
Late Summer Fun

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As August draws to a close, the annual de Grisogono & Londino London to Portofino run takes its place in the social calendar. This year's event, the third of its kind, saw 20 especially invited teams in cars as diverse as Gumpert Apollo, Lamborghini Diablo, Audi R8, and Jaguar XJ8, driving, dining, and competing in 'The Londino Challenge'.

The Challenge works like this: each team is given a camera at the start of the run, this year held at the Bluebird on the King's Road in Chelsea. The team is then asked to take 14 pictures along the route to the next overnight stop. There are four challenge cards, depicting four 'motifs' which must be captured on film, plus a theme for the remaining 10 pictures. The cameras are collected at the final destination and the winners announced. Prizes include 24-carat gold Bluetooth headsets, bespoke suits and, for the overall victors, two exclusive de Grisogono Instrumento No. Uno watches.

After briefing and breakfast on Thursday 22nd August, the teams headed for the Eurotunnel and the first leg to Paris. Torrential rain and poor visibility gave way to brighter skies as the teams arrived in

Paris, where participants were given the rare privilege of parking on the Place Vendôme in front of the Ritz – permission for which given just three times a year, by the Ministère de la Justice.



Dinner and entertainment was held at the Ritz for participants and specially invited guests, such as Chantal Thomass, Stephane Bern, Anne de Bourbon and Emmanuel des Brantes.

Friday's photographic challenges covered famous landmarks in Paris and the surrounding countryside, with the theme for the day being Grisogono & Londino. Heading south on the A6 to Avallon, the teams found a dry and empty autoroute, followed by a fantastic three-course lunch at Auberge de l'Âtre in Les Lavaults: a menu of hare pâté, grey partridge and sorbet.

The next stretch of road was the N5 between Dole and Geneva, a twisting route over the Jura Mountains and down via Col de la Faucille. Those in convertible cars enjoyed the best of the breathtaking scenery.

Early arrival at La Réserve meant time to freshen up before cocktails and dinner, served out on the terrace facing Lac Léman, where drivers and co-drivers mingled with such celebrity guests as Nadine Thalmann, Safia Azzedine and Rebecca Loos.



The final leg to Portofino ran through Switzerland via the Simplon Pass. Following the lake down to Montreaux and then disappearing into the Alps, the '9' road takes you all the way to the Italian border where it appropriately changes its name to 'SS33' – appropriate, because this is just how the road ahead looks. Snow-covered mountains and luscious green hills paved the way to a buffet lunch at the Grand Hotel des Iles Borromées, with Lake Maggiore as a backdrop.

There is something special about driving to Portofino. Those winding, tunneled autostradas on the Ligurian coast of the Mediterranean make for exquisite driving, while the tunnels provide an excellent soundtrack – even for those in the quietest of machines, such as the CL 63 AMG. Meanwhile, the only German to ever sound like an Italian – the BMW M3 CSL – was one of the aural stars,

together with the brutal Diablo, the tones of their engines dancing between the walls.



After the exit at Rapallo, just 7km remained to the finish, at the ultra-luxurious hotel Splendido. Those 7km, however, are treacherous. The road is desperately narrow and corners are frequently blind, so average speeds are just 15mph. But the journey is well worth it: there should be a sign in the reception of the Splendido saying 'Welcome to Paradise'.

Pre-dinner cocktails were served overlooking the small Portofino harbour, where yachts of all sizes moor in the turquoise waters. At the final dinner and prize ceremony, Alex Roy and Michael Ross of Team Polizei took home the prizes for the Jabra and Pal Zileri-sponsored legs, while Jens Lennen and Dr Shobnah Shah of Team Nordic won the watches.

For further information please visit www.londino.org.

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