

Adrenaline Guaranteed

Do you have it in you to be a Grand Prix race car driver? Lotus are offering you the chance to find out with the iRace experience.

Never before has a Formula One team offered a comprehensive training package to the public but that is exactly what the Lotus F1 Team are doing. For anyone who dreams of being a race car driver, the iRace experience offers the opportunity to experience the power, performance and technology of a real Formula One car, coached by an F1 World Championship team.

The iRace is designed for amateurs, while the iRace+ is for the more experienced driver. The main difference is that the iRace+ package offers a little more drive time in the F1 car. Before you rush out to sign up, you might want to think about what that really means. Matthew Pryke Fine & Country, recently volunteered to experience

the velocity that is the iRace and had a few white knuckle moments in the driver's seat.

The iRace package is set within the picturesque Provence region of France and includes accommodation at the Best Western Grand Prix by the Paul Ricard Circuit. A fission of excitement starts at the hotel with its Grand Prix related imagery and themes. 'Motorbikes on the track were making plenty of noise, getting me in the petrol head space', says Matthew. 'Also the Grand Prix was taking place in Singapore and watching this on the TV it suddenly felt a lot more real.' Renovated and modernised to Formula One standards, the Paul Ricard Circuit is the only circuit in Europe to have a straight as long as the legendary



Hunaudières straight on the Le Mans 24 Hours race.

Arriving at the track on the iRace day generates a buzz of its own. The sheer scale of the grounds are framed by beautiful scenery in the background but this becomes secondary when participants are issued with driving kit. The kit includes fire-proof base layers, overalls, gloves, boots and a helmet. 'Now I look like an F1 driver even if I don't feel like one', laughs Matthew.

Kitted out it is time for a briefing session to learn about the cars and the track. Before going out on the track all iRace drivers are taught the basics of racing car driving by qualified instructors, including driving



with a sequential gearbox, car positioning, racing lines, apex's, braking and turn-in points. Even the more experienced iRace+ guests, are required to undergo a safety briefing. For the novice, this is a lot of information to take in but as the day progresses the Lotus team reinforces the lesson. This starts with a test lap of the track in a van. 'This seems very fast and is certainly not how I usually drive around London', says Matthew. 'There are cones and marshals to assist and I am left wondering how fast the F1 car will be in comparison.'

There are still a few more steps to go before participants are trusted with the F1 car, including a physiotherapy session. Driving a racing car requires a serious amount of physical exertion, with race drivers experiencing up to

four times the force of gravity on their necks. The session with the Lotus F1 Team trainers is designed to relax the muscles and prepare the driver's body for the strain. This is no light Swedish oil massage, but rather a serious sports massage. 'I was looking forward to what I expected to be a relaxing moment of the day', Matthew says. 'No such luck. I am pushed and pulled in every direction. It is far from relaxing and provides a good reminder of how fit the F1 drivers are.'

After physio, participants are ready for their first driving experience on the track in a Formula Renault. 'This is unbelievably quick. I manage to pull away without stalling so I feel everything else is a bonus', declares Matthew. He may have spoken too

soon. Just as he starts to get the hang of the track the weather changes, adding some rain and fog into the challenge. In the rain Matthew manages to spin the car but retains control.





Following this initial enthralling experience behind the wheel, drivers are taken through a telemetry analysis session with the team instructors, just like Lotus F1 Team race drivers. The data fields include braking and acceleration position, timing and force, steering angle and gear changes. The data is incredibly detailed and accurate. For our test subject Matthew this identifies he is not using enough throttle or enough brake. The trainers compare his stats to Romain Grosjean to reinforce the message. This gives Matthew a clear indication that he needs to increase his speed to be able to drive the F1 car:

For the second session the gods smile on Matthew and the fog and rain ease. The trainer's feedback encourages him to increase his speed and the adrenaline starts flowing. He is deemed ready to move on to the F1 session. Another telemetry session, more briefings and lunch precede the F1 specific training. 'This is very exciting', says Matthew. 'You can see from the focus of the race operations team that they are taking this very seriously to ensure each driver understands what is required.' Simply sitting in the F1 car is a thrill. It is not often that you find yourself surrounded so thoroughly by high performance engineering genius.

One of the more difficult aspects of driving the F1 car is pulling away without stalling. 'The sound, smells

and energy surrounding the F1 car are electric and I am both nervous and excited in equal measure', Matthew recalls. Finally he takes his place behind the wheel, carefully positioning his large feet over the small pedals, placed tightly together. The nervous energy helps him pull away without stalling and he is off. 'The car is so quick my helmet feels like it is trying to pull away from my head', he says. 'I complete two laps and feel like a hero with the adrenalin coursing through me. I cannot believe how fast I have gone...or believe I have gone.'

To counter this point, a test driver takes participants onto the track in a Formula Renault two seater. The driver doesn't hold back, giving the would-be racers an understanding of the real speed of these vehicles. To complete the day, guests are driven in an F1 two seater. 'I am told I have to hold a red button on a joystick to show that I am still happy to continue,' explains Matthew. 'If I am unhappy or pass out I will let go of the button and the test driver will slow down.' Intrepid speed demon Matthew enjoys every moment of the ride and has no intention of letting go of the red button. 'I cannot describe how fast the lap is,' says Matthew, '...but I am grateful for such a genuine once in a lifetime experience from Lotus.'

If the idea of a red panic button doesn't make you hyperventilate, the Lotus iRace experience may be for you. Release your inner Grand Prix race driver and you will be guaranteed not only an amazing day of adrenaline, but also a lifetime of bragging rights.



iRace events can be organised to suit nearly any need. Whether it is a different circuit, more days or different cars, the iRace can be adapted to suit any requirements. For more information on the iRace experience contact the Lotus F1 Team on Tel: +44 1608 678 000 or email: irace@lotusf1team.com