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Track Time, Anytime



ULTIMATE FANTASY 6

HAVING YOUR OWN RACETRACK

As automotive fantasies go, what could be better than having your very own racetrack, where you can do as many laps as you want, whenever you want? Where the only other cars on the track are those you invite? And, for the ultimate in convenience, why not have it next door to your house? Because aesthetics count, too, you'd select a scenic location with views all around. Your house would be a beautifully renovated, 150-year-old Dutch colonial with an adjacent restored barn. To hold all the toys, a modern museum building would be ideal, with a 5000-square-foot pole barn as the working garage space. That's exactly what Alan Wilzig has created for himself on 275 acres in New York's Columbia County.

Wilzig shares this enviable setup with his very blond, very photogenic wife, Karin, and the couple's two young children. Wilzig Racing Manor, as it's called (it has its own Facebook page), is less than three hours north of the family's townhouse in Tribeca. The Wilzigs also have a condo in Marbella, Spain. Says Wilzig: "The inspiration for this whole place comes from Klaas Zwart, who built Ascari Race Resort in Ronda, Spain, which is about sixty kilometers from the beach in Marbella, where our condo is."

The former banker had a major "liquidity event" when he sold The Trust Company of New Jersey to North Fork Bancorp in 2004 for \$765 million, after which he came to the town of Taghkanic looking for a home site that also would accommodate his plans for a private racetrack. "I asked the broker, 'Is there any restriction on paving?'" he recalls. "She said, 'No. Why? Do you want to make a superlong driveway or something?'" He explained that he had something a little different in mind: a track for himself and his

friends. When she said, "I don't really know what you mean," he replied, "Yeah, I know. No one is really going to know what it means until it happens."

It didn't happen right away, however. Although he was granted permission by the town zoning board, a group of local activists waged a five-year fight to block construction. As the *New York Times* reported, the group opposing the racetrack was, demographically, much like Wilzig: wealthy ex-Manhattanites or weekenders. Interestingly, the indigenous population, which might be expected to oppose the grandiose plan of a rich newcomer, had no problem with it. All his contiguous neighbors signed letters and affidavits of support. Claims Wil-

Counterclockwise from above: The modern museum building houses some of the toys. Alan and Karin Wilzig in their continuation Lola. Go-karts, complete with Wilzig Racing Manor logos. Getting strapped into the Ariel Atom, with pace car and support truck in background. Top right: Rally car at play behind a mermaid statue (Karin modeled). Right: Wilzig Racing Manor, as seen from the air.



BY JOE LORIO ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS MONROE



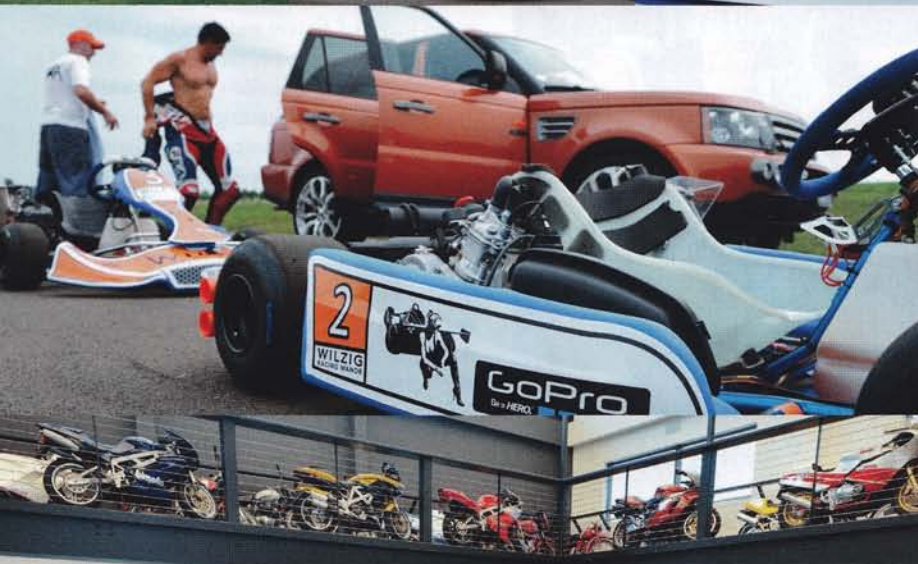
zig: "They said, 'He's the first rich guy to come up here and buy a farm who's not a jerk. And he invites our kids over to go dirt-biking and have pizza and ride ATVs. We've been riding snowmobiles and dirt bikes on that field for forty years before Wilzig knew where Columbia County was.'"

The green light finally came in October 2010, in a unanimous 5-0 ruling from the Appellate Division of the State of New York Supreme Court. Wilzig started paving twelve days later. Final paving was completed the following spring.

The track, shaped like the letter C, is 1.15 miles long and 40 feet wide, features 86 feet of elevation change, and can be run in either direction; a crossover allows it to be further reconfigured if he's running solo. Wilzig describes it as a very technical, tricky course; it was intentionally designed that way to keep him from getting bored over the next twenty years of playing on it. A few of the particularly interesting elements are a 20-degree banked turn, a 210-degree carousel, and turn 2. "It doesn't look like much of a corner because the angle of radius is slight," says Wilzig, "but because it's a blind hill, much like Laguna Seca's Corkscrew, you must begin initiating that turn—whether you're in a car, bike, kart, it doesn't matter—before you can see what's on the other side. If you wait, it's too late. You'll end up in the gravel or in the ditch."

Asked whether he picked particular corners to model in designing his track, he says, "I did not. I went purely based on the topography and the flow of the land." Keith Code, of the California Superbike School, helped with the design, particularly the location of pit lane. Code suggested moving it from the straightaway for safety reasons. "You want to have your pit out, or pit in, at a portion of a curve, even though it sounds counterintuitive," Wilzig says, "because everyone who's going to do another lap will initiate their turn toward the apex, and anybody who's leaving will veer off to the outside."

Measures protecting the safety of corner workers and spectators leave most tracks encased in what Wilzig describes as "layer upon layer of ugliness"—concrete barriers, tire walls, and chain-link fencing. With no corner workers here, the only concern was spectators, and for them he built a 1000-square-foot, post-and-beam



style “tree house” observation building that is across the driveway from the track but affords an expansive view of 95 percent of the track surface. “I couldn’t undermine the most important precept, that this place can never feel like a house slammed up next to a racetrack,” he says. “The point was to feel that you’re on a country gentleman’s farm that happens to have a racetrack on one of its fifty-five-acre fields.”

What, exactly, does he drive on his pristine playground? Motorcycles—he has 110—and also four-wheeled toys like his Ariel Atom and his Gardner Douglas replica of a 1966 Lola T70. Of late, however, it has mostly been karts, because they’re the best preparation for his next dream.

Even as he has achieved one ultimate gearhead fantasy, Wilzig is pursuing another. This one has roots in his childhood. Sports weren’t a part of his life growing up—his father, a Holocaust survivor who had spent his teens in a Nazi concentration camp, prized education above all else and felt that sports were a waste of time better spent learning. “So as a normal American kid, I had to pick my own stuff to get excited about,” Wilzig says. Those two things were the Dakar Rally and the 24 Hours of Le Mans. “As a fifteen-year-old boy in Clifton, New Jersey, in 1980, I can almost assure you that there was no one else who gave a damn about the 24 Hours of Le Mans or the Dakar Rally. But for me, as cliché as it sounds, they were both the ultimate test of man and machine, and therefore really fascinating.”

So in 2011 he formed Wilzig Racing (alanmoto.com), and he is currently competing in his second year of IMSA Cooper Tires Prototype Lites. Why IMSA? “Because it’s the modern version of IMSA Camel Lights that I watched as a kid,” he says. Next year, the plan is to step it up and start taking rides as seats become available with different teams in the American Le Mans Series and get points from the ACO [the Le Mans sanctioning body], “so that by the year of my fiftieth birthday [three years from now], I will run—in a prototype—at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, and I’ll be able to check off that Steve McQueen fantasy after thirty-five years.” After all, one great dream deserves another. **AM**

From top: Wilzig and friends racing motorcycles (the curbing’s orange and white are the Wilzig Racing colors). The restored farmhouse was original to the property. The Lotus and the Maserati are for the road, not the track or the barn. Yes, that’s Karin in the Wilzig Racing logo. Alan changes out of his leathers before climbing into a kart. Karin and Alan in the museum building; says Alan of his collection: “Most of it was acquired on eBay—at three o’clock in the morning.”