

RSRSPA LEARN SPA WITH THE EXPERTS

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR TRACKDAY LOCATIONS IN EUROPE. DRIVER TRAINING EXPERTS RSRSPA SHOWED JASON HARDY THE ROPES

Based a stone's throw from the Nürburgring, RSRNurburg is a one-stop shop for car rental and tuition on the Nordschleife. RSR also offers a premium trackday and Driving Academy experience at Spa-Francorchamps, where there are fewer corners to learn and the instructors can focus more on improving technique, without having to worry about *Touristenfahrten* traffic.

Suffice to say, RSR is very thorough with its approach, starting with the basics of car-handling and how to hold the steering wheel before moving on to the theory of how to actually go faster on the track.

The first thing I was asked to do was adjust the seating position to where I thought it should be – and it



was completely wrong. My instructor, Luis Ramirez, explained that I sit too far away from the controls to maximise braking force – and, sure enough, moving further forwards made a massive difference.

My weapon of choice was a BMW 235i, which was a bit like bringing a knife to a gunfight in terms of the other cars at the trackday, but it was quite soft in its settings and a reassuring car to learn the track with.

I was desperate to prove that I was already a good driver, but to my dismay Luis dragged me in after three laps and said: "That was really quite bad."

"Brutal!" I thought, but then we set about improving by breaking the lap down into sectors – La Source to Les Combes for four laps, then Les Combes to Fagnes and Fagnes to the Bus Stop – before working on stringing a complete lap together.

Sitting down with Luis after each session and talking about why I should be braking earlier here or taking a later apex there was very helpful. When you're in the car in the heat of the moment it's hard to process it all, but we were carrying data loggers so we could follow

where I was improving throughout the day.

The hardest thing to get my head around was the fast left-hander at Blanchimont. My sense of self-preservation kept kicking in and I would lift off before turning in and getting back on the power, but Luis insisted that I could take it flat. It was a big learning curve, moving out of my comfort zone and building up the belief that I could do what he was telling me the car could do. In that one morning, I found nine seconds.

With Luis's instructions still whirring in my head, I was challenged to go out on my own and knock a further second off my lap time. This time I went out with the lap timer turned off to help me focus on spotting apexes without thinking about the time. When I came back in, I'd found another three seconds.

I've been doing trackdays for some time now but had never timed myself before, so it was great to quantify my progression. Had I been there on my own I would have been left scratching my head, but I definitely came away from the RSR Academy a better and more confident driver. ■

RSR DRIVING TIP APPLYING THROTTLE AND THE 'STRING THEORY'

One of the most common mistakes drivers make on track is over-slowing the car at the entry and then trying to win back the lost time by applying the throttle too early, thinking they can still 'fix it'.

This actually has the opposite result, plus the driver will then complain about mid-corner

understeer or oversteer.

I tell people to imagine they have a piece of string tied to the bottom of the steering wheel, which is also attached to the accelerator pedal. While you are still cornering, the string is tight and does not allow you to fully press the accelerator.

As you start opening your line

and removing steering lock, the imaginary string allows you to gradually apply more throttle, without unbalancing the car. With less cornering load, there is more traction available. It's not uncommon to find that your ill-handling car is now 'fixed' by applying this technique.

LUIS RAMIREZ

