

CLASSIC DRIVER

Geneva: Design Analysis

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The Geneva show didn't arrive a second too soon. Any event that engenders endorphins and positivity (or, some might argue, naivety) in the midst of a global depression certainly has my vote. While Detroit had the atmosphere of a heavy hangover, Geneva teleported everyone back to the best bits of the night before...

First, reflect on those cars that enjoyed their world debut in Geneva: **Ferrari 599XX, Frazer-Nash Namir Concept by Giugiaro, Infiniti Essence Concept, Koenigsegg Quant Concept, Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV, Maserati GranTurismo S Automatic, Mercedes-Benz McLaren SLR Stirling Moss, Pagani Zonda R, Porsche 997 RS Evo, Rolls-Royce 200EX, Spyker C8 Aileron, Zagato Perana Z-One**... recession? What recession?

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But let's kick off with the automotive design joke of the year: the **Koenigsegg Quant Concept**. What exactly Christian (von Koenigsegg) was thinking when he gave permission to mill this monstrosity is beyond me. Apparently, there is an ecological save-the-planet philosophy behind it; fantastic, just in time then. Even if one ignores the hideous form-language and lack of stylistic sophistication, you're still left with a design model with a surface quality and level of finishing that wouldn't pass muster in even the most mediocre design school. I suspect the concept was designed solely on CAD screens. It's a perfect example of how different something is in reality – how proportions, volumes and highlights can only be judged in the physical world.



To prove that even traditional OEM brands have humour, one only needed to stay for the second press day. It would take an entire book – an entire series of books – to analyse what went wrong on the **Lagonda aka Aston Martin** stand with its marque concept. While it might be a genius idea to revive the dormant **Lagonda** brand on its 100th anniversary and position it head-to-head with the **X6s** and **Range Rover Sports** of this world, why exactly it needed to be quite so provoking, so visually challenging, is beyond me. As any investment banker will testify, in times of global recession people seek security, comfort and certainties, not another 'all-in' investment. The same should be applied to car design.



The 'baby' **Rolls-Royce 200EX** was not that small after all and quickly scored an unofficial 'best of show' vote from the pundits. Nevertheless, such details as the carry-over **Phantom** rear-view door mirrors gave it a rather disproportionate 'Dumbo' look. It certainly oozed presence and, in contrast to the **Koenigsegg**, will surely fill order books faster than the UK Government can print money. However, on the Geneva show stand, with its A-list big brothers behind it, I did wonder why anyone would choose a new **200EX** over a second-hand **Phantom**. Don't get me wrong, the **200EX** is certainly a smart choice for the downsizing oligarch... but only until a proper **Phantom** pulls up at the traffic lights. It's a bit like wearing the top-of-the-line platinum **Day-Date II** to a business lunch, only to discover that your opposite number has the same; but on both wrists.



As an indication of how distorted reality has become, there was the **Mercedes** stand. While the styling of the new **E-Class** doesn't deserve a complete sentence, it was something unexpected – in the form of the **Mercedes-Benz McLaren SLR Stirling Moss** – that made me smile. It's like a **Renault Sport Spider** on a **Tour de France** cocktail of steroids. This car isn't so much wearing a sock in its underpants: it's got the entire wardrobe stuffed down there. **Mercedes McLaren** certainly believes in the saying 'save the best for last'. This car is the equivalent of taking 'Alien vs Predator II' to Broadway; you might as well go all the way.



The undisputed **highlight of Geneva**, without any doubt, was not a car at all but rather the underpinnings

of a car yet to be finished: the limited-edition **Aston Martin One-77**. While I've previously been very critical of the concept as a whole – assuming that **Aston** was considering re-dressing a pimped-up **DB9** – I couldn't have been more wrong.



The chassis was pure engineering porn. I can think of only two other examples where showing a vehicle's underpinnings has had a similar impact – one being the aluminium-bonded **Lotus Elise** and the other the carbonfibre **Carrera GT**. The latter still provokes daydreams of owning and driving a **Carrera GT** without its body. So maybe the **One-77** chassis sums the show up quite nicely: expect the unexpected and stay authentic to the core.

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