

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Talking art on wheels with A. Lange & Söhne CEO Wilhelm Schmid

### Lead

After joining A. Lange & Söhne's car-loving CEO, Wilhelm Schmid, on the road to Villa d'Este in his glorious AC Ace, we sat down with him to find out exactly what makes him tick, how the watch world differs from the car industry, and what happens when one of his fleet doesn't play ball...

### Is the AC Ace your ultimate car?

I think it probably is, yes. Perhaps I've peaked too early in terms of my automotive career, because it will be very difficult to beat it.

### Can you recall the first car you ever drove?

That's a difficult question to answer, because as the son of a car dealer who also ran a small petrol station, I drove many cars — often without a license!



### What is your dream car?

An Austin-Healey. I remember the great nickname, the 'big Healey', and unlike today's supercars, you'd actually see them out on the street. But alas, I couldn't afford one, so I bought an MGB instead, which I've owned for 36 years.

### There's definitely a British flair in your automotive interest — do cars from other countries appeal to you?

To be honest, I've always liked British cars, and I've owned the classic E-type, for example. About two years ago I bought a Lancia Flaminia GT 3C and I must admit, it's one of the finest cars I've ever driven. But it's a little too over-engineered for my taste, as I like to really drive my cars.

### What makes driving a vintage car so special?

There are many reasons, but to boil it down, with old cars you feel a connection. I have a 35-minute drive through the mountains to work in Glashütte, and you really have to concentrate on what you're doing. As my wife tells me, when I arrive home in an old car I am a younger man.





**Old cars require a lot of attention and maintenance — how do you find the time to maintain and enjoy yours?**

I have the great luxury that if one of my cars is in for a service, I can always take the other. And if one doesn't start, I'll take the MG, as that's always reliable. I have a great mechanic, so he can fix whatever I can't, and I've promised my wife that I'll not own more than five cars.

**Does your wife enjoy your cars?**

Yes, she supports me, but she's always pulling my leg. When I worked in the car industry, I spent all my money on watches, and now I'm in the watch industry, I spend all my money on cars.

**While making the switch from the car to the watch industry, did you ever see yourself in a position to run a company with such a legacy as Lange?**

No, not in my wildest dreams. When I signed my contract with BMW, I said I'd probably retire there. I'm still a big BMW fan, so only something as special as A. Lange & Söhne was enough to lure me away. What you can change in bigger companies will always be restricted, but here, I can influence and enjoy a level of freedom I haven't experienced elsewhere.



**Which car brand would you compare to a watch from Lange?**

The automotive industry today is entirely industrialised, so I don't think you'd find a true comparison. Engineers and designers are bound by so many regulations, which impedes creativity. If it were just one car, in terms of its value, craftsmanship, and performance, I'd say either a BMW 507 or a Mercedes-Benz 'Gullwing'.

**Could you describe the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este in three words?**

Art on wheels.

**Do you think that's why it's a fitting association with A. Lange & Söhne?**

You can boil down classic cars into three elements: craftsmanship, innovation, and heritage, and these are exactly the three values we stand for — it's a perfect fit.

*Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2017*

**Gallery**

















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