MOLSHEIM
10/28/2019

ANDY WALLACE — DREAM JOB AS BUGATTI TEST DRIVER



Le Mans winner Andy Wallace has been testing Bugatti models and training customers since 2011

Mirrored sunglasses and a big grin. Andy Wallace is always in a good mood when he arrives at work in the morning. This former Le Mans winner tests Bugatti cars such as the Chiron[1] and regularly drives prototypes. British racer Wallace also recently set the world top speed record in the Chiron, becoming the first person to exceed 300 miles per hour in a production car. When Andy Wallace gets into a new Chiron, he first adjusts the seat and steering wheel to fit him, then he presses the start button on the steering wheel. The Chiron needs about five minutes to warm up properly. The tyres only offer optimum traction when they reach 25 degrees. ''It's the only way we can get full grip and transfer the 1,600 newton metres of torque to the road.''

2026 BUGATTI AUTOMOBILES S.A.S.

And Wallace should know — he's been testing Bugatti cars and taking customers to the limits of driving physics since 2011. He has covered over 100,000 kilometres in these luxury super sports cars from Molsheim, driving some 30 different Veyron, Chiron[1] and Divo[2] cars and a variety of mule vehicles and record-breaking cars. He knows all about these hyper sports cars, their nuances, their refinements, their peculiarities. "I make sure the first drive in the car is absolutely safe, that customers feel comfortable right from the outset," he says.

A THOROUGHBRED PROFESSIONAL

This 58-year-old test driver is a professional through and through. He spent more than 30 years as a racing driver. He competed in both the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the 24 Hours of Daytona on 21 occasions, winning the endurance classic once and Daytona three times. He drove the 12 Hours of Sebring 19 times, winning twice. Wallace is a long-distance man — with a delicate touch on the accelerator. He's been coaching other drivers in their own cars since 2006, passing on his knowledge and skills and supporting Bugatti developers in their work.

He came into contact with engine manufacturer Volkswagen in Formula 3 back in 1986 and later drove Audi and Bentley racing cars at Le Mans and on other race circuits. When Bugatti Automobiles S.A.S. was looking for an official test driver back in 2011, former race engineers remembered Andy Wallace, that reliable, reserved, precise driver. "Actually, when my racing career ended I thought that would be the end of me sitting in powerful cars. But then Bugatti came up with an offer I couldn't refuse," smiles Andy Wallace. That's because the Chiron and Divo are in almost all respects faster and more powerful than the racing cars he used to drive.

As far as he's concerned, it's a privilege to drive Bugatti models regularly. "I've been mad about cars since I was five years old. I watched my first race at the age of eight, and then I drove in races myself for 33 years. And now I have the opportunity to drive such fantastic cars, with all that incomparable acceleration incorporated into a true luxury car. As a racing driver, it goes without saying that I love speed and lateral forces," he says. The beautiful production site in Molsheim and the great team are added bonuses. Every day in Molsheim is a pleasure for him.

Wallace loves these hyper sports cars — they have more power than his racing cars, but they're still so different. "The acceleration of a Chiron is completely unlike anything else. The Chiron accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 2.4 seconds, to 200 km/h in less than 6.1 seconds and to 300 km/h in just 13.1 seconds. There's no lack of efficiency in the middle, which was a complete surprise," says Wallace. He tests acceleration on the runway at Colmar Airport near Molsheim, or on a high-speed oval in Ehra-Lessien in Lower Saxony. That's also where he also broke the speed record.

TEST DRIVES THROUGH ALSACE OR AROUND RACE TRACKS

No two weeks are alike. Wallace usually arranges test drives for customers, demonstrates the car to them and takes them around beautiful routes through Alsace. If he mainly has to demonstrate the performance of the hyper sports car, which has a top speed in excess of 420 km/h, he charters a race track such as Le Castellet in France. Customers can really put their foot down there and reach speeds of up to 370 km/h. "But Bugatti isn't just about pure

speed, even though we recently broke the speed record at 490,484 km/h and were the first manufacturer to exceed 300 miles per hour. The Chiron is more than just a fast car, though. It's not a racing car, it's a comfortable luxury super sports car that's very, very fast," says Wallace. He even enjoys travelling in the passenger seat.

Many Bugatti customers also own other super sports cars. Outputting 1,500 PS, the Chiron is at the very pinnacle of performance. But that's not all. "As soon as they get in the car, customers notice that Bugatti manufactures luxury cars to perfection. When driving, most people are surprised to find that these models are easy and comfortable to handle," says Wallace. First you get the respect, the awe in the face of so much power. Then comes the pleasure of acceleration, the luxury, the workmanship, the quality of the car.

"When you see a Bugatti for the first time, the first thing you notice is its design and quality. Only when you really get to grips with the cars do you see the superb parts, the engineering and the way the engine and transmission work in harmony," he says. In addition to the performance, he's impressed by the tidy, minimalist interior. "There are no unnecessary buttons, switches or displays to distract the driver — and yet all the important information is conveyed. It's pure luxury," he says.

Besides the performance and speed, he's particularly impressed by the technology and innovations that go into Bugatti cars. "The Chiron and the Divo, with their 8.0-litre, 16-cylinder engines and four turbochargers, are unique in motoring history," he says. But he also likes classic cars such as the 1925 Bugatti Type 35. "Back then, the Type 35 demonstrated that anything was technically possible. It's a true masterpiece," he says.

Compared to the Bugatti Veyron (2005-2015), the Chiron — which has been in production since 2016 — offers not only significantly more power, but also more traction and assistance systems. "The Veyron was in a class of its own and is still a truly brilliant car. With the Chiron, the entire package has been improved still further," he says. The stability control reacts more quickly, the entire 1,600 newton metres of engine torque is transmitted to the road even in first gear. "The Chiron's downforce has been significantly increased, and the chassis quickly smooths out any bumps in the road. There's virtually no roll, and braking is even more powerful. The Chiron is very easy to drive, and it never fails to amaze me," he says.

He reckons the luxury element is the biggest difference between a racing car and a Bugatti. Racing cars just have to be able to produce all that power on track, while a Bugatti has to be comfortable enough for everyday use as well. "Every time I shut the door, I think to myself, 'what a brilliant job I have. I'm sitting in the best car in the world!' How fantastic is that?" he asks himself, sliding his mirrored sunglasses up his nose and putting his pedal to the metal.

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[1] Chiron: WLTP fuel consumption, l/100 km: low phase 44.6 / medium phase 24.8 / high phase 21.3 / extra high phase 21.6 / combined 25.2; CO2 emissions combined, g/km: 572; efficiency class: G