

FROM SCALPEL TO STUDED TIRES: DR. ALEXANDRU MARMUREANU CONQUERS THE FAT ICE RACE IN MONTANA

From the operating room to the ice track, Dr. Alexandru Marmureanu takes on the wild challenge of Montana's FAT Ice Race.

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What do you do when you've already conquered the pavement? When the pursuit of the blacktop becomes too commonplace for your need for speed, where do you turn? For the folks behind the eponymous FAT Ice Race, the frozen landscapes of Zell am See, Austria, and, more recently, Big Sky, Montana, are the next frontier of high-speed automotive enthusiasm.

Passion on Ice

The FAT Ice Race traces its origins to 1952, when a handful of daredevils strapped themselves to the back of motorcycles for laps around a frozen lake near Zell am See. Later that year, the skis turned to Porsches, and the inaugural race took place as a memorial to the late Ferdinand Porsche, who had passed the year before. Given that Zell am See is a short jaunt from Gmünd, where the first Porsches were born, it was the ideal location for the race. The race ran until 1974 before being rebooted in 2019 with FAT International founder and CEO Ferdi Porsche at the helm. Under him, the race has evolved into an international celebration of driving fast cars against nature's strong-handed efforts to prevent it, with drivers, creators, designers, and brands converging on the same stage.



While it might be obvious, let's get one thing out of the way: racing on ice shares little with its pavement-focused counterparts. Here, brute horsepower matters far less than finesse. Drivers must balance throttle, steering, and momentum with extraordinary precision, sliding their machines across surfaces where traction is almost nonexistent.

Despite the afternoon heat turning the frozen tundra of Montana into little more than a slushy mess, the drivers' perseverance and raw horsepower of their prepped legends marched on amid the cheering fanfare of more than 2,000 attendees. Vehicles of all makes, models, and vintages fired up their engines for a shot at the podium. It's no longer a marque-exclusive affair, and many of the participating cars with long-standing pedigrees had the chance to stretch their legs out once more, achieving the feats they were created to achieve some 20, 30, or even 40 years ago.

The FIAT Among Porsches

Winning the Classics category at this year's Montana race was fellow Romanian Dr. Alexandru Marmureanu, whose resume spans from accomplished surgeon to podium-sitting race car driver. While most cardiothoracic surgeons spend their free time decompressing from the intensity of the operating room, Dr. Marmureanu prefers something far less conventional: racing. His choice of wheels was a 1980 FIAT 131 Abarth Rally Group 4, S/N 0388232, one of the defining rally cars of its era and a product of the golden age of the World Rally Championship when Group 4 machines battled across snow, gravel, and asphalt in some of the most demanding environments in motorsport history. His FIAT is best known for winning the 1980 Sanremo Rally at the hands of famed German rally and auto racing driver Walter Röhrl, a victory that would prove paramount at the FAT Ice Race.

Embodying the spirit of Romanian rally drivers of the 1980s, Dr. Marmureanu approached the preparation for this event with the same precision he would typically prepare a surgical case. The car was tuned and prepared by Flying Lizard Motorsports and Road Scholars, while his European partners at Rallysport Development supplied the wheels and WRC-spec winter tires fitted with aggressive 7-millimeter studs designed to claw into the ice. KR Racing and Road Race Engineering maintained the car during the event, ensuring it was at its prime for the duration of the race. He even ordered a Romanian shepherd's coat, called a "cojoc," to wear on the podium, with the win already secured in his mind.



Dr. Marmureanu indeed took first place in his class, besting the numerous Porsches and other racing machines on their home turf, a feat that didn't go unnoticed. During his post-race interview with commentator Andrew Coley, he joked that for a brief moment, the event might have been renamed the "FIAT Ice Race," summarizing the weekend with a phrase that has echoed through history for more than two thousand years: "Veni, vidi, vici."

