

CLASSIC DRIVER

The most beautiful classics of Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este 2014

Lead

Lake Como glistens in the sun; Rivas bob in the water; a jazz melody plays from somewhere afar; and elegantly dressed folk stroll among the refined automotive classics in the garden of the Grand Hotel. Villa d'Este 2014 was a true feast for the senses...

Were the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este held monthly rather than annually, the sense of occasion might be diluted.

As you stand there, Aperol in hand, with gravel crunching under the soles of leather shoes around you and waiters buzzing around with platefuls of club sandwiches, you begin to wonder: why can't life always be like this? But were the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este held monthly rather than annually, the sense of occasion might be diluted. This year, the organisers turned to topical fiction to heighten that sense: 'The Great Gatsby' was given its own class, glamorising the type of cars that might have appeared in F. Scott Fitzgerald's original novel.

Gatsby glamour



Fictional Long Island millionaire Jay Gatsby would no doubt have felt at home in the grounds of the Grand Hotel Villa d'Este in Cernobbio. Making up the Great Gatsby display in the hotel garden were four magnificent 1920s machines: a Chapron-bodied Hispano-Suiza H6B, a Duesenberg A Straight Eight, a Hooper-bodied Rolls-Royce Phantom I, and a Packard 640 Custom Eight - any of which could have been a centrepiece in Gatsby's theoretical fleet.

Windswept to victory



From the 1930s onwards, aerodynamics began to play a vital part in the formation of coachwork: streamlining determined the silhouette. On Lake Como, the aero-shaped classics are always a highpoint of elegance - particularly impressive this year was the 1936 Lancia Astura Type 233 by Pinin Farina, one of Italy's first luxury convertibles. Its refurbishment was deemed to be of the highest order, and won the jury-decided Trofeo BMW Group Classic for the most sensitive restoration. Also notable in the 'Gone With The Wind' category was the Wendler-bodied BMW 328 Coupé Streamline, the unorthodox design of which helped to achieve a respectable 108mph during a test run back in 1937.

4,000 lire for a winner



Also revelling in aerodynamic splendour was Sir Anthony Bamford's 'boat-tailed' Rolls-Royce Phantom II, the winning car in the single-marque Rolls-Royce display. Fellow collector Corrado Lopresto also brought along a stunning open car to enter in the 'Gone With The Wind' category - his [Alfa Romeo 6 C 1750 GS Spider Corsa](#) - and could be recognised, as always, by his sunglasses, small dog and extended Italian family in tow. Lopresto's car was originally produced in 1931 as a Zagato roadster, but gained its gorgeous current coachwork in the hands of Carrozzeria Aprile in 1938. The little-known company had rebodied the car following an accident, asking 4,000 lire for the final product. Following a recent comprehensive restoration, the audience of the Concorso signaled its approval by voting it the visitors' favourite classic, thus securing the coveted Coppa d'Oro for Lopresto and family.

Return to elegance



Visitors to the Concorso d'Eleganza have historically taken a shine to the Alfa Romeo 6C. In 1949, a [Touring-bodied 6C 2500SS](#) was voted the most beautiful car of the show, and 'Villa d'Este' was henceforth added as a suffix to the car's name. In the post-War years, the Italian marques were quick to return to the elegance of the past. The development of the sporty Ferrari body was celebrated, from Ghia's plump-but-comfortable 195 Inter, to Vignale's squat and dynamic-looking 212 Inter and Pininfarina's 250 Europa, the latter's elongated silhouette setting the trend for almost every Grand Tourer since.

Europe's love affair with travel





In the Fifties, Europe's elite no longer took the train, opting for more personal transport in the shape of a sporty convertible for their jaunts to France and Italy. The United States, too, was becoming fascinated by the European roadster, with cars such as the Lancia Aurelia B24 Spider America and Albrecht Graf Goetz's startling BMW 507 proving real hits. Arguably the most popular, though, was the Mercedes 300 SL, represented at the show by an ivory-coloured roadster with its original red hardtop, once driven by Rudolph Caracciola on a promotional tour of the U.S.A. Another stunning drop-top was the Ferrari 250 GT California Spider, brought to Villa d'Este by British collector couple Nigel and Sarah Allen. The car was delivered in 1959 to a man named Harvey Schur as an 18th birthday present, and took a 'Best in Class' win at Villa d'Este 2014 following a 'Best in Show' award at the [2013 Salon Privé](#).

Gentleman drivers spoiled for choice



The Fifties was the decade of the gentleman driver: passionate racers equipped with the necessary financial resources to take part in such an expensive sport. But the frenzied privateers faced a problem, which the Concorso presented for us, too – which car to choose? How about the wonderful Maserati A6GCS, one of the stunning entries from the special class celebrating the Trident marque's centenary. Or maybe you'd prefer a Fiat 8V, an aluminium Mercedes 300 SL 'Gullwing' or a Ferrari 250 GT Tour de France?

A snarling Maserati 450S , voted 'Best of Show'



In addition to the GT athletes, there were some thoroughbred racers on show, such as the Jaguar D-type and Albert Spiess's snarling [Maserati 450 S that was voted 'Best in Show'](#) by the judging panel. Also present was another warhorse of the time, Norman Dewis's Jaguar XK120, complete with a bizarre-looking Plexiglass dome above the driver, with which he reached the record speed of 277.410km/h at Jabbeke in October 1953. Choice for the gentleman driver in the Sixties was no easier, as proved by the stunning array of cars lined up on the shores of Lake Como. This included the breathtaking and now legendary Scaglietti-bodied Ferrari 250 GTO, a Porsche 904 GTS and a Shelby American 427 Competition Cobra, voted by the judges as the most 'Iconic Car of the Year'.

The rare and the unusual



At the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este you not only get to see the most elegant and the fastest, but also some of the rarest and most unusual cars ever seen. For example, the one-off, aluminium-bodied Ferrari 250 GT SWB designed by a 21-year-old Giorgetto Giugiaro for Bertone in 1959. The car had a fine mesh radiator grille, a vast rear window and wore the race-bred Campagnolo steel wheels, rather than the elegant wire Borrani. Another interesting car was the Mercedes-Benz 230 SL, individualised by Tom Tjaarda for Pininfarina in 1964. Unfortunately, the pretty coupé never made production.

The Great Gatsby of Tokyo



The biggest eye-catcher of the Concorso, however, was the super-futuristic 1969 Fiat Abarth 2000 Scorpione by Pininfarina. The wedge-shaped car with its folding cockpit and exposed rear engine belongs in the collection of Japanese Abarth fanatic Shiro Kosaka, who has actually opened a museum in Tokyo to house the wild design study and other important Abarths. Kosaka's huge entourage was certainly quick to ward off any onlookers who came a little too close to his prized car. And so the show ended quite conclusively where it had begun - with the Great Gatsby, but of Tokyo rather than New York.

Photos: [Rémi Dargegen](#) for Classic Driver © 2014

Gallery

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