

CLASSIC DRIVER

5 things you didn't know about Lionel Martin & Bert Bertelli

Lead

Two leading lights in Aston Martin history, without whom we wouldn't have the brand today, were very different men. We discovered the following about Lionel Martin and Bert Bertelli.

Born with a silver spoon...

Aston Martin founder Lionel Martin was born and raised in Cornwall, until he was sent as a boarder to Eton. As a result of the maternal (Birch) side of the family's interest in the china clay industry (eventually becoming English China Clays), his was a relatively affluent childhood, and his shareholding in various family companies kept him comfortably provided for the rest of his life.

Cycling enthusiast - on two wheels or three

When Martin was at school he was given a bicycle by his mother. He took it to Oxford where he took part in races on tracks such as Iffley Road, as well as the banked venues in London including those at Wood Green and Catford. He soon turned to road riding and all his future cycling exploits were on tricycles – a popular machine in the period before WW1.

In 1945, with wartime petrol rationing in place, and by now a relatively old man, he was knocked down and killed while tricycling to his home in Kingston.



Family business

Pre-War, Bert Bertelli's brother, Enrico, better known as 'Harry', ran the independent coachworks next to Aston Martin in Feltham. The name 'Bertelli' soon came to be known as one of quality and good design. Such was the esteem in which the company was held that two founding members of the Bugatti Owners' Club, Col.

G.M and Eric Giles, chose Bertelli to body a Type 57T that Colonel Giles had ordered in chassis form in 1934. The striking roadster was christened 'Terese' and remains one of the most famous Bugattis of the period. Bertelli also restored the 1913 Bugatti known as 'Black Bess' for the Colonel. The 5-litre car had been raced at Brooklands by fast lady Ivy Cummings, and a young James Robertson Justice, the famous British actor of the 50s and 60s.

Not only the cars were sporty

While we know of Bert Bertelli as the mastermind behind Aston Martin in the 20s and 30s, and might have heard of his work at the Grahame-White Aviation company at Hendon Aerodrome in WW1, his prowess on the football and rugby fields is less reported. He played football for the Welsh National Schoolboy team, and could have been a professional when, at the age of 14, he was offered an apprenticeship at Stoke-on-Trent. As befits his early days in Wales, though, he preferred rugby and subsequently played in Cardiff's first team.



Another two-wheeler

Unlike Lionel Martin, it is not known whether Bert Bertelli – a later figurehead of the company – was at all devoted to bicycles. However, the Cloud 9 Special Bertelli bike, with its elegant, sporty appearance and 'amazing speed' (according to the catalogue) takes its name from him, rather than from Lionel Martin.

Photos: Aston Martin Lagonda / 9 Cloud Bikes

Gallery

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