CLASSIC DRIVER

These were the most exciting cars at Techno Classica Essen 2018

Lead
The breadth and variety of the cars both exhibited and for sale at Techno Classica Essen is truly staggering — such that even the gentlest of enthusiasts could spend entire days taking it all in. Picking just a few highlights was nigh on impossible, but we gave it our best shot…

To give you an idea of what we're talking about, within 15 minutes of entering the first of what felt like countless halls, we'd spotted one of the world's most original Bentley 4½ Litres, an original Ford Fiesta Turbo that looked as though it was one petty crime away from an anti-social behaviour order, and a brand-spanking new Porsche GT2 RS (we didn't dare ask to see how much over list price it was advertised at).

Okay, so overall, the quality and average value isn't as high as it is at Rétromobile in Paris, but we think that in itself makes Essen a much more enjoyable day out, as there are simply so many oddball and affordable cars to get excited about — trust us when we say that your chequebook will be twitching. A mint Alfasud Sport 'Grand Prix' edition for 18,000 euros or a barn-find Seat 600 for exactly half that, anyone?

Hoping to add to his impressive wall of recent sales (a nice touch, we might add), Bastian Voigt presented, among other gems, a superb Ferrari 288 GTO. And those looking to add an Alfa Romeo Giulia Sprint GTA will have been spoiled by the pair offered at Cartique by Mechatronik. It was fantastic to see a familiar face in the Mercedes-Benz 300SL 'Gullwing' Outlaw at Rosier Classic Sterne, a car we had the pleasure of profiling in the magazine last year — note the subtle roof chop and the ostrich leather!

While not quite as audacious as their Rétromobile exhibits, industry big guns Lukas Hüni and Axel Schuette were out in force at Essen. The former brought along the fabulous ex-Scuderia Parravano Maserati 300 S Shortnose, while at the latter's stand, we couldn't decide which we wanted to drive home more: the Mercedes-Benz 190 E 2.3-16 raced by Niki Lauda in the now-legendary one-model series in the 1980s or the sensational one-of-three Zagato-bodied Maserati A6G 2000.

Hyman Ltd. Classic Cars wins the award for the longest journey to Essen, coming all the way from Missouri in the United States. The effort will have been worth it, though — its opulent green 1934 Bugatti Type 57 Atalante was marked as sold when we visited. On a more modern note, we were rather taken with Gallery Aaldering's black-on-black Aston Martin DB7 Volante Zagato, despite its rather ungainly hardtop, and the 'Verde Inglese' Ferrari 456 offered by Gipimotor. The elegant shade has no metallic flake in it, which actually works really well on the 1990s Pininfarina design.

For unashamed Porschefiles, Essen is a haven — from Serge Heitz's ultra-tasteful restomod 356s to Manfred Hering of Early 911s' smattering of 1990s RSes. If we had to pick one Porker from the show, however, it would have to be the utterly gorgeous (and extremely rare) 1952 356 'Bent Window' Convertible presented by the Porsche Centrum Gelderland. Well…that or the brutish 1969 911 S Rallye Monte-Carlo that was used by Jo Siffert for practice at the Targa Florio in 1971. Now, there's a good excuse for a road trip to Sicily if ever we heard one.

We finally clapped eyes on the Facel Vega Convertible that Jasper Beukenkamp of JB Classic Cars had so enthusiastically told us about during our recent visit, and the Porsche 356B 1600 Roadster at Classics2Drive and beautifully aged original Morgan Three Wheeler at Albion Motorcars were a delight. And we also bumped into Heinz Swoboda, who's organising the forthcoming Challenge & GT Days in Austria in May — if you haven't secured an entry to the private event yet, we did eye up a bright yellow Ferrari 355 Challenge for sale with Franco Lembo Automobilia.

Such is the scale and the high footfall, that it would be foolish for the major manufacturers and their respective heritage departments *not* to be present at Essen. Surprisingly, it wasn't *The Saint*'s P1800 that caught our eye on the typically minimal Volvo stand, but rather the whacky 1800 ES shooting brake prototype, nicknamed 'The Rocket' (we assume for its size rather than its speed). The evolution of the Silver Arrow was shown on Mercedes-Benz's stand, with three cars spanning over 80 years and culminating with Lewis Hamilton's 2017 Formula 1 challenger. Give us Mika Häkkinen's V10 screamer any day.

The Auto Union Type D parked directly behind the ludicrous Quattro 200 TransAm demonstrated not just Audi's desire to push the technological envelope, but also the motorsport designers' and engineers' in general. Over at Lamborghini Polo Storico, the Espada took centre stage in this, the quirky model's 50th year, while BMW Classic showed us how to make an M1 look pedestrian — just park the flame-belching Procar version next door. Elsewhere, we got our first glimpse of the 'new old' DB4GT continuation on Aston Martin Works' stand. Regardless of what you think of the concept, it's a breath-taking car in the metal. And will we ever get bored of seeing what barn finds Jaguar Land Rover Classic has found? Probably not.

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It was almost eerie to see the 1991 Le Mans-winning Mazda 787B sitting silent in an exhibition of cars associated with the Circuit de la Sarthe — we're so used to being near-deafened by its spine-tingling rotary engine that it felt almost wrong, like looking helplessly at a rhinoceros in captivity. Alongside it was the fiercely quick Sauber C9 formerly driven by Jochen Mass who, coincidentally, we bumped into several minutes later. He, too, had only just thawed out after the snowy Members' Meeting at Goodwood last weekend.

Speaking of Le Mans, Ascott Collection presented one of the more curious cars from the history of the famous endurance race — the helicopter turbine-powered 1968 Howmet TX. Company founder Xavier Micheron will actually race the car at the Le Mans Classic later this year — an occasion we'll be sure to bring to you on Classic Driver.

We're pleased to report that, generally, the dealers were buoyant and confident — a welcome fact given the testing state of the collector car market at present. Many had sold one or even multiple cars on the show's opening day, and the droves of crowds poised to descend on Essen in the coming days will no doubt see those figures rise. Anyway, that's it for now — Classic Driver has a plane to catch. We're off to Stuttgart for, you'll never guess, another classic car fair! Questionable timing, but hey ho. See you on the other side.

Photos: Mathieu Bonnevie for Classic Driver © 2018

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