

CLASSIC DRIVER

Art of the Automobile: The Louvre's Musée des Arts Décoratifs



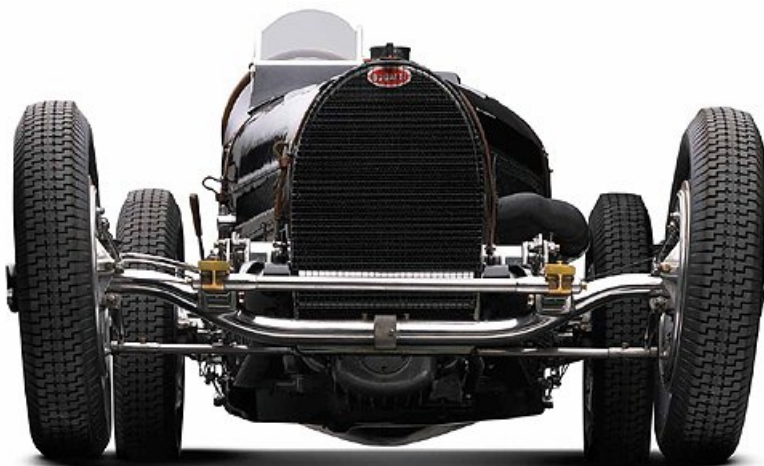
It's probably safe to assume that everyone has heard of a chap by the name of Ralph Lauren, writes Chris Hrabalek. While the majority of non-car enthusiasts might associate him with a horse - or more precisely, the outline of a polo-player on a horse - car-lovers respect him for his fine taste in automobiles, and the assortment of vehicles that he has accumulated over the past decades.

Ralph Lauren was a petrolhead from day one - long before his fame and fortune - hence it was a logical outcome that as his empire developed, he increasingly added to his automobile addiction, acquiring the cars he could previously only dream of. Today, his private collection ranges from a Bugatti Atlantic (one of only two-and-a-half still in existence) to an original Ferrari 250 GTO (one of 39 manufactured) up to a more modern classic: the McLaren F1 LM (one of only five LM commemorative editions ever assembled). Unlike other collectors that either keep their automotive treasures locked away from the public eye in oxygen tents, inside high-security nuclear bunkers, or alternatively abuse their historic masterpieces on numerous chicanes around the world, Ralph Lauren has chosen a very different route.





Ralph understands and celebrates cars as pieces of art and ultimately this explains the careful selection of vehicles that pass the stringent guidelines to be granted acceptance into his collection. He neither has the largest Ferrari collection nor does he have a fetish for colour, origin or era. The common denominator for all his cars is that they have soul; lots of it.



The Louvre's Musée des Arts Décoratifs marks the venue that currently hosts Ralph Lauren's collection. Fittingly titled 'The Art of the Automobile', the exhibition showcases 17 exceptional cars that marked the history of the automobile through its design and technical impact. Shown under art-gallery conditions with

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ideal lighting and ambient temperature, these automobiles are taken out of their natural environment into an atmosphere that makes the viewer discover angles and detailing that might previously have gone unnoticed, at a festival or in photographs.

Countless details in each of his cars, perfectly underlining the craftsmanship of its own era, must surely be inspirational to each and every one of us who appreciates the finer things of life. It is probably for this reason that Ralph Lauren's cars frequently make it into the print campaigns of his fashion empire – trying to form a bridge between fashion, art and the automobile.

It might take another few decades for collectors to realise that some automobiles are indeed works of art – as rare and culturally enriched as any painted canvas, they also reflect the time of their creation, the environment, and the feelings of the craftsmen behind them. And in this context, classic cars are still cheap, arguably too cheap, with the unique benefit that one can add experiences and memories by enjoying them in the way they were intended: blasting along the road.



Text: [Chris Hrabalek](#)

Photos: Ralph Lauren

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