

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Bernina Gran Turismo brings rallying back to the Engadin

Lead

In the 1920s and 1930s, drivers from all over Europe would make the pilgrimage to the Swiss Engadin to compete in the Bernina Mountain Race. In early October, the Bernina Gran Turismo will revive this tradition.

Legendary mountain race on the Bernina Pass



In the 1920s, the triumph of the automobile began in the Alps. Newly built mountain roads and magnificent panoramas attracted gentlemen drivers who sought to prove their sportsmanship at high speed. One of the first and most famous mountain rallies at this time was the Klausen Pass Race, first held in 1922, but other parts of Switzerland were starting to attract wealthy tourists from all over Europe with the lure of hillclimbs. In the summer of 1929, just four years after the abolition of a strict car ban in the Canton of Graubünden, the first 'Automotive Week' was held in St. Moritz. The heart of the event was the Bernina Mountain Race, along a 16.5km route and attended by many great racers of the time. Winners included Hans Stuck in a 1929 Austro-Daimler ADR 3.0 and Louis Chiron in a 1930 Bugatti T47. Another highlight was a 'Kilometre Race' for which Shell had created a dedicated asphalt road between Punt Muragl and Samedan. Today, the road is still known as the Shellstrasse, or Shell Road.

Adrenalin and stunning views



Now the classic race cars return to the Engadin each year, thanks to a group of automotive enthusiasts who initiated a revival race last October. The event will run again this year, starting on 2 October, with a hillclimb for sports and racing cars built up to the early 1980s on a closed road along the Bernina Pass. From La Rösa up to the Bernina Hospiz, the hillclimb will (say the organisers) be 5.6km of “pure adrenalin in an inimitable Alpine setting”. Early October, when the sky above the snowy peaks is a deep blue and the forests rich with autumn colour, is certainly the ideal time for a race weekend in such a beautiful place.

Photos: Bernina Granturismo

Gallery

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