

Cruden drives unique I-WAY simulator centre

I-WAY, in Lyon, France, is the only high-end venue in the world dedicated to motor racing simulation. Thanks to 18 Cruden Hexatech simulators, it is achieving its goal of providing the ultimate realistic racing experience for less than 100 Euros.

I-WAY is the dream of former professional tennis players and childhood friends, Pierre Nicolas and Benoit Dupré, as well as Daniel Nicolas, Pierre's father. Driven by a deep passion for motorsport, they strived to find a way to give ordinary people access to a once-in-a-lifetime realistic motorsport experience. This had to be in a car as close to a real Formula 1 racer as possible and allow guests to race against each other, truly pushing themselves, safely; all for under 100 Euros. Today, thanks to 18 Cruden Hexatech simulators and a carefully created professional motorsport-themed environment, I-WAY has achieved its goal.

"It costs between 3,000 and 5,000 Euros to drive a real F1 car on a track, and for that you get no race, you are not capable of pushing yourself to go really fast, and it is not entirely safe," says Pierre Nicolas. "With karting, you get the racing but not the car and certainly not the realistic exclusive motorsport environment. I-WAY provides access to the most realistic motorsport event that non-professionals can hope for, from just 90 Euros."

Located in central France in the trendy technology quarter of the country's second largest city and around 450 kms from the famous Le Mans track, I-WAY is organised around three simulation areas with six simulators in each. Guests can choose from Formula 1 cars, Endurance Pescarolo sports cars and Citroën C2 Rally cars. While I-WAY will always be considered a niche attraction, it has cleverly expanded its offering to cater for the corporate market, the female companions of wannabe racing drivers and the passing lunchtime trade from Lyon's professionals. Continuing its cool and exclusive, premium offering, I-WAY offers several other luxurious areas – a spa, an alcohol-free bar, a lounge bar and restaurant with two terraces, a shop and four conference rooms.

Partnership with Cruden

From the outset, Pierre knew that industrial technology would play a significant role in delivering the I-WAY concept. He soon came to the conclusion that to provide the most accurate, affordable and safe experience, he had to use simulators. Wary of creating nothing more than a glamorous video game arcade, the simulators would have to provide six degrees of freedom (6DOF). “If the experience is to be real, you have to feel the up and down movement of bumps and rumble strips, just like a racing driver would,” explains Pierre. “When you drive a car, you have six degrees of freedom. To provide anything less is not to provide a true driving simulation. You will always miss something.”

After a visit to Cruden’s headquarters in Amsterdam, Pierre became convinced their technology and capabilities would suit the ambitious project to install 18 simulators in less than 18 months. “After exploring a few different options, Cruden was the only company that had the right product available, not just as an idea on paper,” continues Pierre. “I didn’t have to pay for and gamble on a completely new system being built from scratch. We just concentrated on how to perfect a bespoke system for I-WAY. From the start, I had faith in the team’s deep knowledge.”

Reliable equipment for efficient operation

The simulators – real car bodies mounted onto motion platforms concealed under a raised floor – come complete with 100% realistic steering feedback and wraparound screens. They have been in operation for two years without any breakdown or disruption to guest programmes. The simulators are expected to endure around a further ten years heavy use before requiring an overhaul. I-WAY has people on site: mechanics and network operators who carrying out day-to-day maintenance and perform various other functions at the centre. “We need just two operators for 12 drivers,” says Pierre. “That includes conducting all the briefings, preparing the equipment and setting up the qualifying and race programmes.”

I-WAY gets online support whereby Cruden can connect remotely to resolve any technical issues and if necessary, be on site within 24 hours.

A supercharged business with potential to expand

I-WAY enjoys good awareness within France as a destination for driving enthusiasts. At weekends, all 18 simulators are almost at full capacity and Pierre is well on track to repay the five year loan agreement for I-WAY's initial multimillion Euro investment.

Pierre Nicolas concludes: "It took us four years from the blank sheet of paper to opening the doors. It was a steep learning curve and I would be delighted to spread the I-WAY concept to new countries in a much reduced timeframe thanks to our knowledge."