

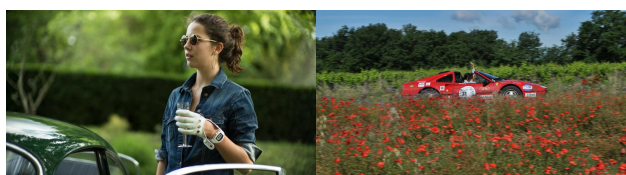
CLASSIC DRIVER

[From Paris to Saint-Tropez with the 2016 Rallye des Princesses](#)

Lead

The 2016 Richard Mille Rallye des Princesses once again took to the dramatic landscapes of France between Paris and Saint-Tropez, with a competition fleet of 76 cars. Classic Driver's Lara Platman and Cathy Dubuisson joined the action for the second half of the ladies-only event...

Capturing the spirit



Event sponsor Richard Mille provided a trio Porsche 356 coupés for their guests to run in parallel to the intense competitors. Some even managed to keep pace all the way, making a pleasant addition to the stunning array of air-cooled vehicles on the mountains.

The third leg of the journey began at Courchevel (the first man-made ski resort after World War II, now recognised as Europe's most exclusive skiing destination), which appropriately captures the spirit of the rally. This year's stages included Saint Bonnet, Gap, La Perrier, Tallard, Sisteron and Cadenet, with the day's action concluding at Pont Royal-Aix. The final day's route snaked east via Chateau Peyrassol on its way towards the final destination of Saint-Tropez, passing through a beautiful vista of windmills, vineyards and poppy fields along the way.

Inspired by past trail-blazers



There's quite a history of women passing through these cols - the mountainous escarpments of the Alps Maritimes. They've long been a passion for female trail-blazers, including Elsie 'Bill' Wisdom (whose daughter Ann Wisdom was navigator to Pat Moss, the sister of Sir Stirling) and the Honourable Mrs Victor Bruce, who won the Monte-Carlo Rally Coup Des Dames in 1927, driving for 72 hours non-stop between John O'Groats and Monte-Carlo.

The 2016 Rallye Des Princesses might be *slightly* less demanding, but the Belgian team of Marie-Christine Perrin and Veronique Morrell-Lab shared the same spirit as the 'speed queens' of yesteryear. Paired snugly inside their 1974 Innocenti Mini, they drove with expert precision and completed the regularity tasks without fault - thanks not only to a car equipped with an abundance of tools for the job, but also a shared wealth of experience in such events. "Driving through the mountains in the rain was one of our most exciting challenges to date," Veronique told us.

Appropriate attire



Vehicle choices for the participants ranged from the winning Innocenti and a Caterham, to a 1963 Chevrolet corvette stingray and a 1956 AC Ace Bristol, the latter two of which placed second and third respectively in the regularity trials. Other notable machines included a 1955 Austin Healey 100/4, a Jaguar XK120 and a lovely 1971 Volvo P1800E Coupe. A variety of air-cooled Porsches were put to the test at the high altitudes, too.

Many women dressed stunningly for the occasion – complementing the era of their cars and with plenty of colour schemes, styles (and attitude), much to the astonishment of unsuspecting bystanders in the cols. From snow on Courchevel to the sun-soaked poppy fields in the Luberon and the Vaucluse, the Rallye Des Princesses provided much topographical diversity for the 79 participant pairings. Furthermore, famous roads such as the Route Napoléon and Route National offered beautiful scenic panoramas, introducing the gateway to the Mediterranean where many rallies choose to culminate.



A gala evening in Saint-Tropez was the only appropriate way to conclude the week-long adventure – and was a fine way to mark the countdown to next year’s event.

Text: Lara Platman
Photos: Lara Platman & Cathy Dubuisson

Gallery

