

CLASSIC DRIVER

Japanese collectors show their secret cars at the Concorso d'Eleganza Kyoto

Lead
With Zagato celebrating its centenary in style and three classes dedicated to Lamborghini, this year's Kyoto Concorso d'Eleganza proved to be a showcase for Italian coachbuilding culture's most seldom-seen classics...



Milan and Tokyo might be almost 10,000km apart, but there are few places in the world where Italian design culture is valued as highly as it is in Japan. Be it at Milan design week or Pitti Uomo in Florence, the most distinguished and knowledgeable connoisseurs of Italian style, fashion, and craftsmanship are often guests from Japan. And the same is true of the automotive scene – some of the most remarkable collections of Lamborghinis, Abarths, and other exotic Italian brands can be found in the Land of the Rising Sun.

It might be well because of the country's cultural celebration of perfect compositions and magnificent details that the rarest, most special, and most unusual Italian cars are parked in the garages of Osaka and Yokohama and not Rome or Bologna. And did you know that one of the world's finest Neapolitan-style pizzas can be found in Tokyo?



When we received an invitation to this year's Kyoto Concours d'Elegance, we thus didn't need to think twice before we accepted. The old imperial city of Kyoto is a magical place full of wonders and especially popular in the spring for hanami, the Japanese tradition of watching cherry blossoms when they're in full bloom. Situated in Nijō Castle, an ancient shogun residence and one of 17 world heritage sites around Kyoto, the concours promised to be a spectacle that would make even the Grand Hotel Villa d'Este pale in comparison. Even more promising was the selection of 54 alluring and ultra-rare cars built between 1930 and 2018 that the organisers had divided into nine classes, with a special focus on Lamborghini and Zagato – two brands especially dear to Japanese collectors.



Commencing the celebrations for its 100th anniversary, the mythical Milanese design house Zagato orchestrated an impressive line-up of its most remarkable creations. The undisputed star was a car that even the most knowledgeable of enthusiasts and avid concours-goers might not have seen before: the 1965 Lamborghini 3500 GTZ Zagato.

Rather resembling a Grand Touring Ferrari from the same era with its long bonnet and covered headlights, the unique Lamborghini was built by Zagato as a design proposal and displayed at the London Motor Show. Today, it's owned by the American collector-at-large Bill Pope, who still drives the car regularly. It was awarded 'Best of Show' by the jury.



Another Milanese rarity was the 1958 Porsche 356A Speedster Zagato, a rather unusual take on the iconic German sports-racing car that was constructed in 2012 and raised the question of whether sanctioned 'recreations' should be eligible for prestigious concours events. We'll be featuring the car in more detail on Classic Driver in the coming months, so keep your eyes peeled.



One of the oldest cars from Zagato's 100-year history was the 1930 Alfa Romeo 6C 1750 GS Zagato with its striking red headlamps and near-cartoonish racecar silhouette. Its appearance was deemed so remarkable, in fact, that it was awarded the audience-voted prize. Among the early post-War cars proudly bearing the 'Z' badge, it was the bright blue 1952 Fiat 8V Zagato belonging to a Japanese collector that truly stole our hearts. It also had us wondering why compact and elegant sports cars ever fell out of fashion.





Speaking of small, the most charming class in the concours was undoubtedly '750', a selection of tiny, Zagato-bodied sports coupés from the 1950s with 750cc engines and an array of alluring shapes. While the Fiat Abarths reminded our photographer Rémi Dargegen of [the joys of shooting his latest book](#), it was a 1954 Moretti 750 Zagato that claimed the class victory.



Modern Zagato oddities at the Kyoto Concorso d'Eleganza included the quirky Alfa Romeo SZ, the ultra-rare Lancia Hyena, and Italo-Japanese Autotech Stelvio Zagato, the Aston Martin V8, and the Ferrari 348 TS Zagato. The latter is said to have inspired the design of the F355 and was brought to Kyoto by Giorgio Schön, one of [the two Italian daredevils who'll soon embark on the Peking to Paris rally in a Ferrari 308 GT4](#).



As Zagato is one of the few Italian coachbuilders still operating today, the timeline didn't end at the turn of the New Millennium. And while most of the cars were quite eccentric, it was quite the sight to see them grouped together in the manicured gardens of Nijō Castle.



The Lamborghini 5-95 Zagato and the equally-odd Maserati Mostro Zagato Coupé, both from 1966, definitely sparked some heated discussions, while the 2011 Alfa Romeo TZ3 Stradale Zagato stood proudly as an impressive reference and tribute to the brand's legendary TZ cars and rightfully claimed a class win.



And then there were the Lamborghinis. Divided into three separate classes, the 21 Raging Bulls from Sant'Agata Bolognese were sure to impress with their scissor doors and hilariously large aerodynamic addenda. For us, it's still the cars from the Marcello Gandini era that have the most appeal, and with no fewer than four Japanese Miuras on display, it was hard to decide which one was best. The jury finally plumped for the *Verde Miura* and gold 1971 Lamborghini Miura SV. Of the cars from Lamborghini's most flamboyant era between 1970 and 1985, it was an orange Countach LP400 from 1976 that won its class.



Considering the current renaissance of 1990s and early-2000s supercars, it was also an inspiring sight to have three Diablos – in SVR, GT, and GTR guises – parked alongside each other in front of the old samurai castle and adored by guests dressed for the occasion in classic kimonos. Only in Japan!

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2019

Gallery

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