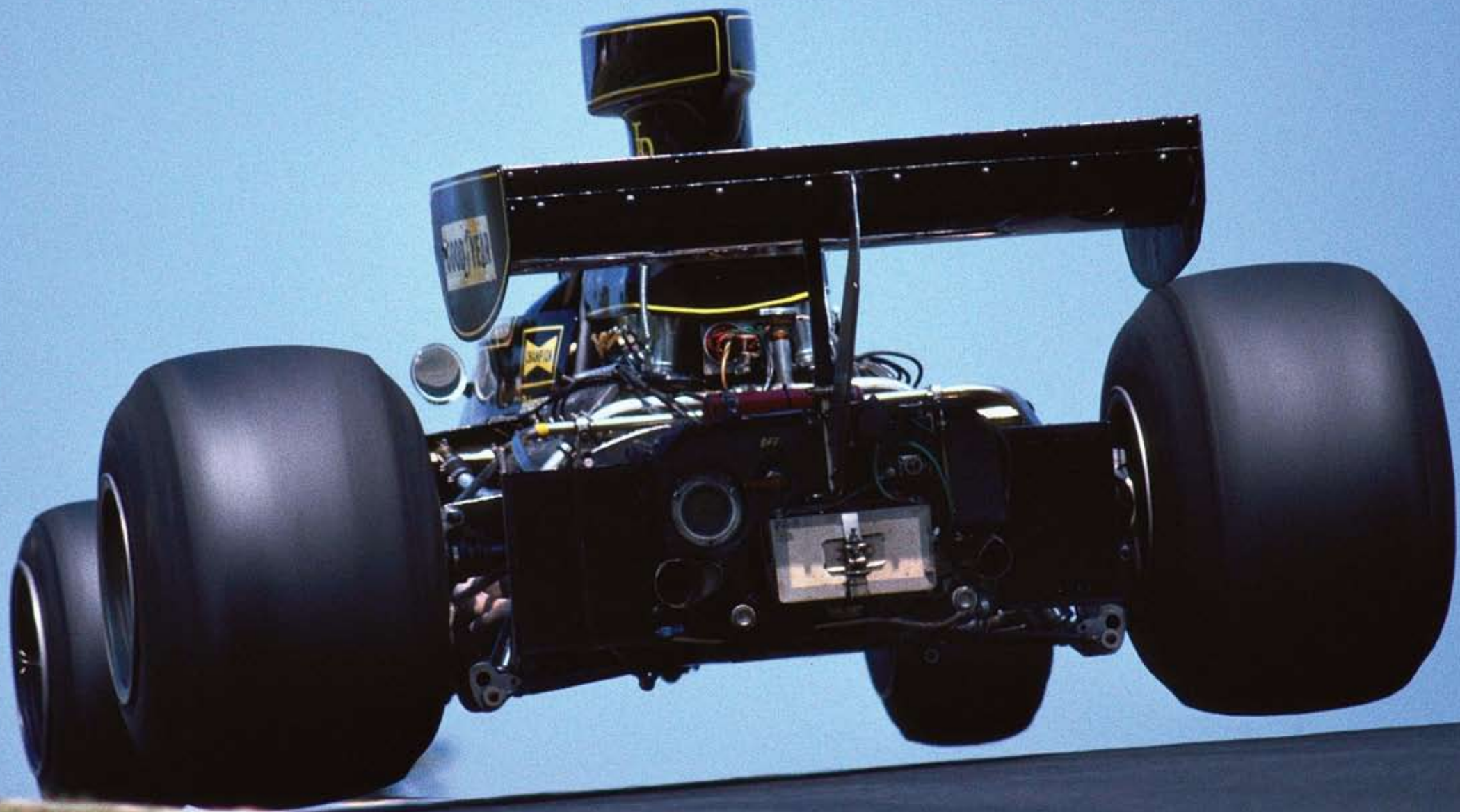
YEAR OPENED	1922
CIRCUIT LENGTH	3.620 MILES / 5.793 KM
LAP RECORDS	1:21.046 / 257.320 KM/H (RUBENS BARRICHELLO, FERRARI, 2004) TOP SPEED 372.2 KM/H (JUAN PABLO MONTOYA, MCLAREN MERCEDES, 2005)
CIRCUIT CHANGES	14 CHANGES: 1928, 1929, 1939, 1940, 1954, 1955, 1971, 1972, 1978, 1979, 1988, 1989, 1997, 2000
MAJOR RACES	ITALIAN GRAND PRIX MONZA 1000 KM FORMULA RENAULT EURO CUP SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WORLD TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP COPPA INTEREUROPA AUTOSTORICHE MONZA RALLY SHOW

FIG 01 (PRECEDING SPREAD)
GERHARD BERGER TESTS THE TRAPS AT MONZA DURING HIS SECOND STINT WITH FERRARI. ALWAYS POPULAR WITH THE TIFOSI, HE PAVED THE WAY FOR SCHUMACHER; WITHIN A FEW YEARS, THE SCUDERIA WERE NEAR INVINCIBLE AT MONZA.



The Vertu Ascent Monza Limited Edition is backed with racing-grade rubber and trimmed with red leather: a tribute to the passion of the Tifosi at 'La Pista Magica'.

NÜRBURGRING



NÜRBURGRING



Jackie Stewart called it 'The Green Hell'. In its full, original glory, it was 17 miles long, wrapped round a wooded mountainside up by Germany's Belgian border. It had 172 corners in all, and whiplash gradients too: as much as one-in-nine down, one-in-six up. Apart from the funnel-like starting grid, it was 7m wide, flanked by trees, cliffs and thin air. "Nothing gave me more satisfaction than to win at the Nürburgring," said Stewart, who won Grands Prix there in 1968, 1971 and 1973. "And yet, I was always afraid."

The Nürburgring was Germany's first permanent racetrack, conceived in the mid-1920s as a showcase for national racing talent and automotive excellence. It took two years and more than 2,500 labourers to build, and consisted of two circuits which could be used together or separately: the Nordschleife (North Loop) was 14.2 miles long, the Sudschleife (South Loop) 4.8 miles. The combined circuit twisted around four villages, overlooked by the moody ruins of the 12th-century Schloss Nürburg castle – and, often, storm clouds. As one observer put it, this wasn't driving, this was opera.

It was here that Tazio Nuvolari famously triumphed in 1935, his greatest-ever win, beating Germany's quartet of state-of-the-art Mercedes W25s in an outmoded Alfa Romeo P3. Juan-Manual Fangio had his greatest drive here too, fighting back from a disastrous pitstop in his Maserati 250F to win in 1957. "I did things I've never done before," he said, "and I don't ever want to drive like that again."

In the Sixties, Britain dominated, with four Grand Prix wins in a row: Graham Hill, John Surtees (twice) and Jim Clark – then Jackie Stewart's first triumph, driving through wind, rain and fog. But spiralling speeds meant the Nordschleife was becoming too dangerous. Three years of rebuilding, smoothed out bumps, installed safety barriers and reduced the official corner count, but the track's size and position made modern safety standards impossible.

Prior to the 1976 Grand Prix, Nikki Lauda – the reigning world champion and the only person ever to lap the Nordschleife in under seven minutes – called for a driver boycott, but the race went ahead. Ironically, Lauda himself crashed, on the second lap. Still loaded with fuel, his Ferrari burst into flames, and he was only saved by his fellow drivers – too far away, the track marshals couldn't get to the blaze in time.

It was the end for Grand Prix at the old Nürburgring, although other racing continued. In 1982 work began on a new track called the Grand-Prix-Track, built to the highest safety standards. Though it hosted Formula One in 1984 and 1985, it was disliked by enthusiasts and dubbed the Ersatzring – an insult to the original. Unpopularity and commercial disputes kept F1 away for years, until the rise of local hero Michael Schumacher helped bring back Grands Prix in 1995 – by which time safety changes elsewhere meant the GP-Strecke now compared favourably. Today it is a popular F1 venue.

And the old Nordschleife is still out there, still used for the occasional race, notably the Nürburgring 24 Hours weekend in mid-June, attracting hundreds of drivers and up to 220,000 spectators. It's also used as a test track by auto makers, including BMW, Porsche and Audi. And, gloriously, it is still a one-way toll-road, as it has been for the past 80 years or so, allowing afficianados to experience at first hand this extraordinary circuit, the like of which will probably never be seen again.

YEAR OPENED	1927
CIRCUIT LENGTH	16.086 MILES / 25.888 KM
LAP RECORDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • F1 GRAND PRIX TRACK (5.148KM): 1:29.468 / 207.145 KM/H (MICHAEL SCHUMACHER, FERRARI, 2004) • NORDSCHLEIFE, UNOFFICIAL: 6:17.130 / 202.073 KM/H (STEFAN BELLOF, 1983) • NORDSCHLEIFE, OFFICIAL: 6:25.91 / 194.33 KM/H (STEFAN BELLOF, 1983)
CIRCUIT CHANGES	1984: INAUGURATION OF THE NEW GRAND PRIX TRACK 2002: INAUGURATION OF THE "MERCEDES-ARENA"
MAJOR RACES	FORMULA 1 DTM NÜRBURGRING (GERMAN TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP) 24H-RACE NÜRBURGRING NORDSCHLEIFE TRUCK GRAND PRIX OLDTIMER GRAND PRIX

FIG 16 (PRECEDING SPREAD)
EVEN AFTER EXTENSIVE REBUILDING AND SAFETY WORK IN THE SIXTIES, TAKING BUMPS AT SPEED WAS STILL A VITAL SKILL AT THE OLD NÜRBURGRING, AS RONNIE PETERSON DEMONSTRATES.



Combining grey leather with a titanium case machined to a knurled finish, boosting grip and ruggedness, the Vertu Ascent Nürburgring Limited Edition is a fitting tribute to Germany's first racetrack.