

### **Five Years of Bilster Berg – “Economy and Ecology are not Mutually Exclusive!”**

In 2004, when the idea was born to create a race track on an old military base, people were skeptical – including Formula One architect Hermann Tilke. But then he recognized the potential of the project, and went on to build one of the most challenging tracks in Central Europe. In 2018, Bilster Berg celebrated its five-year anniversary. In this interview, Bilster Berg’s Managing Director Hans-Jürgen von Glasenapp looks back, explains why he wanted to be involved in this project from the beginning, and why Bilster Berg is not actually a race track.

### **You have been involved in the Bilster Berg project since the beginning. Why did you take on this challenge, and was it the right decision?**

Yes, absolutely. It all started in 2006 when I got the offer to work on the Bilster Berg project. At that point, I already had five years of experience managing and operating a race track, but building something from the ground up was a new challenge for me, and I was excited to tackle it. It was difficult at first. For example, we had to campaign for our project at the district and state level and find backers in order to even start the approval process. Financing the project proved to be another major challenge. For us, it was clear that we would not look for public funding. But it also was not easy to find the initial supporters for this kind of idea. Then came the global financial crisis in 2008. But we did not let ourselves get discouraged. We pushed through. Today, Bilster Berg is complete and is one of the leading, most challenging race tracks in Europe.

### **How has Bilster Berg evolved over the last five years since it opened in 2013?**

There have been successes, but also major challenges. The greatest challenge was and, in part, still is today, that the Bilster Berg noise quota, meaning the maximum noise pollution permitted per day, is much lower compared to other race tracks than what the Federal Immission Protection Act allows. It wasn’t easy to explain the noise monitoring concept that was approved by the licensing authority to our customers. We were able to significantly improve this situation with an adjustment to our license, but only in 2015. Nevertheless, we still need to adjust our license based on our customers’ requirements. Recently we submitted a change request that was denied by the licensing authority. In response, we have filed a claim, and we feel certain that we will win the case in court. Due to this limitation, our marketing and sales measures are currently focused on customers for whom the current noise quota is sufficient.

### **What sets Bilster Berg apart today?**

The combination of a truly passionate, service-oriented team; the modern, clean architecture and infrastructure; and the breathtaking course, set against the backdrop of a magnificent natural landscape.

**Bilster Berg is also referred to as the “mini Nordschleife” Do you think this is a fitting description?**

Naturally, being compared to the Nordschleife is an honor for us, and also has to do with the fact that our course mirrors the surrounding natural environment. However, just like the Nordschleife, Bilster Berg is one of a kind, and therefore it can't be compared with anything, really.

**So – is Bilster Berg a race track or not?**

Bilster Berg has all of the infrastructural aspects required for a race track. But, due to our current license, we have not yet held a race in the traditional sense. However, our goal has never been to build a race track, even though it would be a great addition to our current schedule if we could host races at Bilster Berg two or three weekends a year – mainly because the circuit itself is really exciting. But our actual business model is and remains a niche area that we call “driving business”. That means that we offer a testing, event, and presentation circuit, for example for automotive manufacturers. Furthermore, thanks to our white label principle, we have already hosted film shoots – for example, we recently served as the location for the latest INFINITI TV commercial.

**Bilster Berg is so much more than just a circuit: it's an off-road course, it has two paddocks, a gourmet restaurant...**

As a project planner, and with my five years of experience on big race tracks, it was important to me that the overall concept was multi-functional and flexible and therefore profitable. It was our job to make sure that we provide our customers with all of the necessary infrastructures and services. Against this backdrop, we have taken advantage of the opportunities presented to us by the grounds to create additional modules such as our off-road course, two paddocks, vehicle dynamics test area, pit buildings, and a restaurant. And, last but not least, thanks to this concept, we have created 25 direct and 65 indirect new jobs.

**And you have cattle on the fields, keep bees, rare plants and birds. What does that have to do with “driving business”?**

The ecological aspect has been an important part of the project from the beginning. Even though the construction of Bilster Berg involved a certain level of environmental impact, we wanted to compensate for this impact as much as possible. It is important to us that we work in harmony with nature. That is why, for example, we decided to install an environmental management system – we're the only race track in Europe to do so. This environmental management system, or EMS, helps us to ensure that our products and processes as well as the conduct of our employees and target groups remain environmentally sustainable. The EMS makes it easier for us to comply with all legal regulations and monitor that compliance. Moreover, we undergo an annual audit performed by an independent environmental auditor, thus ensuring that we comply with all legal guidelines and regulations, and making sure that we don't jeopardize our operating license. Economy and ecology are not mutually exclusive.

**What are your goals for the next five years?**

We are currently working hard to increase awareness both in Germany and across Europe. For that reason, we are entering into partnerships with start-ups and established companies in the areas of digitization, gaming, and photography and film. We are also planning to launch a new Bilster Berg merchandise collection soon. In addition, we want to expand our noise quota and build up our infrastructure. To sum it up: we want Bilster Berg to become the best, most attractive race track in all of Europe!

You can find photos here: <https://1drv.ms/f/s!AjW9Dfe3cfMPgWD4-bNYsw5FSxuX>.

