



# Endurance at the NÜRBURGRING

While Aston Martin's DBR9s won at Le Mans, the V8 Vantage N24 faced the contrasting challenge of 24 hours at the Nürburgring, with a dedicated but strictly amateur team including journalist Richard Meaden, who describes racing on the Nordschleife as 'a unique experience, on a circuit deemed too dangerous for F1 some three decades ago, with no run-off and zero margin for driver error or mechanical failure'

'With 210 cars on the grid at Nürburgring, from hot hatches to full-blown racers like the Phoenix Racing DBRS9/8, traffic is a constant factor. 'Slower guys drive on their mirrors,' says Richard. 'The fastest pass dozens of cars every lap. Last year the V8 Vantage N24s qualified just inside the top 50, so we had to negotiate plenty of slower cars without getting tangled-up with the leaders. Imagine trying to race flat-out through rush-hour traffic and you'll get the idea.'

As at Le Mans, preparation counts. 'Journalism as a career doesn't lend itself to sparkling fitness, and I'd like to be fitter, but unlike racing a GT1 car at Le Mans you don't need to be an athlete to drive a V8 Vantage N24 at the Nürburgring! Like most people, I find it hard to find time or motivation for structured exercise – but the race provides a focus. I've never smoked, and for three or four months before the race I try to eat the right food, cut back on alcohol and be more active, if only to make sure I can fit in my race suit – which always seems to shrink during the off-season.'



And the V8 Vantage N24 is on the driver's side. 'Its whole ethos is to be raced successfully by keen non-professionals, so it balances speed with a benign nature. We always run with ABS, and while the standard stability control system is switched off in dry conditions, the driver can choose to use it in the rain. The team introduced a Sportshift version at last year's race, and its paddle-shift is even easier to drive than the stick-shift manual. With no air-conditioning, the car can get pretty hot, but otherwise it's a great package for the Nürburgring – driver-friendly, no nasty traits; and being closely based on a road car, it doesn't generate the huge G-Forces or intense heat Darren has to endure in the DBR9.'

'I've never found myself struggling, so I guess my fitness and stamina are OK for the level I'm racing at. And I suspect circuit knowledge plays an even bigger part here than at Le Mans. The lap is very long, there are so many surface changes, odd cambers and blind crests, and weather in the Eifel tends to be unpredictable and extreme – it can be sunny on one half of the circuit and flooded on the other. Last year's race was delayed for two hours by a Biblical deluge. Then in the early hours, thick fog forced it to be stopped for five hours. 'Still, I'm not sure what's more gruelling: the race itself or the party afterwards!'

If you'd like to learn more about Aston Martin's on-track performance last season, Aston Martin's official books – 'Vantage – Nordschleife 2007' and '24 Heures du Mans 2007' capture the unique atmosphere of the two world-famous 24-hour motorsport events. Available via The Collection at [www.astonmartin.com](http://www.astonmartin.com)