

CLASSIC DRIVER



The Facel Vega is known as the sexiest four-seater for a reason

18 July 2017 | James Bannister

“For the few who own the finest” — the provocative tagline of Facel Vega married perfectly with the seductive lines and American grunt of the firm’s decadent cruisers. Despite a troubled upbringing, vehicles like this Facel II were reserved for the true connoisseurs, as they remain to this day...

The flamboyancy of French styling in the expansive field of automotive design has always garnered admiration, but it’s easy to argue that the works of the 1950s and 1960s were the *crème de la crème*. From Talbot Lago to Delahaye, these gems from a golden age were instilled with the inimitable essence of French high style — a certain *je ne sais quoi* that intrigued and inspired all that were graced with the presence of such machines. Of all these delectable creations, however, it was the Facel Vegas that were found outside the happening clubs and in the company of true A-listers, whether it be Ava Gardner, Ringo Starr, or even the great Stirling Moss.

From humble beginnings



Indeed, the phenomenal Facel couldn't have been more different to the environment in which it was produced. Initially producing components for the automotive and aircraft industries, and after devoting production power to the French defence effort, even seeing a factory occupied by German forces, 1945 saw Facel regain control and commence the manufacturing of car bodies for the likes of Panhard and Simca.

From this, founder Jean Daninos gained the desire to create a competitor for these cars, and thus, the HK500 was born. Utilising a Chrysler Hemi V8 on a tubeframe chassis, with the tried and tested Powerflite automatic gearbox or four-speed manual, the powertrain of Facel Vega's inaugural motor car was a conventional American formula. What was far from conventional, however, was the stunning steel clothing these components...

Show and go



Landing somewhere in between an American sedan and an Art Deco sculpture, the HK500 set the tone for Facel Vega's automotive exploits in fine style. This first offering was a truly compelling package — a powerful, dependable, and, above all, luxurious car with unpatrolled styling and that all-important chic character that was so *en vogue*. Although the HK500 was far from lacking in the design department, its replacement, the Facel II, took things to a whole new, outrageously stylish level. With a more sweeping, streamlined profile and gorgeous twin stack headlights, the Facel II launched the company firmly into the Jet Age. Select design cues from the HK500 remained, such as the expansive glasshouse and an interior reminiscent of a jazz club, as well as the exquisite rear taillights — set into the fenders like diamonds on the dial of the finest of watches. Just 184 Facel IIs were produced, including prototypes, between 1962 and 1964, before the firm finally succumbed to bankruptcy. An undoubtedly sad end to the Facel Vega story, but a glance over the curves and creases of this beguiling beauty is sure to banish any melancholy from one's mind...

Standing the test of time



“The lines of the Facel II are, in my opinion, so balanced that even after more than 50 years, it still looks stunning and stylish,” explains Jasper Beukenkamp of [JB Classic Cars](#), who’s stunning [1963 Facel Vega Facel II](#) is the star of this photoshoot. “Sitting behind the steering wheel and looking over the painted dashboard and all its switches, it almost feels like the cockpit of an airplane. Because of the small roof and the big front and rear windows, it’s very light inside. Besides that, the V8 engine sounds very nice and it also has enough power and torque. It’s not a sports car but more a grand tourer in which you could easily drive from Paris to your house in the south of France on a Friday afternoon.”

Unsung hero



“What most attracts me to the Facel Vega brand is the vision of one man who owns a steel parts factory having the dream to design and manufacture his own car — a car that’s still very elegant and stylish today. Most of the time, we have about 8-10 Facel Vegas in our workshop, and it’s still a privilege to work with such iconic and rare cars. If you compare the Facel II to such cars as Ferraris or Aston Martins, a car with such low production numbers is very underrated, especially in terms of value.”

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