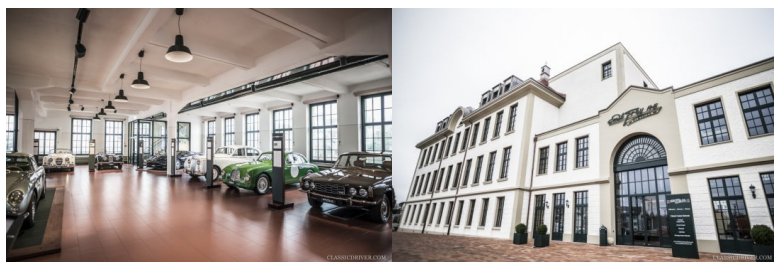


# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Emil Frey Classics is the heart of the Swiss classic car scene

### Lead

In Safenwil, not far from Zurich, the land glistens in glorious British Racing Green, for behind the simple industrial architecture of an old textile factory, Emil Frey Classics has created a home for car enthusiasts that fulfils almost every conceivable automotive desire...



It was a momentous encounter when the young Swiss Emil Frey met bicycle and motorcycle dealer Sir William Lyons in England in the mid-1920s, as it became the catalyst of what was to come: a career that started out as one of the first brand representatives of Jaguar ever, and, then later, grew to Lagonda and Aston Martin. Completed in 2015, Emil Frey Classics' building complex is accented down to the smallest details in the legendary British Racing Green paint colour, which was not only an aesthetic decision but also a conscientious choice to emphasise a long, passionate connection with automotive culture.





This passion is one that Philip Ringier, sales manager and the one responsible for all facets of the classic vehicle trade for the company, unreservedly shares. Although, his passions don't just lie in British classics, which was evident after asking him about his own Lancia Delta Integrale Evo II, to which he raved about "its originality and its unfiltered driving experience." He still remembers rides in it with his car enthusiast father from his childhood and the unforgettable fragrance of freshly mown meadows and petrol. After a career in the financial and media world, he found his calling in 2013 and helped build Emil Frey Classics into what it is today: "We are a service provider that offers a complete service, from advice, maintenance and care to the storage of customer cars in our vintage car hotel." A bond of trust between the company and its clients has been formed — one that has been further reinforced by the many cherished trips the company has hosted.



The former textile factory also houses a museum that holds many acclaimed exhibitions, where you can admire such exotics as a Toyota Corona GT or a Mitsubishi Sapporo, as well as a British jewel or two. As one of the largest distribution companies in Europe, Emil Frey AG primarily deals with new vehicles, including Japanese brands, whose traditional care is just as important to the company. But that's not to say that a couple of classics won't show up in the building from time to time — currently, a 1993 Aston Martin Virage Volante, a 1987 Daimler 5.3 Double Six and a 1951 Jaguar XK120 OTS can all be found in the showroom.





To get to the real heart of Emil Frey Classics, you have to walk past Emil Frey Racing, where three generations have brought success to the racing team, and go to the workshops. Here is where the still young company is working hard to prove its claims of high quality. A few years ago, Walter Frey bought Roos Engineering and integrated the renowned Bernese specialist, who holds the heritage certification for Lagonda and Aston Martin, into Safenwil's Classics City. This allows the all-mounted engine workshop to completely clean, repair and rebuild the six-cylinder and V8 series, and then they can be put through their paces at the in-house performance test stand.

Proof of their competence in the workshop can be found in a Maserati Vignale Spyder that has recently been extensively restored, whilst one of just 32 Aston Martin DB4 Convertible Special Series is currently undergoing the "Classics Treatment", covering everything from the body to the powertrain. "She was old and tired and had a lot to say," smiled Philip Ringier. But the extent of their accurate and detailed work can already be seen on a neatly arranged trolley that's holding the marked components of the DB4 and its custom-made protective covers — of course, finished in British Racing Green.

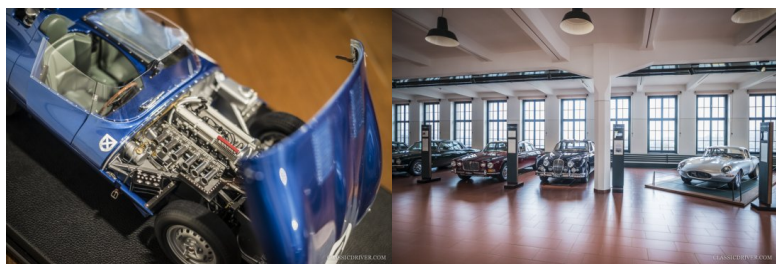


When it comes to the Swiss market, Ringier knows that it's strong and mainly driven by domestic demand: "Many Swiss people buy their classic automobiles in Switzerland, not least because of the otherwise imposed tariffs." That's why Emil Frey Classics, unlike its peers in the EU, sees the approaching Brexit a little more calmly, even though many of their parts are sourced from Britain. This special, almost insular Swiss tradition of buying from within is, according to Ringier, responsible for the development of some of the best mechanics in the world and the production of so many above-average historic cars.

During our visit, the catalogues for the spring auctions of Bonhams, RM Sotheby's and other auction houses were laid on his desk. "Prices have adjusted and stabilized after the hype of recent times," Ringier commented, "and the exclusive cars continue to achieve the values they deserve, but we're seeing that prices for Aston Martins, such as the DB4, DB5 and DB6, have also become more realistic. Whoever has invested just to speculate is losing out."



Like the Lancia Delta, the Aston Martin Virage has long been underestimated. But its hour has come, just like others from the emerging league of youngtimers. "We see, using the example of the youngtimers, that the collector's activity is shifting. There are younger buyers with different preferences who also want to use their cars differently than the classics of the 1950s and 1960s. Of course, the modern supercars are attractive, but we want to work with what we know. Our expertise and reputation lie with the UK brands. Nevertheless, we also offer a Maserati Ghibli and a Mercedes-Benz SLR, because you can be more broadly positioned in retail than in the workshop." Today, specialisation is required, not least because you have to have a network of reliable partners in order to obtain spare parts.



Despite their higher production figures, the growing demand for youngtimers poses a future challenge for Ringier: "We also have the car electricians here, who can revise old English ignition coils. But let's take, for example, injection computers and ECUs in an Aston Martin of the 1990s. They just don't exist anymore, and you have to know how to help yourself." In the face of ever-changing on-board electronics, he also wonders how one will be able to keep a LaFerrari or Veyron ready to drive in the future. But Philip Ringier is convinced of one thing: "No matter how far digital development may go, you will still find young enthusiasts in 40 years' time who want to experience cars up close and touch and drive them."

*Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver*

## Gallery



























































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