



By Rob Steele (originally published under the name Alex Lydon)

Jacob Best - Test driver

His mission today is to take the Koenigsegg Agera R to its limit. The difference between this day and his normal driving days? There won't be a track. No perfectly paved road. No ovals. And to be honest, very few guard rails. Just a man, his car, and his wits. The Koenigsegg Agera R is one of the most advanced cars on the planet. Developed in Sweden, it produces 1140 horse power and 1200 newton meters of torque. It set a world's record by going from zero to 300 kph and back to 0 in just 21.19 seconds.

The road for today's test is not where premier drivers like Jacob Best would typically find a test road. This is State Road 95 between Lenoir City and Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The locals call it: White Wing Road. It passes the Melton Hill Dam, the back-door entrance road to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory or ORNL (formerly known as the X-10 nuclear plant) and a road leading to the Y-12 National Security Complex (also formerly a nuclear power and weapons plant). The three and a bit mile road contains hills, twists, turns, a dangerously narrow trestle and something rarely thought of in Tennessee: tree-laden cliffs.

While this is a road Jacob has driven many times before, the road has been closed for driver safety, both his and anyone who would happen to be driving at the same time. The Koenigsegg Agera R is one of the most agile cars on the planet, but even Jacob Best knows that he's not going to be staying in one lane if he takes this road at speed.

The starting point is a small paved section near exit 364 on Interstate 40 across from Grubb Creek. Car and Driver magazine have strategically lined the road with cameras to catch this particular attempt. While there is no "official record" for how fast this road have been traversed, this road is well known for being extraordinarily dangerous. Many of the locals prefer to go out of their way to connect with the interstate by using exits 356 or 369. Legend has it that it got its name "White Wing" road from all the angels its created over the years.

Today, it may add one more, but tempting fate is what test drivers are born for. The conditions are perfect. A cool spring morning. No rain for the past week so the road is bone dry. Spotters have been placed along the road to warn of deer sightings. The elusive creatures are known in these parts as serious road hazards. Despite the bright daylight, the overhanging trees cause enough shadow on the road to confuse the creatures that live in the forest and taunt them into thinking the road is uninhabited when it isn't - another reason for the "White Wings."

His crew has checked the car thoroughly. It's sleek silver shape glistening in the sun. It's one visible peculiarity being the single windscreen wiper whose resting position places it proudly in the middle of the windscreen. The other oddity that sets it apart from other cars, visually, are the doors. Jacob opens the driver's door, but rather than swing out like a normal car, or flap up like the gull-wing door some high-end Mercedes Benz, the door rolls forward and up.

Jacob Best, suited up in a flame-resistant racer suit and helmet, assumes his driving position. The 5-point safety harness is strapped in place. The ignition button is pressed and the car roars to life. All of the instruments show that the car is in perfect working order. He takes the steering wheel, pulls the paddle and the semi-automatic transmission puts the car into the first of its seven gears and the car sets off.

The slow left turn and subsequent straight make for a good running start. Second gear as he passes Buttermilk Road. Third as he passes the Marine and Auto shop and the slow right turn. The car is already approaching 100MPH. Picking up speed rapidly as he crosses the first bridge over the somewhat appropriately named Clinch River – 150MPH as he approaches the gradual left.

On the follow-through, the road is no longer straight. It weaves slightly, left and right. The first real obstacle is a left turn by a water sluice. He feels the electronic differential working as the car hustles into the turn and almost immediately he spins the wheel the other direction as the road shifts again. The trees, having sprung up around him like a massive green wall around the road, blur as he reluctantly slows the car for the turn.

Another straight allows him to press the accelerator to the floor, regaining much of his lost speed. Another left ahead. This time, he attempts to retain his speed through the turn. The car drifts slightly, but not enough to be out of his control. The road drops at a sharp angle as he heads for an almost 90-degree right. Hard on the brakes. The tires screeching at the attempt to maintain contact with the road.

A brief straight and another turn, this time, left and a quick twist right and the road straightens out again. The first milestone! The temporarily non-functioning stoplight for the ORNL lab is here and gone before he even really registers that there's an intersection. The combination of the road and the car is so fast!

Another sharp left ahead followed by a 180-degree right and another 90-degree left! The tires are straining to their limits. The brakes are pulling the car one way and then another. A quick glance at the speedometer shows his speed has been reduced to 95MPH. And even then, as fast as he knows it is, as fast as the car is capable of, as sure of his skills as he is, it seems like the road is too fast for the car. Even one as spectacular as this one.

A quarter-mile straight is here and gone – another right turn. It's hard to tell if there are multiple trees. It's all a great green blur! Right again. Straight. Right. Hard left. The road suddenly darts uphill. He forces the accelerator to the floor to maintain speed... forgetting what comes next.

The upward slant is almost instantly transformed into a downward slope. Gravity is unable to contain such a drastic change in direction with this speed and the car loses contact with the road. Jacob's heart had been racing almost as fast as the landscape. For a moment, while airborne, he's pretty sure it stopped. The landscape seemed to stop. Everything seemed to stop. He was aware of the right turn.

He was also aware that he wouldn't be able to make that turn unless he returned to the ground – which he did just in time. The ground rushed up and the wheeled missile is returned to *terra-firma*.

The car drifted, but not enough to send it careening into the trees. He'd have to be more careful. Especially with what was coming up, the narrow trestle. He'd never seen a train going across this bridge. He wasn't even sure it was a train track above the road. He just knew that there was a narrow, concrete barrier, holding up the bridge and a long left-hand turn going in and coming out of the passage.

He checked the gauges of the car in the all-too-brief straight before the turn. All systems still green, although he was sure the tires might disagree. Again, he floored the car bringing it back up to almost 125MPH in the short distance before the turn, then, again, he applied the brakes as he entered the perilous curve. The concrete walls so close he could swear he could feel them. The next section of road is much easier. The road does turn left, but its gradual and over the next half mile, uphill.

Speed is of the essence. The end is in sight. Only a few more seconds and, "Thank god this road is over!" His daughter's voice from behind him made him almost lose complete control.

"She's right, honey. We really hate this road," added Mrs. Best, from the front-passenger seat. "Are you ever going to drive it normally?"

Almost. He'd almost had the dream completed. Only a few more feet to the end of White Wing Road and the return to the extraordinarily bland Oak Ridge Turnpike. Someday his family would just let him have the dream in peace. Until then, time to finish driving the minivan to the in-laws. Oh joy!

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The road in question is real and can be found here:

<https://www.google.com/maps/@35.8750249,-84.3238531,331a,35y,39.25t/data=!3m1!1e3>

The Koenigsegg Agera R is also quite real and can be found here:

<http://koenigsegg.com/agera-r/>