

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Bugatti Veyron at Top Speed



**Every year, five Bugatti Veyron owners have the chance to re-open their wallets and invest in an incredible experience: that of driving their car at top speed. Chris Hrabalek was one of this year's lucky few...**

It was a chance to add to my stock of stories to tell future grandchildren and, in the spirit of Burt Munro, I grabbed the opportunity. The recent news of **Pierre Henri Raphanel** – Bugatti's '**Pilote Officiel**' – taking the new **Veyron 16.4 Super Sport** to a verified top speed of 434.211km/h and setting a [new Guinness World Speed Record](#) in the process, probably evoked a different sensation for those that have experienced the original Veyron at speeds above 400km/h. To date, this numbers 14 owners, a handful of **Bugatti** engineers and the odd journalist.

Prior to firing up, **Bugatti** insists on a mandatory '**Feeling the Road**' safety training at the French **L'Anneau Du Rhin** circuit. The experience of a 1001PS car – one that weighs significantly more than its **Type 35** ancestor – on a twisty and flooded racetrack is probably worth a separate story all of its own. Bugatti is very careful to make the '400 Drive' a positive and (above all) a lasting experience.



Fast forward a couple of days, and there's a change of scenery, to **Wolfsburg**, Germany. The local **Ritz Carlton** serves as a meeting point for the four other automotive adrenalin junkies. After instructions and a pile of waivers to sign, we are sent to bed early with the line: "...oh, and if something happens tomorrow, you will not be back to tell us about it...". Gulp. The last thought I took to bed was: "...are there pelicans in Germany?".

The location for the **400 Drive** is the **VW Group's** purpose-built high-speed oval – featuring two very long straights of 9km each, separated by steeply banked turns at each end and surrounded by forest. For a **Veyron** to reach its top speed, one must first master the psychological challenge of speeding through the banking at 200km/h – seemingly at an angle perpendicular to the ground.

After an initiation lap with **Pierre Henri** at the helm, doing 300km/h, followed by a swap so that he rides as a passenger at the same pace, and then a final practice run with me on my own doing more of the same, I can honestly say that 300km/h quickly loses its magic. It becomes easy to imagine setting the cruise control at this speed for the daily commute to work (as one brave **Veyron** owner apparently does quite frequently).



Time for the final challenge: 407.9km/h, or as close as possible to this artificially limited top speed. Mummified in fireproof linen and strapped into the driver's seat, my character turns more **Woody Allen** than **Steve McQueen**. I concentrate for a few seconds on the procedure I studied the night before and that I've run through in my mind a million times this morning: ...accelerate to 200km/h, set the cruise control, look out for marker points followed by shifts from 7th to 6th, 6th to 5th and 5th to 4th... finally take a deep breath and give it full acceleration to the pre-defined braking point. It's a good day to die.

To describe the sensation that one gets at top speed – or the even better feeling of returning to the pits afterwards – is almost as impossible as recounting one's life experiences in a single-volume autobiography. However, anyone who says that it takes skill to do 400km/h in a **Veyron** is either an attention seeker, a liar, or both. Truth is, even Ozzy Osbourne – who only recently passed his driving test after the 19th attempt – could master the **400 Drive**. Skill-wise, it's probably more challenging to ride a bicycle without training wheels than to take the **Veyron** to the speeds it was engineered for. What an incredible car.

Naturally, this is not the story I will pass on to my grandchildren. I will tell them that if you have the chance to grab life by the horns, then you'd better do so. You'd better take that diving watch down to its 3900m maximum – and take granddad's **Veyron** for a blast down a German autobahn.

**Text:** Chris Hrabalek

**Photos:** Bugatti

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