

11

# TO TAKE A RIDE: IN THE RING TAXI

Sabine Schmitz treats Dieter Losskarn to the most intense ten minutes of his life. The Ring Queen and her hell-toy, a BMW M5, reigns supreme

PHOTOGRAPHY: WALTER MATHIAS WILBERT & DIETER LOSSKARN

## SABINE IN ACTION

The famous *Top Gear* video, where she throws a Ford Transit around the ring in record time:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1pkIvKKnd0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1pkIvKKnd0)

The Stig vs Sabine Schmitz:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1p0Gg9uLBw&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1p0Gg9uLBw&NR=1)

Sabine in the BMW Ring Taxi:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNemK-xKfZY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNemK-xKfZY)

Check out the German TV motoring show

Sabine co-hosts:

[www.dmax.de/dmotor/](http://www.dmax.de/dmotor/)

Look out for the video in which Sabine races a Mercedes McLaren SLR around the Nürburgring in pursuit of an acrobatic aeroplane.

Her website: [www.sabine-schmitz-motorsport.de](http://www.sabine-schmitz-motorsport.de)



## BOOK YOUR RING TAXI RIDE

Start with OK Speed Marketing. Phone on 0949-2691-93 20 20, or go to [ringtaxi@ok-speedmarketing.com](mailto:ringtaxi@ok-speedmarketing.com), [www.bmw-motorsport.com/ringtaxi](http://www.bmw-motorsport.com/ringtaxi) or [www.ok-speedmarketing.com](http://www.ok-speedmarketing.com).

Ring-taxi tickets are usually booked long in advance. Reserve them online. Check regularly for availability. Tickets prices are per car (three passengers) and cost around €200.

Find more info on self-drives around the ring at [www.nurburgring.de](http://www.nurburgring.de), and if you want to rent a race car at the ring, go to [www.rent-racecar.de](http://www.rent-racecar.de)

IMAGINE A WOMAN  
WHO CAUSES YOUR  
PALMS TO SWEAT  
WHEN SHE TAKES  
OVER THE WHEEL,  
THEN RECOMMENDS  
AN EXCELLENT  
VINTAGE  
AFTERWARDS

TODAY BMW STANDS for 'Breakfast Must Wait'. If you intend to join Sabine Schmitz around the 73 corners of the world's most famous racetrack, she recommends that you don't have breakfast before you climb into the passenger seat of her BMW M5 ring taxi.

With a V10 under the hood and 378kW it is definitely the most powerful taxi available for hire in the world and Sabine is the fastest hack. With the M5 taxi service on the ring BMW wanted to demonstrate the 'sportiness' of its car. Experience a lap as a passenger and you know what they are talking about.

But let's find out a little more about Schmitz before I join her for a lap to remember on the largest, most fearsome race track in the world, one which has taken more than 200 lives over the years: the Nürburgring Nordschleife. It was once named the 'green hell' by F1 driver Sir Jackie Stewart, a name that stuck.

But back to Sabine, who was born on May 14, 1969, very close to the Nürburgring. Instead of listening to soothing lullabies, she grew up with roaring engine sounds in her ears. She was six months old and screaming like crazy when her dad took her around the ring in his car for the first time. Her parents are hotel owners at the Nürburgring and so she learned the trade as well. She is a fully qualified hotel manageress and a sommelier. Imagine a woman who not only causes your palms to sweat when she takes over the wheel, but recommends an excellent vintage afterwards for relaxation purposes. Oh, did I mention that she recently got her helicopter flying licence as well.

Back down to earth. Aged 17 she wanted to drive the ring herself, and her mother's car suffered quite a bit in the process. At 19 she set a lap record in a Ford Sierra Cosworth with a time of 8min 16sec.

In 1995 she did Cup racing in South Africa in super touring cars, followed by a stint in Brazil in 1999. She won the Nürburgring 24-hour race in 1996 and 1997, piloting a BMW M3, and currently races a Porsche 997 GT3.

Just as well Dieter didn't have time for breakfast. Sabine's warm-up lap is lightning quick



Sabine's current Nordschleife lap count is about 24,000, nearly 1,200 laps a year. Her mantra: 'Everybody can drive fast on the autobahn, but drifting sideways at 140kph on the ring is completely different.'

In 2004 she added to her fame count when she challenged Jeremy Clarkson of *Top Gear*, claiming she could beat his lap time of 9min 59sec proudly set in a Jaguar S-Type diesel – in a Ford Transit van.

It was absolutely hilarious to see her throwing the Transit (high centre of gravity, 0-100kph in 45 seconds) around the bends, overtaking guys on superbikes. Even with her skills, various weight reductions and the slipstream of a Dodge Viper, she missed Jeremy's time, if only by a small margin. Still, 10min 08sec is a lap time most mortals in a Porsche would struggle to reach.

It was good publicity though. 'I am still getting e-mails from as far away as New Zealand,' she said. Sabine appeared on a few more *Top Gear* episodes, challenging the Stig to a shootout and winning the 'best German of the year' award.

Since 2006 she has co-hosted her own TV motoring show *Dmotor*, on the DMAX channel. It's a bit like a German version of *Top Gear*, especially when Sabine does crackpot things like racing an acrobatic aeroplane around the Nürburgring in a Mercedes McLaren SLR.

But enough talking, time to board Sabine's M5. To be honest I am quite nervous.

'It is my first ride of the day,' she says, 'a bit of a warm-up lap for the brakes.' OK. I try a little small talk to calm my nerves.

'How do your male colleagues react to your driving skills?'

'Well, at first they were very helpful, showing me tricks and the ideal racing line, until I overtook them after two bends...'

'And what about accidents Sabine, how many times have you crashed here?'

'Can't recall,' she says with a wide smile and passes the little toll gate at Germany's longest,

public one-way road. Yes, public. The 20.8km Nürburgring is part of Germany's road system. In case of an accident (several during public days), the police will file a report. Your car has to be street legal to enter the ring, but otherwise anything on wheels can (and does) go.

From superbikes to sightseeing buses, with GTRs, GT3s and AMGs thrown in, it's a hilarious and exciting mix, especially for the many spectators, who put the craziest stunts on YouTube. The entrance fee to a lap of the hell translates to less than R200.

Whenever Sabine's white BMW appears on the scene, there is a queue of cars waiting to enter her slipstream and discover her ideal racing line. 'People queue up to follow me around the track, but after a few bends, they disappear from my rear view mirror.'

'OK, ready, off we goooooo.' I am finished with small talk and pressed into my seat. Sabine calmly talks about the track. Legendary names like Hatzenbach, Flugplatz, Schwedenkreuz, Fuchsröhre and Adenauer Forest roll off her tongue, as her hands and feet work frantically. Lots of green foliage rushes by. Sabine is drifting around the corners.

Then Bergwerk – I remember, that's where Niki Lauda lost most of his ears during the final Nürburgring F1 Grand Prix in 1976. Then the really fast section through Kesselchen and into the most famous turn of them all, the banked Karussell – a rattling, bone-crunching experience. The roller-coaster ride continues over climbs of up to 18% and through various left-right sweeps. Brunnchen, Pflanzgarten, Schwalbenschwanz, and back on the long straight past Döttinger Höhe. How time flies when you're having fun.

Danke Sabine, that was amazing.

I have to conclude that a ride with Sabine around the world's most demanding race track is real bucket list stuff. And it's probably the most intense ten minutes a guy can spend with a woman without getting into trouble with his wife or girlfriend. **TCM**