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## McLaren pairs product with experience for P1 GTR drivers

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*McLaren P1 GTR*

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

British automaker McLaren is focusing on experience and exclusivity with the P1 GTR Driver Programme.

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What the brand calls "the world's most exclusive McLaren owner experience" debuted this year and began at the Circuit de Catalunya in Barcelona, Spain. An exclusive, experience-driven promotion helps McLaren distance itself from competition and honors its heritage by giving consumers a glimpse of the professional autoracing lifestyle.

"In the long run the direct ROI to McLaren is better measured by customer satisfaction, not revenue," said JP Canton, senior public relations manager for the Americas, **McLaren Automotive**. "In fact, the McLaren P1 GTR is backed by a goodwill warranty, despite them being track cars. The P1 GTR program was designed to give much more experience to the drivers than our competitors, and the goal is to keep McLaren owners happy and loyal to the brand as repeat customers."

### Racing ahead

For a bit more than \$3 million, McLaren enthusiasts not only get to drive the 2015 McLaren P1 GTR, but also receive training and racing tips from McLaren's autoracing team and do laps on tracks all around the world. In addition to Barcelona, the program will also make stops at tracks in Malaysia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, providing participants with an experience in addition to a vehicle.





### *McLaren P1 GTR Driver Programme in Barcelona, Spain*

The program offers training with McLaren autoracers, access to a racing simulator and driver coaches and support along with a chance to circuit the racetrack. The program will prepare drivers to make full use of the 986 bhp vehicle.

"The McLaren P1 GTR has been a unique project, where the design and engineering teams were not limited to the restrictions of a road car or a set of race regulations," said Paul Mackenzie, executive director of McLaren Special Operations, in a statement. "As a result, the car is a no compromise racer, focused on track performance."

Consistent with luxury service expectations, the experience will be customized to each driver with support from McLaren Special Operations (MSO), the brand's bespoke division, and professionals from within the McLaren autoracing world.



*McLaren autoracing helmet*

As a testament to the success of the training program, chief test driver for McLaren Chris Goodwin said in a statement, "The performance of each driver, and the improvements made over the course of the three days on track showed how effective the driver training program in the build up to the event has been, and it proved to be a lot of fun! Every driver was close to the performance they showed on the simulator straight away, highlighting just how realistic the system is, and the bespoke nature of the program, ensured each driver was engaged with the training at their individual levels.

"This first event gave the drivers the first taste of what the McLaren P1 GTR can really do, and it has got each and every one of them hooked for the rest of the calendar," he added. "From here, we will visit some of the most exciting and challenging circuits around the world."

Consumers of all ages increasingly want luxury brands to deliver experiences and fulfill dreams rather than merely provide products, and this is necessarily more difficult in some sectors than others. Providing a world tour experience with the purchase of a car shows that that McLaren is prepared to go the extra mile to offer a genuine experience rather than market a product as one.



*GTR Driver Programme image*

Just as significantly, the program honors rather than dilutes brand identity, offering consumers an experience that invokes McLaren's autoracing associations and gives them a taste of the profession in a way that many other brands cannot.



## Different track

The GTR Driver Programme is an exemplary step in McLaren's transition to an automotive brand from a racing brand, targeting consumers but invoking heritage as well.

A McLaren executive at the Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2013 discussed the challenges faced by the brand after its relaunch as an automotive brand in 2011.

Although McLaren is now 52 years old, the brand was originally dedicated to racing and still maintains strong ties to the racing world. To extend brand awareness to consumers who are not car enthusiasts, the brand originally initiated a series of collaborative events and highly targeted driving events, which continue to this day ([see story](#)).

Many other automakers are taking a different route to innovation than McLaren, giving the latter brand a less competitive field to work within.

German automakers Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi are among the leaders in strategy and execution in autonomous cars, with Tesla and Jaguar a bit further behind, according to a new report by Navigant Research.

Although fully self-driving cars are still at least a decade away, pieces of the technology are already being implemented into vehicles today, meaning that the battle to be first is already waging. Because of the safety and ease of such a vehicle, the first brand to release an effective, fully autonomous car could capture a sizable segment of the market ([see story](#)).

As a car with ties to racing, both manual driving and experiences are integral, which has prompted the brand to go a different direction.

This is an era when consumers have many choices when purchasing an automobile, and almost all of them are good," Mr. Canton said. "With a premium brand the lifestyle and the experience are very much deciding factors in either initial purchase or a decision to stay with a brand long term.

"The P1 GTR owners are at the most exclusive level, where the program experience is something you can't buy anywhere else: spending your weekends with the CEO of our company, having access to our Formula 1 simulators, and enjoying the company of likeminded individuals- which is often good for business networking as well as leisure. These are all things that don't happen when you buy a car and the experience often ends as soon as you drive off the dealership lot."

## Final Take

*Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York*