

CLASSIC DRIVER

2011 Mille Miglia North America Tribute



The car count and competitive intensity might have been significantly toned down from its European namesake, but the inaugural Mille Miglia North America Tribute (October 26-28) created its own 'bella figura' with a blend of Italian spirit and culture and some of the finest driver's roads in North America.

Around four dozen period correct (1927-1957) classic cars, including the obligatory Ferraris and Alfas, a 1935 Delahaye 135 MS, a 1957 Lotus XI, a 1953 Allard K3 and American 'iron' in the form of a 1954 Corvette and 1928 Chrysler 'Mille Miglia' Roadster took to the scenic and circuitous 1,000-mile route that began and ended in Santa Barbara, with the turnaround point at San Francisco's Stinson Beach.

The 3-day drive included crossing the Golden Gate Bridge before picking up the narrow, twisting path of Highway 1 as it travels from Half Moon Bay to the surfing mecca of Santa Cruz. Then the cars headed to Monterey-Carmel, from where the legendary road clings to the rocky coastal mountains of Big Sur on a jagged path to the quaint seaside village of Cambria.





The inland roads of California's Central Coast contributed their own scenic driver's challenges as they wound around the prolific vineyards of Paso Robles and the Santa Ynez Valley.

The intention, according to Jeremy Cable of Stratus Media Group, Inc., the event's organiser, was to avoid the area's major highways while travelling on such roads as that based on the former Butterfield Stage Coach trail through Santa Ynez and Carmel Valley Road, through Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* territory. Cable said the idea was to trace California's heritage just as the Mille Miglia runs through Italy's historic towns and cities.

Besides the music and meals that feted the participants, the event's Italian flair also included Giordano Mozzi, overall winner of the 2011 Mille Miglia retrospective. Mozzi was driving an MG co-piloted by his son.



But the driver who captured the most attention was John Nikas and his 1953 Austin-Healey 100. Far from being a concours queen, the well-used Healey had just completed a 7,000-mile-plus coast-to-coast and return run to Nikas' Irvine, CA home as part of his Drive Away Cancer campaign, prior to tackling the 1,000 miles of the MMNAT.

Although there were no timed stages and thus no trophies for finishing first, Cable reports that Nikas was always the first to arrive at all the stops on the tour.

Even so, he could still be considered the event's 'winner', as he was one of five entrants selected by drawing to receive automatic eligibility into the 2012 Mille Miglia in Italy. Better yet, of those lucky five, Nikas was chosen by Stratus to have his entry fee and transportation costs fully paid.



With a five-car North American 'team' running in next year's Mille Miglia expounding on the virtues of California's scenic route, Cable expects next year's North America Tribute to include many overseas entrants eager to experience both events.



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