

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## You won't find a better collection of Abarths than this one

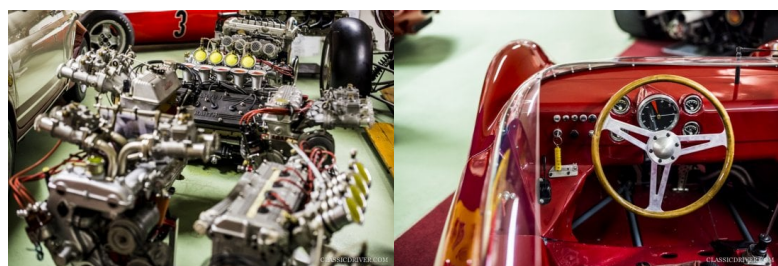
### Lead

Striking a balance between petite and delicate and angry and boisterous, Carlo Abarth's scorpion-tailed cars are sought after by collectors across the globe, from Europe to Japan. But one Swiss collection stands above them all. And now, it's preparing to steal the show at Rétromobile in Paris...

### Surprise, surprise



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In a nondescript car park beneath the sleepy Swiss town of Solothurn resides the most impressive collection of Carlo Abarth's 'small but wicked' cars in the world. Lovingly amassed over the last 45 years by former Abarth factory racing driver Engelbert Möll, the collection comprises over 40 Abarth vehicles, in addition to a plethora of wonderful automobilia, engines, and parts. Now, 20 of the cars are preparing for a sojourn in Paris, where they'll take centre stage in an exhibition at Rétromobile that's dedicated to the fascinating saga of the Italian manufacturer and its ingenious founder.

### Generation change



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A phoenix risen from the ashes of Cisitalia, which was disbanded in 1949, Carlo Abarth's eponymous company was founded with the express purpose of tuning regular cars, such as the utilitarian Fiat 500, for motorsport purposes. And that's exactly what it did, not only clocking up thousands of victories (not to mention dozens of speed records) in two decades but concurrently inspiring a generation of

motorists to inject a sting in the tails of their humble means of getting around. The story is a testament to Carlo Abarth's fierce passion and competitive spirit in an automotive epoch that so conveniently allowed his company to succeed.

## Unbroken, undeterred



Engelbert Möll knew Abarth's traits only too well. A chance encounter with Abarth racer Tommy Spychiger led the young Swiss to become a fully-fledged Works driver. While it was not a straightforward endeavour (Carlo Abarth was known to be unpredictable and complex), it did prove successful, with a number of class victories. That was until 1963, when a terrible accident at Solitude near Stuttgart, while driving an Abarth-Simca, cruelly curtailed his racing career.

Sometime afterwards, while hunting for an Abarth-Simca as a souvenir, Möll — who was running a Swiss Opel dealership at the time — took a rare long-nosed Abarth 1000 GT Bialbero with a terrific history in part exchange for another car. And so began a long and fruitful journey, on which he spent weekend after weekend searching for retired racing Abarths to rescue. Some 40 cars later, and the Möll Collection is unrivalled. And ogling the diverse assembly of miniature marvels, it's hardly surprising to see why...

## The 'king of small cars'



So, just what led Möll to put this collection together? "Carlo Abarth, the 'king of small cars', was a visionary with great ideas," he explains. "He remains so popular, because in addition to the special-bodied street cars, he produced racers for all the FIA categories, from touring and rally cars to GTs to prototypes." Indeed, as Abarth's right-hand man Lorenzo Avidano later described his former boss's machines: "They were cars that raced and won on every Sunday of the year in different classes and categories."

The exhaustive collection is indicative of this diversity and success. There is everything from the scorching-hot little 1968 Fiat-Abarth 1000 TCR and the Zagato-bodied 1959 750 Bialbero Record Monza Coupé to the sultry OT 2000 Periscopios and the oh-so-pretty open



sports prototypes, such as the 2000 Sport 4-Fari. A little more unusual, but no less desirable, are the Pininfarina-designed 500 speed record car, the 2000 Monoposto World Record car, and Carlo Abarth's personal 2400 Allemano. "That's still a very comfortable grand touring car for long journeys," notes Möll.

## Eenie, meenie...



And what are his favourites (excluding his own former car)? "Well, there are several," he proclaims. "One is the aluminium 1000 Sport in which Tommy Spyckiger scored 13 class wins in 1963, but the Abarth-Simca 2 Mila is also very special from a technical point of view, with its six-speed gearbox." Pleasingly, he also notes our personal favourite, the 2000 Sport 4-Fari: "That was maybe the most successful two-litre sports car and over 40 were produced. Carlo Abarth also had a great aesthetic!" Hear, hear.

On the 110th anniversary of Carlo Abarth's birth, the season-opening Rétromobile salon next week in Paris will accommodate 20 cars from the Möll Collection in a dedicated exhibition to honour the virtuoso tuner. Rétromobile's director, François Melcion, with whom we visited the collection and is pictured in Rémi Dargegen's fabulous photographs, couldn't be prouder.

## 'The best cars with the best history'





“In a way, this is the Bardinon Collection for Abarths,” comments Melcion. “Just the best cars with the best history. We also wanted to show it because it’s more than ‘just’ a collection — it’s the story of a truly passionate man, Engelbert Möll, who dedicated his life to this brand, despite his tragic accident.” The occasion is also special, as this will be the first time such a large number of cars from the collection will have left Switzerland at the same time.

“Möll has always lent cars to friends, drivers, and ex-Abarth mechanics for certain shows and historic hill climbs, but never before have the 20 most important machines been shown somewhere else,” Melcion explains. “He isn’t a man who collects cars and hides them away. He wants to share his passion and to show people what Abarth achieved. He’s a really nice man, really simple, and for him, it’s only the passion that counts. We really appreciate that at Rétromobile, where we try to show people something you don’t see anywhere else.”

## Approach with caution



While it’s true that the collection tells Engelbert Möll’s story, it, too, paints a picture of Carlo Abarth, whose intelligence, ideas, and determination forged his eponymous company into a truly enduring legacy. So, should you be travelling to Paris for Rétromobile next week and happen upon this incredible display of Abarths, approach with caution: there are stings in the tails of each of these boisterous beasts.

*Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2017*

## Gallery





























































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