



# *The Driving Force*

**Jakub Hanus**

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Jakub Hanus founded Ricard & Bonette six years ago, to share his passion for automotive travel design. He speaks to Explorer about fast cars, great roads and lifestyle experiences.

**What's your favourite ever place to drive?**

I really love alpine countries because they provide the best driving conditions. Switzerland has great mountain passes. I recently discovered a beautiful loop in Catalunya, from Barcelona towards Andorra. My most favourite region is the Maritime Alps, above the Cote d'Azur. There's this wonderful road, 280 kilometres of twisting road, curvy mountains, no villages and no cars. It's literally an open road, but you have Michelin-starred restaurants on this road. Drive it for a day then the next day you can be at the coast, sailing to Monaco.

**Have you always been a sports car enthusiast?**

No. By lucky chance I changed industry. I was in marketing and changed jobs to work at a startup, a luxury car hire company. It was my first time driving a Porsche. I'd never driven a sports car before and I realised oh my god, this is so cool, this is not just a car that gets you from A to B, it's a beautiful experience. Customers were coming to us and renting a Porsche or a Ferrari and asking, where can I go with the car to enjoy it. So I started creating packages for them.

**Was it this that inspired you to start Ricard & Bonette?**

I moved to Switzerland and my wife didn't appreciate Switzerland. She moved back to the Czech Republic and I had these free weekends. I'd pick a car from our supersports car garage and drive on my own through Switzerland, France, Italy, staying in beautiful hotels, trying great restaurants. But I couldn't share it with anyone. I moved back to the Czech Republic to join my family when my son was born and stopped working for the car hire company. I'd experienced so many

beautiful places and cars and wanted to share it with others. So this is where the idea for Ricard & Bonette came up. The agency has been running six years now. We are still in the era of beautiful V8 and V12 engines, so we rent beautiful supersports cars - like McLaren, Ferrari, Porsche - and we organise driving tours throughout different regions.

**You started by operating driving tours on Europe's roads, so how did Formula 1 come up?**

We have an exclusive partnership with a French company who can provide a true Formula 1 experience. It's not just a test drive. This really is Formula 1, driving the F1 cars that were racing in the time of Senna and Lauda, on Formula 1 circuits like Catalunya. It's about the experience of trying something new. Of course you cannot push the car to the limits because your brain is not even accepting the limits.

**Many people think they can drive better than they can. Have you ever had mishaps in these Formula 1 cars?**

You cannot just sit behind the wheel of a F1 car and go on the racetrack. You need to learn how to even start the car, what to be careful of, what the speed should be, how to go on the brakes. And each circuit is different. We start with two to three stints in a Formula Renault. Professional instructors monitor you and give you a debriefing. When you meet their recommendations and progress, only then can you drive Formula 1. It feels fast to take a corner at 90 km/h, but F1 drivers will do the same corner at 180 km/h!

**Formula 1 is really capturing people's attention again. You must be a big fan?**

Yes, people have discovered the Formula 1 world and it will continue to grow in popularity over the next few years. We do VIP hospitality packages to the events and the most popular race is Monaco, because of course it's Monaco, it's different. When customers come with us, it's not that much about the race, it's about the party as well. We have a three-deck yacht in Port Hercule close to the racetrack. People can also walk to the racetrack and go to one of the grandstands, so there are three places to watch the race. There's premium catering, unlimited Champagne, plus some celebrity appearances. This year we will have Mark Webber joining us.

**That's not really the petrolhead experience people may associate with automotive travel design?**

No, most of what we do is for people who are searching for extraordinary experience. It's not for people who dream of buying a Ferrari, it's for people who want the feeling of driving a Ferrari and then comparing it to a Lamborghini, a McLaren. These people don't have a need to buy a sports car. They like the whole package - great cars, great hotels, great company, amazing food. It's the entire lifestyle they love. We do have some clients with three or four supersports cars who want to drive them, so there is still the petrolhead thing in some of what we offer.

**What's the uber-petrolhead experience then?**

We have events on a racetrack, like a training on the Red Bull Ring, called Toys4Boys. First you drive a KTM X-BOW, an ultralight open roadster without a windscreen. You go above 150kph and it feels very dramatic. Next it's Formula 4. Then a professional driver gives them two crazy laps in a limited edition Porsche GT2 RS Clubsport.

At the end we have an open pit lane and everyone gets to drive their own machines on the racetrack.

We just came back from a drifting experience in Austria, driving Subaru WRX STIs and real-wheel drive Toyota GT86s on the snow and ice. Another one is in Sweden. We go to a very small village with just 30 inhabitants and one hotel. Next to the hotel there is a huge icy lake and we drive Subarus, sliding the car at 130 or 140 km/h. It's more than two full days of driving, we even have a night race.

**What's the future for automotive travel design?**

Electrification is slowly coming. Still we are not there. Right now electric cars have a range of 500 kms but that's just on paper, when you drive on a public road it's less than half of that. When the range is 1000 kms we will do tours in electric cars and there will be demand for that.

In the past, people driving supersports cars were heroes for others. Nowadays these cars are becoming collectors' pieces. There will be more speed restrictions on the roads and more demand for eco friendly cars. So those supersports cars will move to the racing circuits and petrolheads will move to the racetracks.

**What is driving you forward?**

It sounds like a cliché but it's customer smiles. I'm trying to be present on most of the tours, so I can share my passion with customers. I see how people react when we drive a nice section. During dinner we talk about what we experienced. It's a ton of positive energy. I'm a person who wants to discover new stuff, so I want to go to Portugal and design something there. I want to do US trips, to do adventure trips in Asia, in Georgia. ■



1. A multi-day Ricard & Bonette tour along Jakub's favourite place to drive - The Maritime Alps

2. Participants on a Ricard & Bonette F1 experience behind the wheel of a Formula 1 car from the days of Prost, Senna and Lauda

3. EliteVoyage CEO Petr Udavsky goes drifting in Austria. "It was just pure adrenaline. Speed up, slow down, turn and cut a turn" says Petr. "The parking brake is for children! Sometimes it feels like you fly, but that's part of the whole experience."

