



From the Arctic Circle north to the top of Europe, winter is a world of snow and ice. It's a journey that requires the utmost capability. Enter the Range Rover Sport SVR – the most powerful Land Rover ever

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N O R T H

& R I S I N G



This is a journey of 1,403km from Mo i Rana in the fjords of Norway's west coast, across the mountains into the ice-locked lakes of the interior and up to a windswept spot at the top of Europe, where only the Barents Sea divides us from the Pole.

We drive through Norway, Sweden and Finland. It means three currencies, changes of time zone and various languages – in short, an international road trip. And yet, we are in fact traversing one land – Lapland – a place that obliterates national borders with an ancient common culture, and whose people are united by something stronger than national identity: the will to survive, and thrive, in one of the most inhospitable climates on Earth.



Main image: the Range Rover Sport SVR powers down a straight on an icy replica of Silverstone in Arjeplog, Sweden. Inset from left: polar explorer Ben Saunders; Silverstone in ice from the air; Finnish rally driver Minna Sillankorva

PART ONE: HOW TO DRIVE ON AN ICE LAKE

Polar explorer Ben Saunders is used to ice – but not ice driving. We found a life-size replica of the Silverstone racing circuit – home of the British Grand Prix – carved on a Lapland ice lake and handed him the keys to the Range Rover Sport SVR. Here's how he got on

"When it's going sideways you need to stay on the throttle because if you lift up, you will spin."

This is good, solid advice dispensed by Minna Sillankorva, the woman sitting beside me. She ought to know. Firstly, she's Finnish. They're so tough they scare Swedes with the temperature of their saunas. Secondly, she is an ex-rally champion. In a country that's a byword for rally drivers, that's no mean feat. Thirdly, she's a Land Rover Experience instructor, so she doesn't just drive – she knows how to teach me.

I'm no stranger to ice, having completed multiple expeditions to both Poles. Yet despite all my polar experience, I've never driven fast on ice. The 550 PS Range Rover Sport SVR is a daunting place to start. If I wasn't already nervous, the deep growl of the 5.0-litre Supercharged V8 petrol engine certainly raises a hair.

While the Range Rover Sport SVR is equipped with

traction control systems to help prevent me sliding on ice and snow in normal circumstances, these aren't normal circumstances. As we begin, Minna switches off the systems. She wants to show me how the pros do it.

"We grow up learning to drive this way," Minna explains. "We take corners with what we call the 'Scandinavian flick'. We're used to controlled slides."

Minna's first directive almost becomes a mantra – "be very careful with the throttle, there's so much power". At the same time, she counter-intuitively reminds me that to avoid a spin-out on corners, I should actually stay on the throttle. "You need to be brave enough to drive this car," she tells me.

The Range Rover Sport SVR's ride is incredibly poised. Despite the conditions, I feel completely safe, giving me the confidence to test myself further. Minna has more straightforward advice: I must feel at one with the vehicle, no sudden movements of the wheel, steady with the throttle. Slowly I learn to switch off my instinctive responses. Steer into the slide. Stay on the throttle. Don't brake. By the end of the day, I'm just beginning to feel what it must be like to be a Finnish rally driver. And I'm in need of a hot sauna. →

DRIVE ON ICE

Test yourself against the Silverstone ice track at Lapland Ice Driving in Arjeplog lapland-ice-driving.com



TESTED TO EXTREMES

"Vehicle test engineers double the population of Arjeplog during the winter test season," says Phil Talboys, manager of the Jaguar Land Rover Winter Test Centre in the small Swedish town. "We've been coming here since the early 1980s and have developed from a one-ramp workshop into a hi-tech facility testing chassis and vehicle systems in extreme cold weather. This means we test traction, handling and braking on ice, in snow and over tough frozen tracks. Our 'split-mu' ABS straight even tests two different surfaces and levels of grip at the same time. Then, when we're done, we run durability tests driving thousands of kilometres in extreme Arctic cold.

"We have customers in some of the coldest countries in the world – we want to make sure their Land Rovers always perform, no matter how extreme the weather." →



Left: the Range Rover Sport SVR makes its way through the Alta Gorge in Norway's far north. This page: crossing the Arctic Circle at 66° north on the high Saltfjellet mountain pass on the E6 highway

PART TWO: HOW TO THRIVE
IN AN ARCTIC WINTER

Everyone and everything is bred tough in Lapland to survive a winter that lasts six months and drops to lows of -40°C. Meet the experts

Crossing the Finnish frontier, we leave Scandinavia behind, but are in the very heart of Lapland. Its most defining traits – reindeer, huskies, even Santa Claus – are rooted not in Scandinavian culture, but the far older Sami and Finnish communities. Their related Ugric languages bear no resemblance to the Scandinavian ones and dominate the road signs of the region. They are the original hard guys. They survived in these parts long before Norwegians and Swedes headed north.

The Sami practice of rearing reindeer for their meat, hides and antlers as well as transport is integral to the lifestyle of Lapland. They know reindeer like no-one else. Among hundreds of words relating to reindeer in the Sami language are such specifics as *vuonjal* (a reindeer in its second winter), *heargi* (a castrated reindeer who pulls sleighs) and *ruovgat* (reindeer grunting noise).

"I'm Finnish and my husband is Sami," says a reindeer herder named Minna Kankaanpää, whose husband spends days with their herd in the wilderness in temperatures running close to -40°C. He sleeps in a *siida* or mountain camp, his herd of 5,000 reindeer surviving outside in their thick fur coats.

Minna stands astride her 150PS snowmobile, the engine growling. She wears traditional Sami clothing, including reindeer-skin boots, the only footwear she says can handle the temperatures. She is spare and precise in her movements. This is not an environment in which to expend energy unnecessarily.

"We have about 2,000 people living in this municipality and over 20,000 reindeer," Minna says. "Every winter, we bring about 20 reindeer of various ages to the farm to train for pulling sleighs. Calves are first put in the corral and later in the springtime we mark them and tie them to the trees. Then we let them go free again for the whole summer."

Reindeer are built for cold weather. The only precaution Minna takes is to feed them a little more. It's a similar story on the other side of the village where they breed another of Lapland's survivors – the husky.

"Most of our dogs are Alaskan huskies," says Anna McCormack, a Brit-turned-Laplander who runs a pack of 158 dogs. "They are bred to pull. These dogs have a soft undercoat of hair that keeps them warm through the winter and they can live outside with no problem, sleeping in the snow."

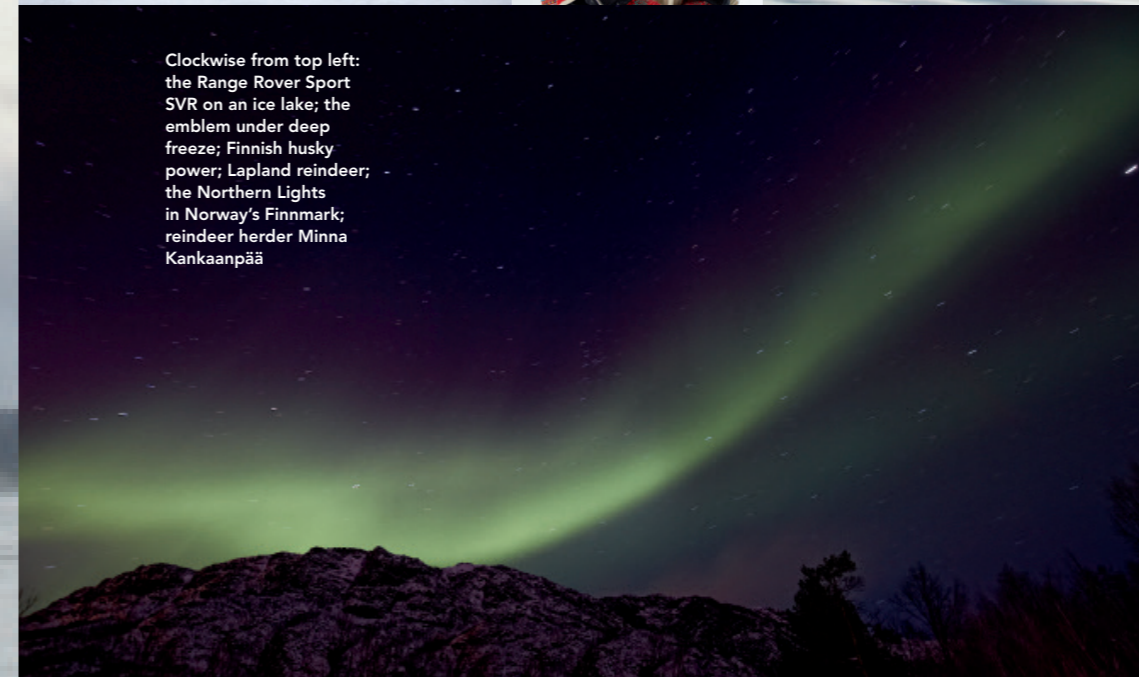
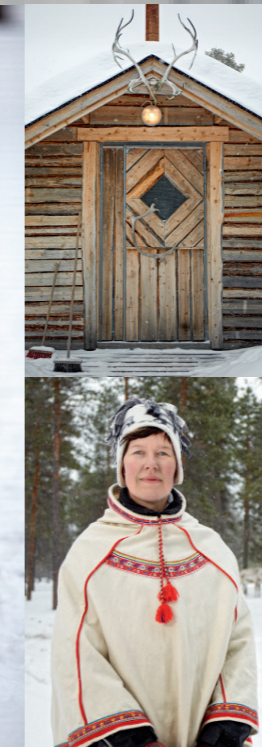
This is important since Anna leads adventure tours of up to a week across the high tundra, the dogs sleeping together for warmth at night. In smaller packs, the dogs would run free and establish a hierarchy, with a lead dog emerging. But with her huskies, Anna's the boss. "We have a lot of rescue dogs, so we are the leaders of the pack," Anna explains. "Vets visit us from all over to see the standard we're setting and share information with universities around the world."

Before the arrival of the snow- and automobile, reindeer and husky power was the only way to cross the vast distances in the Arctic winter. They are still important to the region today, complemented by modern technology. Though modern technology sometimes needs a helping hand. "We have to heat the snowmobiles to stop them

freezing in severe cold," Minna tells me, "because no matter what temperature it is, the farmer still has to go out to the reindeer."

The same is true for many vehicles up here, which have special heaters on their engines to stop them freezing. Such problems didn't affect our Range Rover Sport SVR the next morning when we woke from a night that dropped to -30°C. To the hotel manager's amazement, one press of the start button and the vehicle leapt into life. We headed north in the latest innovation designed to handle the conditions of an Arctic winter. →

RIDE BY REINDEER	
Cross the tundra pulled by reindeer power at Minna Kankaanpää's Finnish stables minnantallijaporotila.fi	
RIDE BY HUSKY	
Command your own pack of huskies in a sled ride at Hetta Huskies in Finland hettahuskies.com	



Clockwise from top left: the Range Rover Sport SVR on an ice lake; the emblem under deep freeze; Finnish husky power; Lapland reindeer; the Northern Lights in Norway's Finnmark; reindeer herder Minna Kankaanpää

"Fire and ice. Warmth and cold. Adventure and comfort. These things go together here."

Arne Bergh is a sculptor and the creative director of IceHotel – an extraordinary dream world of ice chambers running off a grand central gallery with attendant ice bar. The world famous hotel is created from about 1,000 tonnes of ice cut from the Torne River alongside 30,000m³ of snice – a mix of snow and ice.

Arne lives in a home he built across the river. In summer, he paddles to work by kayak with his laptop in a rucksack. In winter, he trades

kayak for skis. But it wasn't always this way.

"I came here as an artist, not even knowing about this place, and I slipped on the ice," Arne remembers. "I had a studio in Stockholm at that time, but I came here to find inspiration in ice as a material."

IceHotel lies in the northern reaches of Swedish Lapland. Happily, our Range Rover Sport SVR is fitted with studded winter tyres to help on roads that are nothing more than sheets of ice. Kiruna, the nearby capital of Swedish Lapland, is a city with one purpose – to extract iron ore from a vast mine. "People in Kiruna said there was no future in tourism," Arne smiles. "They said the mine is doing important things for the country and we're playing around with snow. They said it would never work."

The idea of a hotel made of ice began as an accident. An art group came to exhibit paintings in an igloo, had nowhere to stay, and had to bed down on reindeer skins. They woke with fresh faces and bright eyes – it was better than a night in a hotel.

Swedish Lapland is a land of vast resources – minerals, timber, water. Its hydroelectric dams account for almost 50% of national electricity production. Yet this igloo sat next to one of Sweden's few undammed rivers. "The Torne is an amazing river," says Arne. "It's one of the few wild rivers in Europe. You can drink the water."

The Torne is the heart and soul of IceHotel. It is exceptionally clean and its swift, uninterrupted flow means that when it freezes there is still movement. This stops air bubbles from becoming trapped in the ice. The result is ice so crisp and clear that the huge blocks standing sentry around the hotel are like great columns of glass.

The hotel has developed into a rich mix of experiences that feel like a fairytale of an Arctic winter. Your ice room hovers at -5°C, ice blocks holding up your bed on which reindeer skins are draped. Guests run from the log cabin warmth of the sauna area, where they have left all their possessions to avoid them freezing solid in the night, and wriggle into polar-grade sleeping bags.

No television, no electric blankets. Simply the silence of your ice room, uniquely carved every year by one of 50 artists invited to participate from around the world. "You should be somewhere completely different," says Arne. "You should be in nature and have another experience."

In the pale morning light, guests are woken with

warm lingonberry juice. They can then set off on husky and snowmobile trails before returning to a three-course smörgåsbord of Arctic char, moose carpaccio and fillet of reindeer. It's a formula that has captured the world's imagination.

"IceHotel is in an old Sami village, called Jukkasjärvi," Arne explains. "It means 'coming together by the river'. It's an ancient meeting place because a river is like a road – you travel on water in the summertime and on the ice in the winter. Now it's become an international meeting place for people from all over the world."

For a brief period each year – from December until April – the world's first, largest and most opulent ice hotel stands proudly on the banks of the Torne. Then it melts slowly back into the river from which it came.

"People says it must be sad after all that work, but it's not," says Arne. "I love to go in here as it melts. All the electricity has gone. Sunlight shines through the structure. Water on the ground mirrors everything. I find myself standing in the beauty of the most modern ruins in the world. Then we start all over again." □

Main image: the island of Magerøya – the most northerly point in Europe. Inset from left: the Range Rover Sport SVR at IceHotel with creative director, Arne Bergh; on the road to Nordkapp

VISIT ICEHOTEL

Experience the unique silence of a night in your own ice room at Jukkasjärvi's iconic IceHotel icehotel.com

