

CLASSIC DRIVER

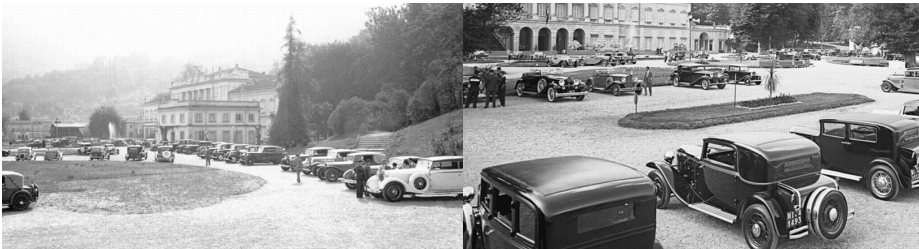
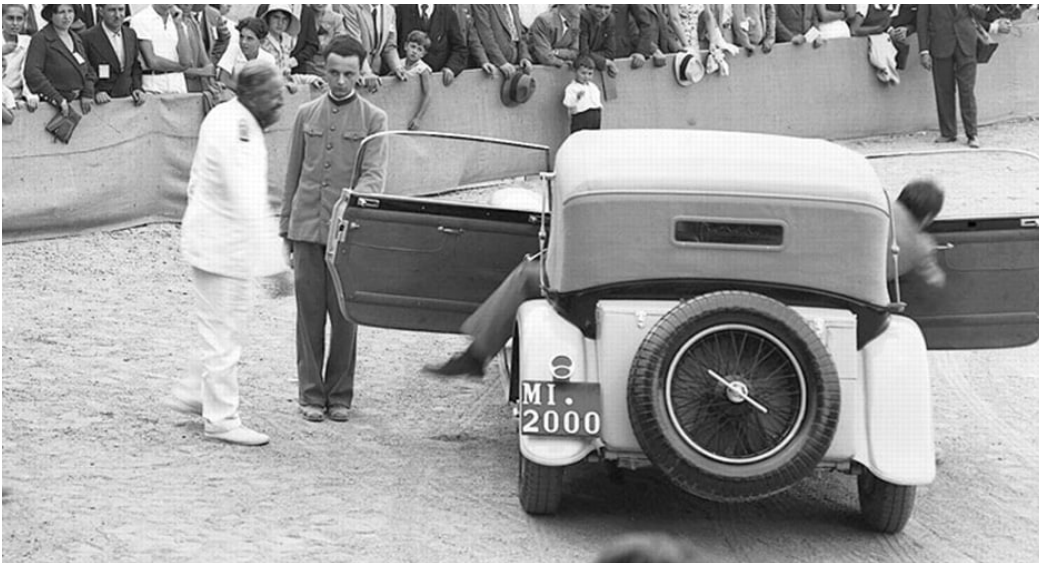
Relive the (troubled) early days of the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este

Lead

Even the name sparkles with Italian magic. In September 1929, the Coppa d'Oro Villa d'Este (or 'cup of gold') was held for the first time: a concours for the world's most beautiful cars, in one of the most beautiful places on Earth. But the timing could hardly have been worse...

It was held just two months before Black Tuesday and the Wall Street Crash, when such extravagant automotive icons as Isotta Fraschini (which scooped the top prize at the inaugural Concorso di Villa d'Este) become anachronisms, almost overnight. Yet, strangely, out of the darkest days of the Great Depression came some of the most gloriously indulgent automotive creations in history, and Villa d'Este played host to the best of the best.

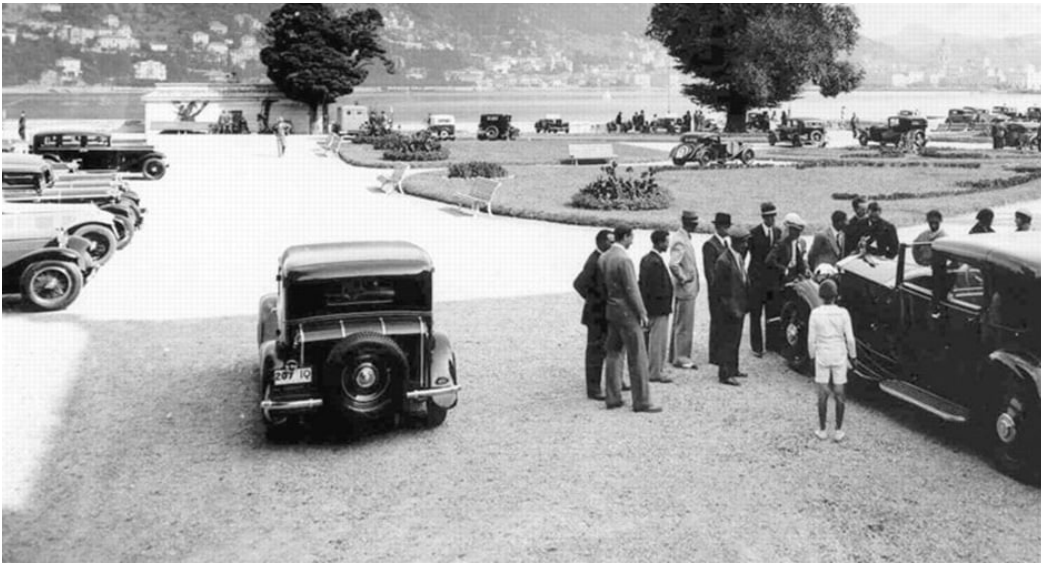
Experts and public disagree



Then, as now, it is the geographical setting which gave the event its unique character. The cars gathered in the large and generously planted gardens of Villa d'Este, on the shores of Lake Como – the third largest lake in Italy.

Although the Concorso was not held every year – some events were skipped for reasons that ranged from WW2 to internal wranglings – it struggled through to 1949, which was a very strange event in itself. By this time, Villa d'Este awarded prizes voted for, separately, by a panel of experts and by the public. In 1949, the panel chose a worthy but fairly dull saloon by Ghia, while the public showed vastly far more flair by voting for [Touring's stunning version of the Alfa 6C 2500 SS](#) – a car that would ever after be known as the 'Villa d'Este'.

Postponed... for 40 years



But despite public enthusiasm for the elaborate beauty of such icons, the coachbuilding industry was in crisis. The planned 1951 Villa d'Este never took place, and it was soon announced that the concours event had been 'indefinitely postponed'.

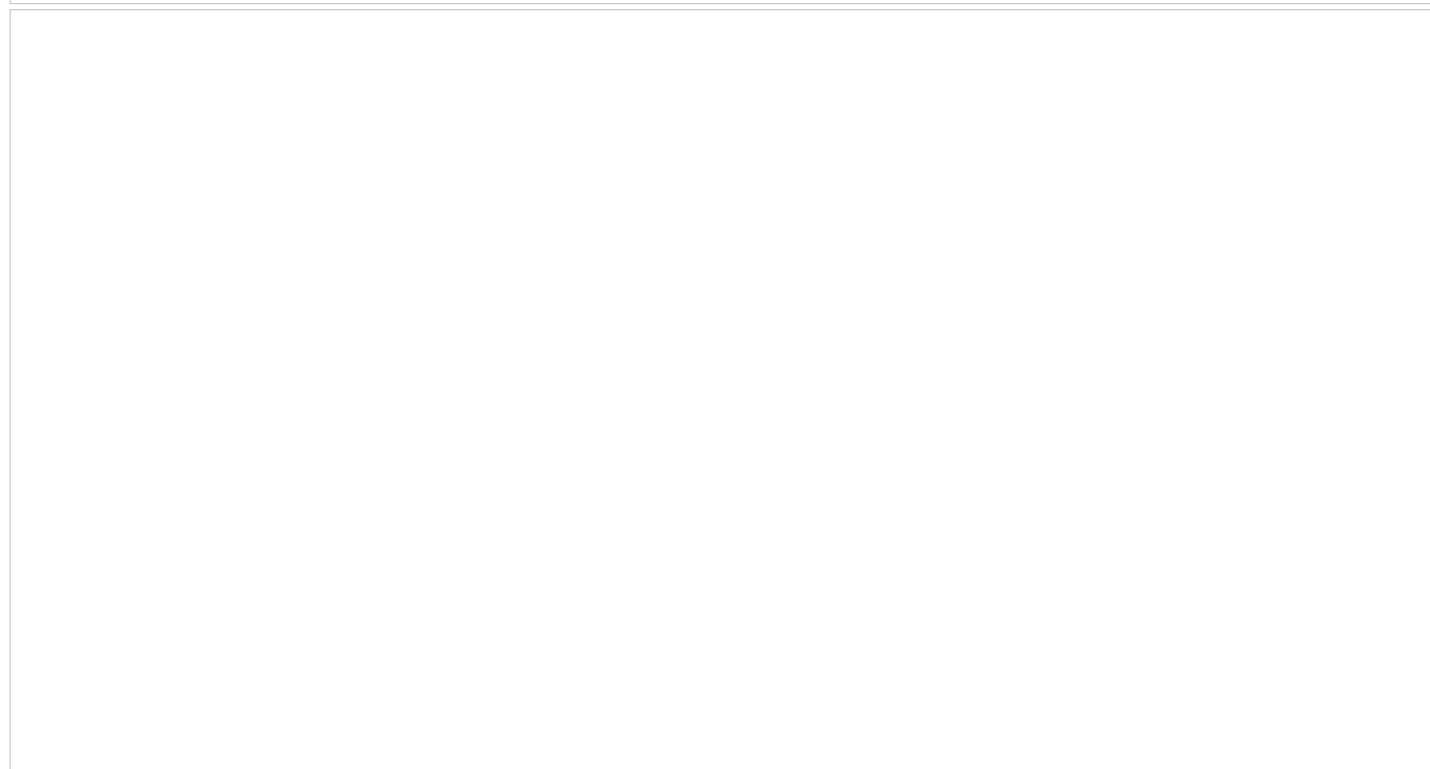
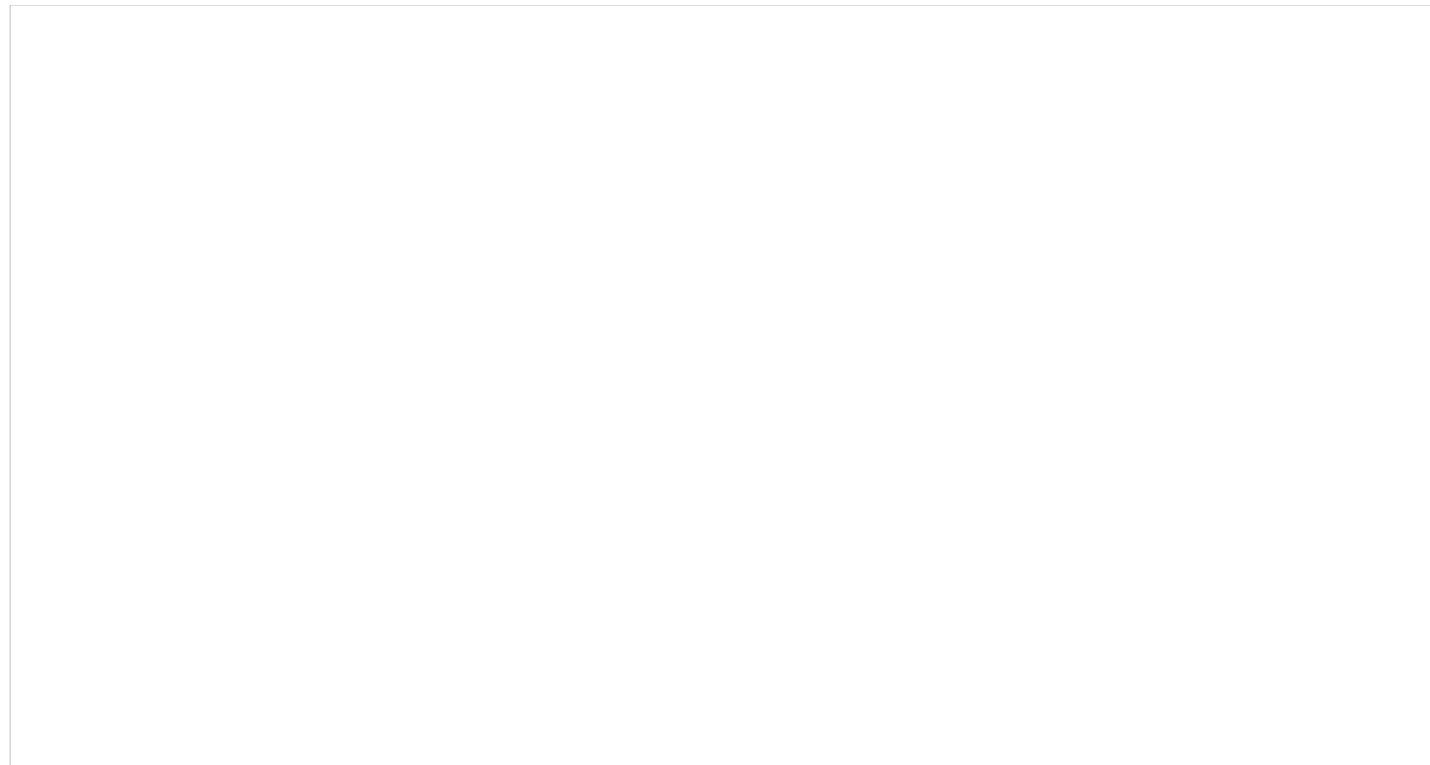
Postponed, in fact, for 40-odd years. The once great event launched itself back onto the world scene in 1995 as the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este – and even then, its path was not smooth. It was held sporadically until the BMW Group came to the rescue in 1999. Happily, for the last 14 years, the concours has been jointly supported by BMW and the Grand Hotel Villa d'Este, in whose magnificent grounds (as well as at the Villa Erba) the now world-leading concours is still held.

Photos: Villa d'Este Concours d'Elegance

Gallery







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