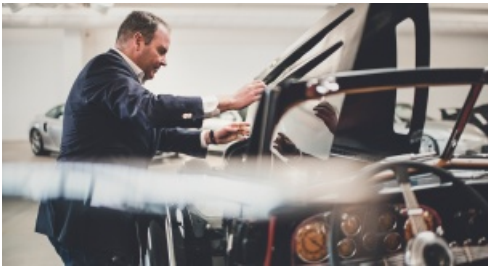

Anders Kirk Johansen on building the Lego family's appetite for cars

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This Christmas, we wonder how many children and adults alike will wake up to a Lego set? What they might not know is that the Danish family behind the popular plastic bricks is one consumed by cars. We spent the day with Anders Kirk Johansen, grandson of Lego's founder, and a special Mercedes-Benz...

On a misty Danish morning, Anders Kirk Johansen took the time to talk to us about his automotive passions, which, like most of us, started when he was a child, playing with toy cars and jumping for joy at the sight of a combine harvester at work in the field. Suffice to say, the interest stuck, grew, and, of late, has become part of his new development business.

More than a plastic brick



Beyond the shores of Denmark, you might be hard-pushed to know the name Anders Kirk Johansen. But perhaps his grandfather Godtfred Kirk Christiansen rings a bell? He was the man responsible for creating the Lego brick — that tiny plastic construction toy that’s brought joy to so many around the world. Anders had a special bond with Godtfred, who helped ignite his passion for cars.

“I loved all machinery, and in fact, I still love to get out in the fields and drive the big tractors during the harvest on my farm,” he recalls. “There’s something fascinating about the machinery at work, no matter the scale. Tractors and aircraft — really all machinery and technical things — have been magical to me since I was a little boy.”

Character building





Johansen doesn't have a particular era or type of vehicle that he likes to collect, but instead, he's built up a collection of cars with different personalities, offering different emotional connections when you drive them. They vary from a 1934 Cadillac V16 (his personal favourite) and a back-to-basics 1952 Chevrolet pickup to an Aston Martin DBS Volante — and each delivers a unique experience.

For now, though, we're here to talk about his Mercedes-Benz W126 380SE, which his grandfather bought new in 1982 in Switzerland, when Lego had a second factory there. Apparently, it was one of the few countries that could produce the plastic bricks to the correct tolerances and quality.

Cigarettes and pop music



In 1987, Godtfred brought the Mercedes back to Denmark, and as it was his car of favour, wonderful signs of use can be seen here and there. The Cabernet Red Metallic paint retains its deep lustre, but on closer inspection, you can see the flattened chrome strips in the bumper and the dented and worn number plate. "My grandfather didn't always have time to swap cars, so sometimes the 4x4 G-Wagen would remain at home while this S-Class bounced across a field or straight through a forest on a hunting trip."

Anders has kept the car as original as possible, along with his grandfather's favourite cigarettes and German pop music tapes in the glovebox — each with a memory and a story. The car is a joy to travel in, wafting around the beautiful Danish country roads. Its 218hp, 3.8-litre V8 is smooth and strong, but then again, this example has only travelled around 75,000 kilometres.

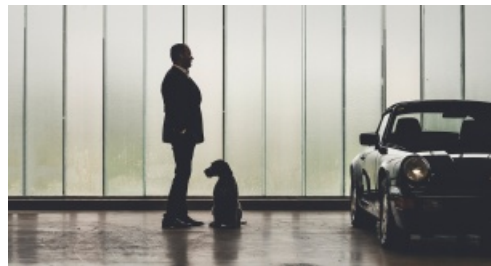
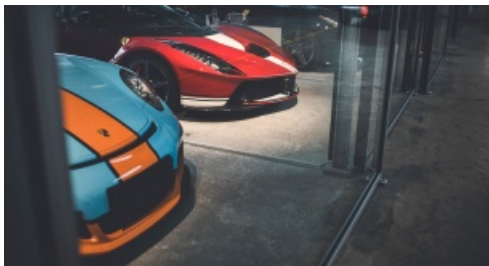
A rolling oasis of calm



Some of those kilometres were more important than others: Godtfred was known to use the Mercedes as his personal and undisturbed refuge in which to carefully think about important business decisions. This is a treat that's been passed down to Anders, and it's easy to understand how the serene ride, quietness, and substantial feel of the S-Class leaves the driver able to think freely about matters other than the road surface or the weather conditions. It's an extension of an office, if you like.

This isn't the only S-Class in the Lego family — Anders' two brothers both have older examples, also formerly owned by Godtfred Kirk. And we'd like to be the first to request a family reunion. Anders' passions don't just lie with four wheels, though. He bought the Lauge Jensen motorcycle company in 2013, after riding one of its bikes the previous year. And he's taken this experience to another level, working with Henrik Fisker to start a new motorcycle brand called Viking — the design of the bike is as striking as you would expect from a Fisker project.

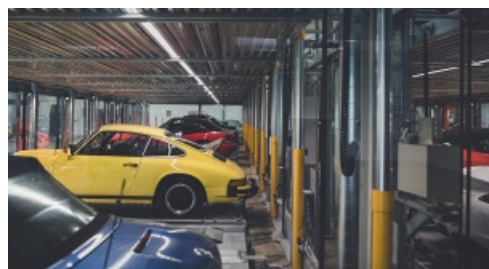
A lightbulb moment



In 2015, Anders turned his passion for cars into a business and founded My Garage, located on the outskirts of Vejle in Denmark. “At our estate, our family had built a private garage so we could collect our cars. It was there that I saw a connection — a lot of people came by to visit and were so interested in the cars we had on display. They would ask if they could store their own cars at our place. In doing so, they sort of became part of a club.”

A plan was formed to open a commercial garage for individuals to store their classic and exotic cars, which would be open to the public. In Denmark, the concept works particularly well, because huge taxes on vehicles means it’s very rare to see these cars on the road. My Garage gives visitors a chance to see them in the metal. Furthermore, two workshops at My Garage have been authorised as official Porsche and Ferrari service centres, and a handful of dealerships are already part of the project, with more expected to join.

Perfect imperfections



So, what does Anders think is next for the automotive world? “I think that, in Denmark, like the rest of the world, it will become more popular to own an old car — not necessarily a vintage car, but a classic that offers a more engaging experience. With new cars, such as the Tesla and the Audi A8, with their autonomous driving modes, we’re becoming more removed from the driving experience.

“This will only make you want to drive your classic or fun car more, with the real sound of the engine, a manual gearbox, and less servo steering. The Porsche 911R already shows that the industry is still providing these cars. The more perfect your daily car gets, the more you actually go back and search for imperfections — you want more engagement and fun on your weekend drives. I’m already seeing this at My Garage — it’s what the owners here want.”

Text: Craig Callum / Photos: Amy Shore for Classic Driver © 2017

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