

Roundel

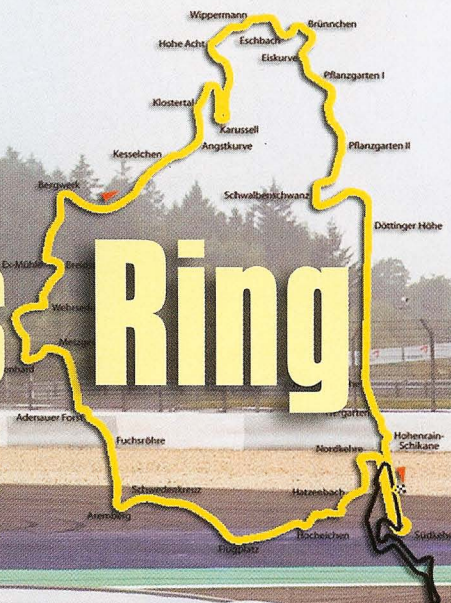
NOVEMBER 2007

**Advantage:
Alpina!**



With This Ring

A chance encounter and a planned excursion provide a tale of two Alpinas on the most challenging track in the world.



Like every gas-and-oil-blooded enthusiast, I've always dreamt of going to the Nürburgring, so when Judy Ray of Driving Concepts invited me to join her on a pilgrimage to motoring's Mount Everest, I jumped at the chance. Five months later, I'm settling into a brisk pace from the Frankfurt airport to the Nürburgring in a little diesel-powered Garmin-guided rental Golf.

To keep me company on the 90-minute drive I flip on the radio, and much to my surprise an American voice is chatting away. I listen a moment, and discover it's Radio Eagle, the U.S. Armed Forces station. They're talking about an upcoming Family Preparedness meeting for a division called Old Ironsides, who are soon shipping out to Iraq. But in this context,

"Family Preparedness" doesn't mean stocking up on canned goods and flashlights for a gathering storm; these men and women face the very real risk of losing their lives in the next few months of service, and this is how their loved ones are "prepared" for whatever may come. I find myself humbled by their bravery and their selflessness—and that humility sets the tone of my trip.

The Nürburgring is said to claim over fifty souls a year, but unlike soldiers going to war, none of these souls—or their loved ones—are prepared for it. This may be the Holy Grail of all race tracks, but it is also the one on which you're most likely to meet your Maker. It took me just one lap in the passenger seat to understand why Jackie

Stewart fought so hard to get the Nürburgring removed from the Grand Prix calendar. It is a place that forgives nothing, no matter how brave you are. Any mistake can only have very serious consequences here, and it's even worse for those on two wheels. During the time I spent behind the Armco barriers with a camera, I was walking on a colorful plastic gravel of broken car and motorcycle parts, each step a reminder of the constant toll this thirteen-mile tarmac ribbon takes on the unlucky and the unwary.

I have no shame in admitting that this rain-soaked Armco alley was a bigger mountain than I was ready to climb. I was humbled by finally finding a road I didn't want to drive fast, and I gained an enor-



**STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY ANDREW MACPHERSON**

mous respect for my fellow BMW CCA members who were brave enough to attack this place at full tilt though the rain and fog that swirled around us for the three-day BMW Club event.

Speaking of full tilt, it's time to introduce two extraordinary drivers and two very unexpected Nürburgring chariots: Robert Fassel in the Alpina B7 and Judy Ray in the Alpina D3. Robert has done around eight thousand laps of the Ring without incident in his long career as one of BMW's M Division test drivers. Judy, who is no stranger to our SoCal members, is a wonderful driver who has devoted much of her spare time to running Driving Concepts, an organization that does every-

thing from putting first-time teenage drivers on the right path, to getting race-ready enthusiasts up to SCCA speed.

This year Judy celebrated her sixtieth birthday by coming back to the Ring for the fourth time. She left with not one, but two of the beautiful blue *Routineer* prizes for being among the best of the best.

The cars in this tale of rain-soaked skill and bravery are both from the house of Alpina. They are as extraordinary as they are different: Robert drove the elegant Alpina B7, the supercharged V8 version of BMW's 7 Series sedan, and Judy the athletic D3. That's based on the 3 Series familiar to most American drivers—but its two-liter turbodiesel engine is unknown on our shores.

At 4.4 liters and a certified 300 kilometers per hour, the B7 is Alpina's luxury flagship, with an Alpina-reworked ZF automatic that can be used manually via steering-wheel-mounted shift buttons. The car's most extraordinary feature is its wall of torque, reaching 700 Nm at just 4,250 rpm—that's 560 foot-pounds of torque—which seamlessly leads into 500 hp at just 5,500 rpm. This propels the large sedan with the urgency and vigor of a sports car, and also allows the B7 to be drifted with the ease of a runaway bad boy from *The Fast And The Furious*.

When I first jumped into Fassel's car to take some moving shots of Judy, he deftly slid the car left and right through Adenauer Forst, the tightest set of right-left-right



corners on the Ring—at full speed in the pouring rain. The B7 slip-slided—can I use that verb, Mister Editor?—with a composure and stability that belies reason for a car of its size and weight. Its pendulum progress was so smooth that I wouldn't have spilt a drop of my coffee, if I had any. Fassl then repeated the maneuver a dozen times for my camera, on exactly the same spot. Talk about being humbled by precision driving!

This big sedan will take anything you throw at it, while keeping you both safe and unruffled in complete luxury; American drivers lucky enough to aspire to the few hundred that will be available in the U.S. will probably never realize the full potential of this car unless they live near the Bonneville Salt Flats, but they'll have a terrific time trying.

But that's enough from the right seat and behind the Armco. Let's talk to the drivers themselves, using a question-and-answer format:

Roundel magazine: Robert, when did you first drive the Nürburgring?

Robert Fassl: I first drove the Nürburgring Nordschleife in April 1986. It was an endurance test for the E30 325iX. I thought I would never be able to master this almost-fourteen-mile track with all its challenges. It is so demanding, with around 175 curves, so many blind corners, dips and bumps and fast stretches.

It is nicknamed the *Grüne Hölle* [the Green Hell]. For some people it must be like



Hell, but for me it's the ultimate challenge. There is not another race track that demands such precise driving skills, with no allowances for errors! I would class this track as "The Ultimate Driving Experience!"

RM: How long have you been driving for BMW?

RF: I started with BMW in October 1985.

RM: Your fellow test-drivers nicknamed you "The Rain God"; can you tell us why you love the Ring in the wet so much?

RF: The Ring is even more demanding

and a challenge in the rain. Rain in the Eifel Mountains, the Ring's home, is pretty normal, so experience with it is inevitable. I'm not sure whether one can say it is perfection, but whatever the conditions, whether rain or shine, one must adjust and forever be aware of the grip and the slip threshold for absolute preciseness. When the track is slippery there are far more variables from damp to soaked. The track becomes a dancing partner, and in the wet you have to be even more sensitive to its every whim. You must



make it your friend, and not foe. I respect this track—and I love this track!

RM: Can you describe the difference between the regular 7 Series sedans and the B7 at the Ring?

RF: The main difference is the enormous amount of torque—700 Newton-meters and 500 horsepower—which gives you warp-speed acceleration from curve to curve. It always makes me smile, seeing GT3 drivers gasp when they see the BMW emblem in their rear-view mirror appear from nowhere!

RM: What makes the B7 such a special car for you?

RF: The B7 is an athlete in a tuxedo. Alpina's subtle body-panel changes and unique rims create sleek and elegant exterior, while on the inside it's tuned to perfection. One can certainly enjoy the sensational feeling of cruising along at 300 kph on the Autobahn, but it is really its ability as a sport sedan that sets it apart. It's always a pleasure and a privilege to drive the B7 on the public roads, but it's even more of a joy at the Ring.

I thanked Fassl for his comments—and for showing me the Ring at a pace I would never, ever have the courage to do myself. As always, the experts make it look so easy, and again I found myself humbled by a level of ability that I'd never even imagined. Then I sat down to discuss the Alpina D3 with Judy Ray. The D3 is another car whose driving nature is defined by its torque, but the heartbeat of this very athletic and well-poised 3 Series is a turbocharged four-pot diesel. I did do a few laps in this one myself and was intrigued by the motor's very willing nature. The redline comes at just 4,500 rpm; but surprisingly, below 2,000 rpm there isn't much oomph, so you still have to keep it on the boil. However, at those revs it is more of a purposeful simmer. When it is in its power band, it is an absolute hoot, reminding me that BMW was the first to win a 24-hour race with a diesel race car—the 24 Hours of the Nürburgring, in fact, with Alpina's Andreas Bovensiepen at the wheel—and gave me a glimpse into the storming Le Mans success of Audi's diesel R10.

Roundel magazine: Judy, first, congratulations on both your trophies! As you were my original BMW CCA instructor responsible for getting me out on track almost seven years ago, I was delighted to see you do so well. This was your fourth trip to the Ring; how different was it going diesel?

Judy Ray: Sharing my love for motor-sports has been my passion for almost 25



years, and seeing friends and students develop a similar passion is the best reward for an instructor. As for the Nürburgring, each trip here is always different—and always a challenge. I think that’s why we keep coming back; it creates a hunger that is difficult to satisfy on any other track.

Going diesel with today’s technologies is not a performance compromise; I think it’s smart. The old concept of a diesel car simply doesn’t apply today. The D3’s performance is really strong, and the great news is that even with two drivers in the car most of the time, we weren’t sitting in the fuel line during our lunch hour like our gasoline-fueled friends.

RM: You’ve owned several M3s over the years. Tell us what makes the Alpina D3 such a special 3 Series.

JR: As my students and fellow instructors know, I’m a “driver of touch, not technology.” Each car has its own personality: Some are wimpy, some are neutral, and some are strong-willed and opinionated. I like to find a car’s nature, and then drive it accordingly. The Alpina D3 is one of those cars that wraps its arms around you and says, “Let’s go!”

Besides the beautiful Alpina Blue color,

the first thing I noticed was the amazing suspension—responsive, firm, but comfortable. As soon as you get into the car, the fit-and-finish really impresses you with its quality. The four-cylinder turbocharged engine has 197 horsepower and 305 foot-pounds of torque. The power band is between 2,000 and 4,000 rpm and the redline is 4,500, so on the track it needs a fair bit of shifting to keep it in the power band—but the low revs and massive torque keep it feeling like a gentle dance, not a frantic foxtrot.

It did exactly what I asked it to do, the way I wanted to do it, and never argued or talked back about it. It loved following in the B7’s tracks, and it did a heck of a good job at keeping up!

RM: You visited Alpina’s home base in Buchloe to pick up the car. What were your impressions of this unique family business?

JR: The entire experience was like a fairy tale, and I want to thank Andy Bovensiepen, Kris Odwarka, and Conny Menzel of Alpina for their kindness and hospitality. Kris led several of us on a tour of the facility, where we learned more about this fascinating family business and their passion for motorsports.

I met Andy several years ago when he was one of the instructors at the Ring, but didn’t realize his relationship to Alpina until the auto show in LA when the Alpina Z8 was introduced. Like all of his family, he quietly goes about the business of engineering, building, and driving some of the finest cars in the world without making a big fuss about himself.

Alpina is the epitome of the personal touch to performance. Each engine is hand-built by one technician; that’s where pride, responsibility, and performance come together. The finishing touches personalize each special-order European Alpina with a wide range of colors, leathers, and trims. BMW and Alpina have found a wonderful relationship—and the driver is certainly the beneficiary of their bond.

RM: When you aren’t teaching or tracking, your day job is selling BMWs at Crevier in SoCal. How easy would it be for you to sell the Alpina brand, especially the diesel ones, in the U.S. market?

JR: Yes, I still have to make a living, as I still can’t persuade my cat to get a job! When I first meet a customer at Crevier BMW, I give them my card and say, “This is how I make a living.” Then I give them my Driving Concepts card and say, “This is how I have fun.” It has been a wonderful mix for all concerned, and I’m happy to be with a dealership that understands the passion behind these great cars.

When the Alpina Z8 came into the dealership several years ago, I was the first to dismiss it, since it didn’t have a manual transmission. Then one evening following a “show and tell” in south Orange County, I had the privilege of driving the Alpina roadster back to the dealership through some hills, valleys, and freeways. As I backed it onto the showroom floor, my manager noticed a tear trickling down my cheek. What an amazing car! I sold quite a few of them, as you can imagine!

When the Alpina B7 arrived this year, I was like a kid in a candy store—I couldn’t wait to taste it. It is everything I expected from Alpina, and more. I have always said the 7 Series is the most misunderstood car in the BMW line. It doesn’t know it is a big car, it thinks it is a little kid out there having fun—and the B7 really builds on that.

As for BMW diesels in the U.S., they’re on the way—and I think it’s time. During a recent BMW Experience, we had a chance to drive the 5 Series diesel and everyone was impressed with its performance. Between the engineers at BMW and Alpina, they have found ways to keep the performance levels high and the environmental impact low. I know it will fly out of the dealership with the popularity of the new eco-friendly B99 bio-diesel mix in Southern California. ♦

32 With This Ring

The Nürburgring may be the most challenging track in the world, especially in the rain. But if you do take it on, you might as well take Alpina's top guns to the fight. **ANDREW MACPHERSON**

38 B7 Blast-off

The Alpina B7 is not just for Nürburgring assaults, of course; it's also handy when you want to cross several countries with your foot down. **JEREMY WALTON**

50 Luxury Meets Opulence

A luxurious BMW 7 Series cruiser will set you back about a hundred grand. Add a quarter million to get to Rolls-Royce territory. **MICHAEL BIRD**

57 Wagons Ho!

When you have to cross 800 miles to make the boat on time, it's good to have the right car to get you there—like an M5 Touring wagon. **JEREMY WALTON**

COVER

Just what you need for a rainy day at the Nürburgring—a BMW Alpina B7 cranked up to ten. **PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MACPHERSON**

62 An M For The Masses

The first M car was the low-volume M1, destined for racing. But their next project was M treatment of the family sedan. **JEREMY WALTON**

68 Playing Catch-up

In the battle of the Way-Cool Coupes, BMW's Z4 3.0si faces strong heat from Audi's TT 3.2 Quattro. **DAVID HAUETER**

80 Farkle, Farkle, Little Star

Your BMW probably already has everything it needs to be the perfect machine—unless we're talking about your BMW motorcycle. **DAN ERWIN**

85 Caveat Emptor

These days it's easy to look beyond your local market when you want to buy or sell a car. But you should use simple judgment and take elementary precautions. **MICHAEL BIRD**

90 The Shoemaker's Child

No, you can't get back what you spend rebuilding an old car. But sometimes there are other rewards. **DENIS WISNIEWSKI**

93 DVD Review: WTCC 2006

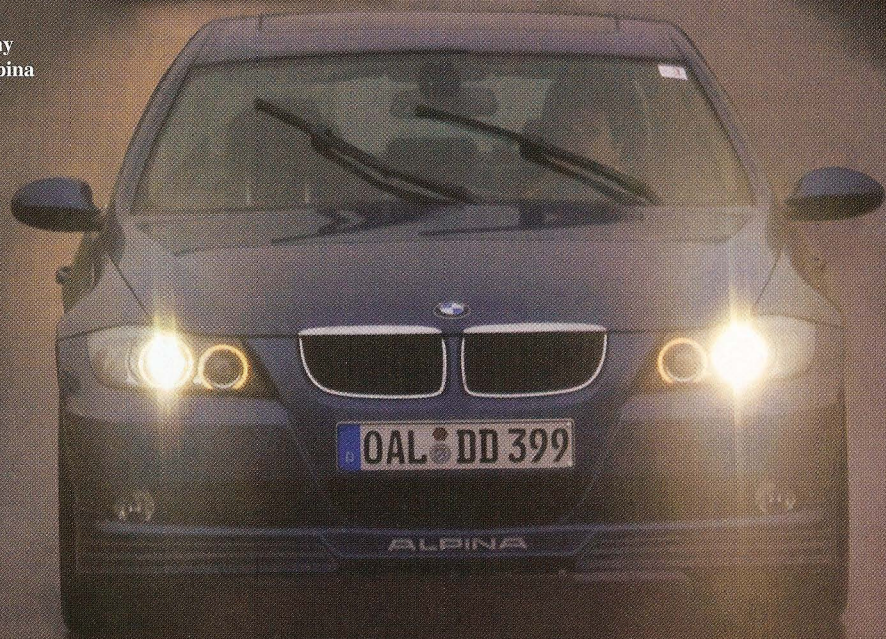
You can watch all the NASCAR you can stand on ESPN, Fox, or SpeedTV. For WTCC coverage, you have to look overseas. **DAVID HAUETER**

94 Powered By BMW

Dutch builder Klaas Zwart chose BMW V8 power for the Ascari supercars—and then built them a splendid playground in Spain. **JEREMY WALTON**

101 September Song

In a long-playing performance, BMW has sponsored the Lime Rock Vintage Fall Festival for several years. Now the final curtain may be ringing down. **BRIAN S. MORGAN**



COLUMNS

- 19 The Navigator
- 20 The English Patient
- 23 Smithereens
- 24 Runnin' on Empty
- 104 Off Line
- 109 The Hack Mechanic
- 110 Die Werkstatt
- 113 Calabresions
- 114 02 Cents Worth
- 117 Bimmer Lite
- 125 President's Page
- 133 The Way We Were
- 152 End Piece

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 Letters
- 26 Briefs
- 30 Heard on the Strasse
- 106 Racing Lines
- 118 Tech Talk
- 126 National Board
- 127 Club Services
- 128 Special Interest Groups
- 130 Calendar of Events
- 134 Classified Ads