



Lamborghini Murciélago R-GT at Salzburgring Rodeo Ride

Test by Roberto Giordanelli / Photography by Michael Ward

TESTING THE AWESOME REITER ENGINEERING GT1 LAMBORGHINI AT AUSTRIA'S SALZBURGING CIRCUIT

I first saw it two years ago, testing at Spa. The noise it sent ricocheting around the Ardennes forest was so menacing that when the car returned to the pits, I was too scared to even look at it. Now I have to drive the thing on ice, and at an unfamiliar circuit.

Here we had the perfect ingredients for a career-limiting monumental shunt. However the bravest man at the Salzburgring race circuit was not me or some chisel-jawed racing hero, but race team boss Hans Reiter for trusting anyone with his monster Murciélago R-GT, or his 'baby', as he calls this GT1 class racing car. Some baby – compared with a regular Lamborghini Murciélago, the Reiter Engineering R-GT packs half-as-much-again in the power-to-weight department. This is one rock-hard mother of an angry rodeo bull. Now imagine that bovine bolide on a tricky track surface that is icy, wet and dry all on the same lap.

Fast, furious and unforgiving, no gentleman drivers are allowed to race in GT1. It is for pro-drivers only, and with one German eyebrow raised, race boss Reiter says, "Even zen, zer are professionals und professionals."

For 2007 Reiter Engineering will compete in FIA GT1 and the Le Mans 24 hour race. Hans Reiter is also joining forces with the Austrian race team of S-berg for a joint attack in GT1 with Murciélagos, and GT3 with Gallardos. Sportscar manufacturers keep a watchful eye on GT racing. Some get involved, some don't. Those that get involved have two things to worry about: cost and failure. Those that don't get involved have only one worry, and that is not being involved.

But what about the private teams? Manufacturers don't like supporting privateers. This is because they have little control over the team, and are terrified that a loose-cannon privateer may do something silly that could damage the manufacturer's brand. Reiter Engineering has some limited factory help. Lamborghini collaborates with Reiter and sells him the cars considerably cheaper as they are in a partially built state.



GT RACING

GT Racing's governing body is the FIA which runs the major international series, with many countries running their own national GT series under the FIA's technical regulations. Modern GT racing has been inspired by, and evolved from, decades of Le Mans cars. The golden years of GT racing were in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today there is healthy resurgence with cars like the Aston Martin DBR9 and Maserati MC12. Reiter's Murciélago came a creditable 6th at Brno and 8th at the Budapest and Dijon rounds of the championship. See www.fiagt.com

The rules for GT1 are fairly free. This means that to be competitive you do not modify a road car. Instead, you start with a blank sheet of paper and virtually build a prototype in the shape of the original car. The cost is so vast that there are relatively few GT1 cars, which means that GT1 is always under threat. GT2 allows fewer modifications and GT3 even less. The recent success of GT3 means that there are so many cars and competitors, that rival GT3 championships are taking hold.



at the menacing car" "Right you ****, I am in charge here!" I may be in charge of the car, but the track is now in charge of me. The low winter sun doesn't kiss the long pit straight or many of the other turns. Overnight ice is reluctant to melt in 3°C temperatures. Now I am on track in the Murciélago, hurtling past the Gallardo. Now I am a god. But unlike gods, or politicians, I am not infallible. This GT1 racer takes no prisoners. If I make a mistake, there is no cushy torture chamber or Guantanamo Bay for me, just a hyper-speed appointment with the cold steel of the armco barrier. Slippery cornering moments are bad enough but more worrying is loss of control in sixth gear. You have to be super-quick to catch a slide. You must anticipate loss of grip in order to correct it.

ABOVE: ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg
 BELOW: ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg

Then you must undo the corrective input before the car reacts or you will get into a terminal tank-slapper. The dry-sump engine sits very low in the chassis, making a big difference to the way a Murciélago feels compared with its Diablo ancestor. There is no four-wheel drive and no ABS in GT1, which makes it hard on the drivers, although traction control is OK for 2007. Without traction control, power must be fed in just so. Too slow and you are nowhere, too fast and ditto. With most of the Murc's weight on the rear wheels, throttle use is far less critical than on, say, a

weight saving, brake discs are carbon, though with such large diameter discs, Reiter reckons that steel discs are just as good as carbon. Formula One cars need carbon brakes because the F1 rules stipulate 13in diameter wheels and hence minuscule brake dimensions and the need for carbon discs.

ABOVE: ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg
 BELOW: ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg ghghg

Track Test

Be scared when you read this. Hold a cushion or something. Cars are like horses and angle-grinders. They know if you are frightened. If they sense your fear, they bite you. Reiter's Murc is intimidating to look at, intimidating to sit in and needless to say, intimidating to drive. GT driver Peter Kox gives me a 10 second briefing as I strap myself to the raging bull. He tells me four things. "When you change gear, really mean it. The brakes feel light but you must trust them. The car weaves at high speed on the straight. And finally, you need lots of time in this car, which you don't have." Thanks Peter.

Before driving the GT1 Murciélago, I learn the circuit in a stealthy Reiter Engineering modified Gallardo. The company sells top quality upgrades for several Lamborghini models (see www.reiter-engineering.com). The monster Murciélago is lapping the circuit with Peter Kox at the wheel. I think I am going quite quickly in my Gallardo when the wailing Murc R-GT hurtles past like a meteorite in a ball of freezing spray. My immediate thoughts are, "That car is a god and so is whoever is driving it." I return the Gallardo the pits.

Hans Reiter would make a great poker player. I am about to snatch his 'baby' and he is as cool as a cucumber. I clunk the sequential gear lever into first gear. The clutch pedal is only used to move off from rest. A shudder and a numbered light on the dash confirms the action. No matter how scary, you have to show a car who is boss. I release the race clutch and shout



