

# Z06 Hot Laps the 'Ring

**HOW GOOD** is the new Corvette Z06?

For the definitive answer, you have to wait until our "First Drive" story appears next month. But we can tell you already that GM's 7.0-liter all-American supercar is the real deal. How?

Because Jan Magnusson, one of the drivers of the Le Mans class-winning C6R, turned up at the legendary Nürburgring Nordschleife circuit the Thursday after the 24-hour race and peeled out a seven-minute 42.99-second lap in a pre-production car—on treaded tires, not race slicks.

To put that lap in perspective, it's within fractions of a second of the best time ever set by Porsche's hard-core 996 GT2 and about 10 seconds faster than the best laps by exotics such as the 493-horse, V-10-powered Lamborghini Gallardo and the 617-horse, supercharged V-8-powered Mercedes-Benz McLaren SLR. What's more, the time was achieved in unseasonably muggy conditions, which probably took a slight edge off the LS7's 505 horses. The only production car that's gone faster at the 'Ring is Porsche's \$450,000 Carrera GT, which reportedly has lapped in the seven-minutes 32-seconds bracket.

Our man-on-the-spot says GM spent nearly two weeks testing at the Nürburgring before Magnusson flew in to set a time. Engineers switched suspension settings and changed tires many times before finding the optimum setup. On that day, GM hired the 14.2-mile, 170-turn track exclusively for an hour from seven a.m. Magnusson, who drove for Jackie Stewart's F1 team in 1997 and 1998, did a total of four laps in the Z06, with his best time coming on his final lap.

GM staffers were all smiles as Magnusson pulled off the circuit. His summation? "Absolutely marvelous."

## SECRETS OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST TEST TRACK

**BUILT IN** the rolling green Eifel Mountains south of Cologne between 1925 and 1927 as Germany's first permanent race circuit (with the support of then Cologne mayor and future West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer), the original Nürburgring was composed of two joined loops—the 4.8-mile Südschleife and the 14.2-mile Nordschleife. It was home to the German Grand Prix until Niki Lauda's fiery and near-fatal crash in 1976 convinced authorities it had become too dangerous for F1 cars.

The track was reconfigured in 1984, when the current F1 circuit was constructed over part of the Südschleife. Most of the old Nordschleife was

retained, however, and it can be lapped without crossing onto the new circuit. As it stands now, the Nordschleife is 13 miles long and "officially" contains 73 turns—officially, because there's debate as to what constitutes a turn. The track rises and falls almost 1000 feet as it twists and turns among the trees.

You can drive the Nordschleife in your own car—just turn up and pay a toll. But public time on the track is limited, not the least because most of the world's automakers now use the Nordschleife's varied and demanding combination of corners and hills to fine-tune the chassis of their high-performance models.

Why? "Because if a car works well on the Nordschleife, it'll work well almost anywhere," says one chassis engineer. Mike Cross, the former Jaguar engineer now responsible for signing off the final chassis tune of a wide range of Ford Motor Company products, shares this view, though he warns: "You have to be careful you don't end up with a car that's too stiff, because it's fairly smooth."

Nordschleife lap times have become bragging rights for any automaker. Porsche test driver Walter Röhrl says any good driver can achieve an eight-minute 40-second lap in a standard 911; learn the track—where the bumps are—and you might get that down to the low eights. Anything under eight minutes means a good car. And a good driver. ■

## THE NORDSCHLEIFE HALL OF FAME

Porsche Carrera GT	7 min 32 sec
Chevrolet Corvette Z06	7 min 42 sec
Porsche 996 GT2	7 min 42 sec
Pagani Zonda S	7 min 44 sec
Lamborghini Murciélago	7 min 50 sec
Lamborghini Gallardo	7 min 52 sec
Mercedes-McLaren SLR	7 min 52 sec
Chevrolet Corvette C6	7 min 59 sec
Porsche 911	8 min 07 sec
Dodge Viper GTS	8 min 10 sec

Niki Lauda's 1975 German GP Pole Lap	
Ferrari 312 B3	6 min 58 sec

## LAP RECORD

(Stefan Bellof, Porsche, 956, 1983)	6 min 11 sec
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\*Unofficial: Lap times from various sources; Lauda, Bellof times set on slightly different track configuration