CLASSIC DRIVER

This year’s Concorso d’Eleganza was the ultimate collector car game of thrones

Lead
At last weekend’s Concorso d’Eleganza Villa d’Este, the throne of the global realm of collector cars was renegotiated in exquisite fashion…

On the Monday morning after the Concorso d’Eleganza Villa d’Este, blinking dazedly at your laptop screen, you have to seriously ask yourself whether the weekend actually just happened or if it was one fantastic dream. The grandezza bubble has burst, the final Aperol glasses have been emptied, and it’s time to capture the automotive extravaganza in reasonably meaningful words. One thing is clear: the battle for the throne has been decided. The new collector Tsar is David Sydorick, whose Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B from 1937 proved unbeatable, and not for the first time. The black Carrozzeria Touring-bodied wonder has already won at Pebble Beach and in Paris and its third consecutive major trophy was unanimously voted by both the jury and the audience as the most elegant automobile on earth.

So far, so unsurprising. On the other hand, it was a bit of a pity that, in the face of the mighty Touring Berlinetta, a series of exceptional classic cars were barely able to put up a fight. Still, you had to compliment the selecting committee at Villa d’Este this year – rarely has the competition been so first-rate, versatile, and exciting as it was this year, the Concorso d’Eleganza’s 90th anniversary. In the class for automobiles from the early days of the automotive beauty pageant on Lake Como, it was a rare Boattail Tourer built by the once-glamorous marque Vauxhall that was voted the winner.

As impressive as the mighty land-ships of Delahaye, Lagonda, and Rolls-Royce might have been, we couldn't help but lose our hearts to the miniature sports cars perfected by Italian coachbuilding studios such as Frua, Ghia, and Bertone in the post-War period. The 1952 Maserati A6G/2000 owned by the Belgian collector Roland D'leteren demonstrated that presence and dynamism need not have any relation to size. One of our favourites at Villa d'Este this year was the light grey 1953 Abarth 205 Sport 1100 Ghia, which had long been considered lost. The Jet Age-inspired coupé narrowly missed out on the 'Best of Show' prize at Pebble Beach in 2015.

Ultimately, it was the Japanese Abarth collector Shiro Kosaka who took the class victory with his Fiat Abarth Monomille GT, a car he bought new in Tokyo in 1964 and has maintained fastidiously ever since.

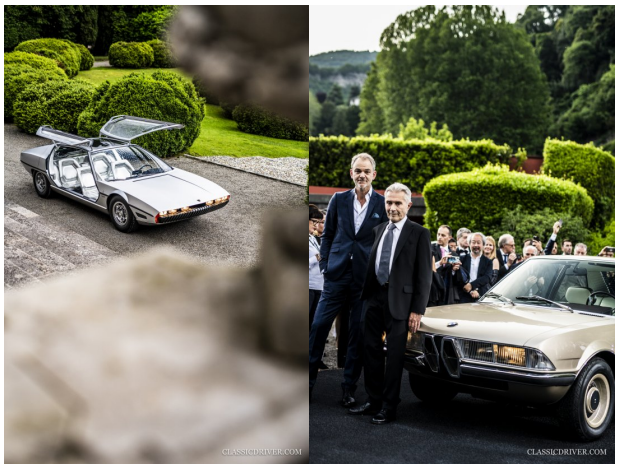
Another Bonzai projectile was also rewarded: the marvellous Touring-bodied Ferrari 166 Mille Miglia from 1949 reminded us how pure and at the same time elegant Enzo Ferrari's early sports cars were. The fact the little racer shared a class with the mighty Ferrari 500 TRC and CD Panhard LM64 was a little strange.

In the class for sports cars from the rock 'n' roll era, it was not the Pininfarina-designed Ferrari 250 GT Speciale nor the Alfa Romeo 1900 Super Sprint 'La Fléche' from the collection of Corrado Lopresto which the jury deemed the best, but rather a Mercedes-Benz 300SL – a car that among this extravagant society, felt downright inconspicuous. The history of this 'Gullwing' particularly impressed the judges. Just the 19th example built, it served as a demonstrator in the autumn of 1954 and was driven by legendary drivers such as Alfred Neubauer, Karl Kling, Juan Manuel Fangio, and Stirling Moss on racetracks from Montlhéry to Brands Hatch.

It was a pleasure to be reacquainted with the Ferrari 250 GT California Spider once owned by Alain Delon, if at first, we almost didn't recognise it! Discovered in 2014 after years of slumber on a French farm, the car was auctioned for 16m euros, despite its state of disrepair. As impressive as the restoration by Russell & Company might be, we do miss the patina that made the car so unique.

The hype surrounding automotive provenance led to a class dedicated to 'Star Cars'. At the centre of the competition was Elvis' BMW 507, parked on a giant record. The Italian rock 'n' roll singer Little Tony might be largely forgotten these days, but the man had style. Two of his former fleet were on show at Lake Como: a Lamborghini Miura and a Bizzarrini GT 5300 Strada. Elton John was savvier in automotive matters than in selecting his eyewear – his aubergine-coloured Aston Martin V8 Vantage looked fantastic.

After the Head of Design at BMW Group Adrian van Hooydonk had honoured the legendary Bertone designer Marcello Gandini on the eve of the Concorso with the rebuilt BMW Garmisch, the audience was astonished by another of the great Italian designer's concepts: the Lamborghini Marzal.



The winged prototype was sold by RM Sotheby's at Villa Erba back in 2011. The Swiss collector Albert Spiess has since extensively restored the silver Espada forebear and was particularly happy to claim the class victory at the historic event.

Further visions of the past were also admired. Designed by Paolo Martin for Pininfarina in 1970, the Ferrari 512 S Modulo is certainly one of the most extraordinary and well-known design studies of the wedge era. Owner James Glickenhaus has transformed the metre-high UFO from a static sculpture to a working car and was certainly not deterred by the torrential rain that broke at Villa d'Este on Saturday.

Philip Sarofim, who last year brought the impressive Lancia Stratos Zero from Los Angeles, once again surprised everyone with a slice of American automotive history. In 1965, GM designer Herb Adams dreamed up the elegant Vivant 77, whose lines were reminiscent of Bertone's BAT concepts. Armed with umbrellas, Sarofim and his co-driver Richard Gauntlett rather unceremoniously hared along the quarter-mile promenade in front of the Villa d'Este. It was only thanks to compere Simon Kidston that the astonished Hautevolée were not given a gravel shower.

That a car doesn’t need four wheels to thrill the audience at a concours event was proven by the team from the Lane Motor Museum in Nashville, Tennessee. Their single-seater, two-wheeled Gyro-X was devised in 1967 by the Ford designer Alex Tremulis as a solution to modern traffic. But the gyrostabiliser, which was supposed to balance the car, proved unreliable and so it remained a prototype. Nonetheless, unusual concepts and ideas such as the Gyro-X make the Concorso d’Eleganza Villa d’Este such an exciting and inspiring cross-section of automotive history.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2019

Gallery

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

\[page\]

Source URL: https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/cars/years-concorso-deleganza-was-ultimate-collector-car-game-thrones
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.