
Joining the Royal road trip to the 2015 Concours of Elegance

04 September 2015 | Joe Breeze

Sights don't come much more surreal than glancing in your rear-view mirror, and seeing Sir Jackie Stewart readying his Gullwing to blast past you and disappear off into the Scottish Highlands. We joined the 2015 Tour of Elegance...

A road trip to remember





Considering the roads in Scotland are among the most scenic in the world, it was almost a formality that an official driving tour would be integrated into the 2015 Concours of Elegance programme. Spread across two days, the 250-mile Highlands Tour incorporated some of the most stunning views and driving roads in the country, interspersed with pit-stops at some of Scotland's most iconic locations.

No ordinary XJS...



The majority of owners were brave enough to pilot the cars that they are displaying at the Concours – whether a 1903 Mercedes 60HP Simplex or a 2015 LaFerrari – although some took the option of taking another car that was perhaps better suited to the undulating Highlands roads, hence the additional Carrera 2.7 RS that appeared in the convoy, for example. Our mount was the Jaguar XJS V12 Convertible in which Princess Diana covered 55,000 miles from new, made all the more special by the fact it had just over 56,000 when we collected the keys. To onlookers, a humble XJS might have looked a little out of its depth among such a valuable cavalcade, but we felt quite comfortable knowing we'd be arriving at Holyrood Palace in a loyal, Royal servant. Plus, it doubled up as the perfect photography workhorse, the welded-in rear section of the roof (one of the Princess's special requests, along with the unique seats) providing adequate protection from the cool Scottish winds, yet allowing the photographer to pop up through the roof and snap away when necessary.

Spirit of camaraderie



Also along for the ride were the event's patrons: Sir Jackie Stewart and Prince Michael of Kent, the latter's elegant, Vanden Plas-bodied 4¼ Litre Bentley providing a stark contrast to his menacing, blacked-out escort vehicles. Widely known to be a car lover, evidenced by the enthusiasm with which he spoke of his steed and the tour as a whole, the Prince fully immersed himself in the spirit of camaraderie present throughout the tour. One particularly memorable example of fellowship saw collector Adam Lindermann stop to help another tour participant, duly completing a 'petrol run' in his short-nosed Ecurie Ecosse D-type in order to rescue the stranded pre-War car. We thought the sight of Sir Jackie and his Gullwing in our mirror was surreal, until we saw one of the most legendary Scottish cars in history slide out of a petrol station to complete its mission - very different from the one that saw it take first place at Goodwood in 1956.

A traditional welcome brigade





Among the *scheduled* stops were Inverary Castle, the stunning Kinross house, and the Rest and Be Thankful hillclimb, the latter tackled particularly enthusiastically by Jeff Pope in the Zagato-bodied Maserati A6 G. But the most poignant stop-off destination for many participants was the Dollar Academy, a 197-year-old school that laid on a spectacular welcoming display of bagpipers. Here, the pupils swarmed over the cars with youthful glee, proving just how alluring these timeless machines are even to those not yet in the know (although, naturally, the LaFerrari commanded the most attention). As the cars exited once the Prince had presented awards to some of the star students, we were excitedly waved off by the youngest pupils of the school, their soprano-pitched exclamations and wide-eyed gawps creating one of the most memorable moments of the tour.

The Royal seal of approval



Blessed with glorious, un-Scottish-like weather throughout (the locals said we'd brought good conditions with us, as it was apparently a wet summer otherwise), the tour really couldn't have been any more glorious. It was perhaps best summarised by His Royal Highness himself: "This is the fourth year of the Concours of Elegance, and third year I've been the Royal patron. It's truly the best one yet - it takes a huge effort to put together an event like this as a one-off, as it was originally planned, but to do it annually is nothing short of remarkable. This year, we wanted to include a tour and the roads up here are one of the main reasons we chose to hold the event in Scotland. I was involved in planning the route, and I have never had a more enjoyable drive." One would be inclined to agree.

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