

motoring

Michael Schumacher helped mould Ferrari's latest, the 458 Italia, mo5
Two differing views on solving the world's auto industry problems, mo8



Ansi Oyvanen from Finland gets airborne during a round of the off-road championship. The competition features performance-enhanced dune bashers on an incredibly demanding course. Thrandur Arnthorsson for The National

Valhalla of dirt

Gordon Torbet witnesses the final round of this year's off-road competition in Iceland, a risky and riotous romp around a near impossible course by racers driving high-octane dune buggies

Delve into the sagas of Norse mythology and you'll see how revered the horse has always been to Viking culture. The Icelandic horse is a rugged breed: stocky and powerful, they are ideally suited to the unique volcanic terrain of the island.

The heritage continues, but today the horses are purely mechanical. This is the last round of the Icelandic Formula Off-Road championship – about as extreme and rowdy a form of motorsport as you can imagine.

Just north of the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik, it's 9am and the sun has been up for six hours already. Gathered in a quarry a few hundred metres from Route 1, the main highway that circumnavigates the island, is a motley crew of grease- and oil-splattered petrolheads making rapid, if make-do, repairs to big-footed 4x4 monsters. Limbs appear from be-

neath engine bays, bodies hang over gear casings, and a lone police car drives through the pits – a subtle warning that they might just get the Breathalyser out. It's been known to happen before, and several drivers have failed in the past.

Meanwhile, the marshals and drivers inspect the impossible angles and terrain they'll be expected to scramble up and over in a violent hail of scree and dust. By the end of today, one of these men and his ultimate all-terrain vehicle will reign, having clawed their way up and across treacherous vertical slopes, over (yes, over) lakes and down sheer, boulder-strewn faces. This is about as far from rock-crawling as you can get.

Iceland, continued on mo4 →