

# CLASSIC DRIVER



## British Motorshow 2004

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**Motorshow on Press Day. Great ambience, the cars are at their best and the manufacturers' stands and staff are positively purring. Nearly ten days of meeting and greeting await our brave car makers. But Press Day is special, and it's also the day the celebrities turn out for their favoured marques, like Maserati's latest signing, supermodel Jodie Kidd.**

Both **Maserati** and **Ferrari** had really pushed the boat out for the UK show, ably demonstrating that Britain (with Germany and the USA) is one of its most important markets. Tasteful in the extreme, the back-to-back stands were exercises in discrete Italian styling and matched the machinery displayed thereon. Only two red cars to be seen, yes an F1 car was on display - and there was also a Rosso Corsa **575** with the 'Handling GTC' pack - but pride of place for the Prancing Horse must go to the **612**, and for the Trident the **MC12** - the latter displayed on press and preview days only.

The **612** was debuting in the UK and close examination reveals an extremely elegant GT car for a discerning clientele, the most extraordinary facet of which is the rear passenger compartment space. A touch under 6', I was able to sit in the back, with the front seat in its normal position, and neither knees were cramped nor head was touching the headlining. More spacious than the Continental GT

without doubt; although whether the boot would hold sufficient luggage for a long weekend away for four is another matter. The **Maserati MC12** was finished in its natural carbon-fibre finish, this time the resin coat tinted with deep blue. The whole effect - whatever your thought of these cars and their suitability for the road - was stunning, really fabulous and a tremendous alternative for frustrated 'Enzo' buyers. There was also a '**GranSport**' on display, a sort of 'souped-up' Coupé, and Jodie Kidd's involvement was revealed to be some serious motor racing this year in a Coupé. A talented horsewoman, she has proved her skill on the track before and will be no pushover behind the wheel.

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2003

<i>Team Veloqx Audi R8 - ready for Le Mans</i>	<i>New Land Rover Discovery 3 makes its UK debut</i>	<i>Le Mans-winning Bentley - still carrying the grime of 24 hours</i>
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**Bentley** was showing two examples of the much-in-demand Continental GT, as well as the latest Arnage in its two-tone paint, and the 2003 Le Mans winner. Apparently the 'dirtier' dirt has been removed but the green car still retains most of that 'just off the track' patina. Past fellow company **Rolls-Royce** had the superb **100EX Centenary Experimental** convertible on display but this, like various other manufacturers' cars, will not be present on public days, it will be replaced by a 'normal' Phantom.

So much has been written about **Aston Martin's** sublime **DB9** it would be fruitless to add more than a note that both Coupé and Volante versions of the car will be on display for the duration, and as it's probably the first time UK buyers will have a good look at the car, the stand will be busy. Suffice it to say industry professionals on Tuesday still found time to remark on its proportions, finish and interior design details - high praise from those that have seen it all.

Sister companies **Land Rover** and **Jaguar** had some new models on show. The **Discovery 3TDV6** is going to be a winner while the long wheelbase take on the much-acclaimed **XJ Saloon** looks a creditable alternative to a BMW or Mercedes. Jaguar was also launching the same diesel engine in their product range with much soul-searching and hand-wringing as to the relevance of diesel to Jaguar. By all accounts a fantastic motor, the Coventry company should face facts that BMW, Mercedes and Audi have been doing pretty nicely thank-you with luxury oil-burners for many years now. On the **Ford** stand (an extraordinarily creative effort themed around the new Thunderbirds film) was a **GT** which looked as good as it does in pictures.

All quiet on the Stuttgart front with **Mercedes** only having an **SLR McLaren** stand and **Maybach** covering some serious footage with two gigantic limousines. Having the chance to examine both cars from the front and rear seats, I should really only say I have never their ilk before. **Audi** were using the show simply to display the new **A6**, a classically-designed and, as always with Audi, most beautifully finished machine. Other absentees, as well as M-B's regular passenger vehicles, included BMW and Alfa Romeo.

**Porsche** were showing their 'last-of-the-line' 996 911s in **Turbo 'S' Coupé** and **Cabriolet** formats, as well as the awesome Carrera GT. The road-going 911s in GT2, GT3 and 'Cup' form still look pretty good.

The show is open to the public from 28th May to 6th June.

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<i>Fabulous Rolls-Royce EX100</i>	<i>Aston Martin DB9, another UK debut</i>	<i>Jaguar XJ long wheelbase</i>
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<i>Magnificent Maseratis, MC12 to the fore</i>	<i>New Audi A6</i>	<i>Ferrari 360 'Challenge Stradale' and superb 612</i>
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*Maserati GranSport*

*Porsche GT3 RS*

*Maserati MC12 - on Press day only*

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