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Hypercar showdown: McLaren P1 vs Porsche 918

30 September 2014 | Chris Hrabalek

Almost exactly a year and a half since covering the Geneva debut of the hybrid hypercar trinity, LaFerrari, McLaren P1 and Porsche 918 Spyder, a rare opportunity presented itself to Chris Hrabalek to experience two of these cars at first hand...

Intelligent mobile currency





Contrary to all market-crash paranoia, the trend towards investing in collectable cars – and the level of funds available to do so – has continued to skyrocket in the past 18 months. Ultra High Net Worth Individuals (UHNWI) have finally acknowledged that an automobile of historic significance is also a piece of art and – perhaps more significantly – an intelligent mobile currency.

While auction records seem to be re-written on a monthly basis that 1962 Ferrari GTO holding the current record at USD 38m, the willingness to spend a significant sum to achieve instant ownership has also resulted in at least one of the aforementioned hybrid hypercar triplets being traded at nearly twice its current list price... while still in production. Crazy times.

Enough theory, on to the Stelvio Pass...



The Porsche 918 is the first I get my hands on and, after a few hours behind the wheel, it becomes clear that I have previously failed to do this car justice. Its tech-lab interior still feels as if it will date before the next refuelling stop and its overly upright seats communicate pain rather than pleasure, but all is forgotten thanks to the car's divine steering feel and addictive out-of-the-bends 4WD hybrid acceleration.

Forget straight-line speed, it's on twisty mountain roads that this Porsche generates the biggest smile. The 918 Spyder is also the only one of the three hybrid hypercars – at least for now – to feature a removable top, as well as the single coolest feature of this car: the ability to switch from crackling roar to instant silence at the flick of a switch. Never has open-top motoring been so stimulating for all

the senses as it is when driving top-off, in stealth mode, in a Porsche 918 Spyder.

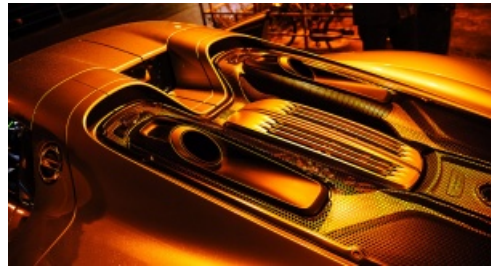
Perceived speed vs actual speed



So what about the McLaren P1? When following behind it in the 918 Spyder, I could have sworn that the Porsche is at least as fast, if not faster; but experiencing the car from the driver's seat makes me re-assess this view. Perceived speed and actual speed are two very different things, and I am now pretty convinced that on the right track and - more importantly - with the right road conditions, the P1 does exactly what it says on the box: it's the world's fastest road-legal, track-ready, hybrid hypercar.

Unlike the 918, the P1 has a rather spartan feel to the interior. Its cabin appears significantly smaller from the outside, yet it feels - dare I say it - a great deal more generous and comfortable on the inside, a fact helped by a more upright centre console, the transparent roof, and the additional elbow room thanks to its carved-out door pockets.

Future retro-chic



A watch connoisseur would understand that one of the great joys of an entire collection of watches is the diversity that it allows one to express... and this is perhaps the best way to sum up these hybrid hypercars: the Porsche 918 Spyder is a steel Rolex, the McLaren P1 a titanium Richard Mille. Meanwhile, though we don't have one here today, perhaps the LaFerrari is more of a gold Patek Philippe. Each is a must-have, albeit this time with quartz movements and digital sub-dials.

Both the 918 Spyder and P1 have their place and purpose and, contrary to general belief, they complement (rather than cannibalise) each other. Should we desire both of them? Yes. Can we pass them on to the next generation without feeling embarrassed? Yes again. Rather than dismissing them as a digital mayfly, we probably have to accept that they will, one day, be thoroughly retro-chic.

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