

CLASSIC DRIVER

“Cars seek out their new owners” – Harry Utesch on trading classic cars

Lead

When you've been successfully trading classics for more than 30 years, cars become a way of life. As such, the founder of DLS Automobile Harry Utesch values automotive diversity highly. Classic Driver caught up with Utesch to find out what makes him tick...

The Stuttgart-based showroom of DLS Automobile spreads over several thousand square-metres, and is filled with a diverse selection of over 180 vehicles. In addition to rare Porsches and supercars such as the Lamborghini Gallardo, other lesser-known delights include an Opel Diplomat B V8 and a Renault Alpine A610 V6 Turbo. The company's owner Harry Utesch works with his daughter Susen – a father-daughter duo, with petrol coursing through their veins.



What is your earliest automotive memory?

My most intense early automotive memory is that of an encounter I had with an AC Cobra 427. I was unaware of the car's performance, and it was the first time I feared a car, thanks in part to the V8 rumble.

How did a career involving cars come about?

I bought six 'old' cars in my early twenties, and they were responsible for my current job. I struggled to afford the registration fees for the cars, so to avoid submitting them to the relevant authorities, I registered as a trader. That way, I could drive carefree with red trade license plates on. The following 34 years are, well, history...

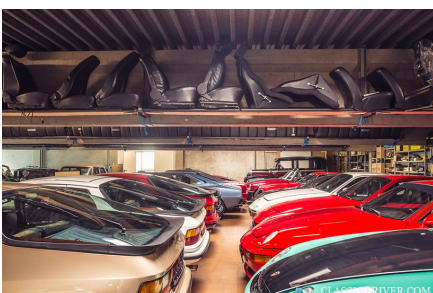


What fascinates you about cars?

I'm a technology freak, and thus primarily interested in the mechanicals of a car. While the shape of the bodywork can be pleasant, for me it is not critical. A technically fascinating car is much like a shoebox, in that it's what's inside that's interesting. A beautiful design by Frua or Touring may look fabulous, but without outstanding technical features underneath, it does not really interest me.

What criteria must cars sold at DLS Automobile fulfil?

Most importantly, they must be cars that I like. There are not many cars that I have not driven over the years, and from my past experience, I've found that if I like a car that's new to me, sooner or later someone else will like it too.



Are there any brands of which you are particularly fond?

Porsche is the clear favourite – they are almost too perfect. From the early years to the early 1990s, the 911 was the star pupil, a great distance ahead of its competitors.

What do you look for in a classic car?

I love almost all old cars, so I have no preference regarding origin, pedigree, brand, performance or size. From the Unimog to the GM Futurliner, we will sell it. A critical attribute, however, is quality. Whatever the type of car, it must be in great condition or subjected to a restoration.



What's important in your profession?

Intimate knowledge of the cars in question is very important. One should know exactly what he or she is talking about, or not speak at all. A salesman could convince me far more with his knowledge of what he's trying to sell, than with his negotiating skills.

What can your customers expect from you?

Open, honest and fair business. We deal with a highly emotional product, often bought as a result of lust, rather than out of necessity. It is thus extra frustrating if something goes wrong. That's why we think listening carefully to the customer's wishes is so important. Sometimes you will have a customer looking for one car, while another might be better suited for him. This is the basis of a lasting relationship, and many of our customers return to buy another car. I'll say it again – cars seek out their owners.

The classic car trade has changed drastically in the last few years - what do you expect from the future?

The business has largely changed from a place for genuine enthusiasts to one for investors and wealthy collectors. This development has arisen because of the extremely positive market development that, in turn, has made it more and more difficult for the typical motorist to realise his or her dream. Cars are appreciating quicker than people can save, and I don't consider this to be a positive trend. After all, cars are meant to be driven, and not stored as investments.



Is there a car from your career that you wished you'd kept?

I've had thousands of cars over the years that I wish we'd reserved, but then DLS Automobile would not exist if we hadn't sold them. Every car is sold out of necessity, and that's actually a very good thing. Releasing a cherished car simultaneously opens the door for the next one, and so on...

What do you drive at the weekend?

I currently drive a Ferrari 550 Maranello, which I adore. Now the weather is getting better, I'd like to go on a proper Grand Tour with the car.

Photos: Frederic Seemann for Classic Driver © 2015

Gallery

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