

CLASSIC DRIVER

Turning up the heat at the 2019 Chantilly Arts & Elegance

Lead

The unexpected arrival of a sizzling heatwave could do little to sour the automotive crème de la crème that was the 2019 Chantilly Arts & Elegance. Etienne Raynaud reports... Chantilly may have felt more like Andalucía at the peak of summer last weekend, but it certainly didn't lose any of its magic.

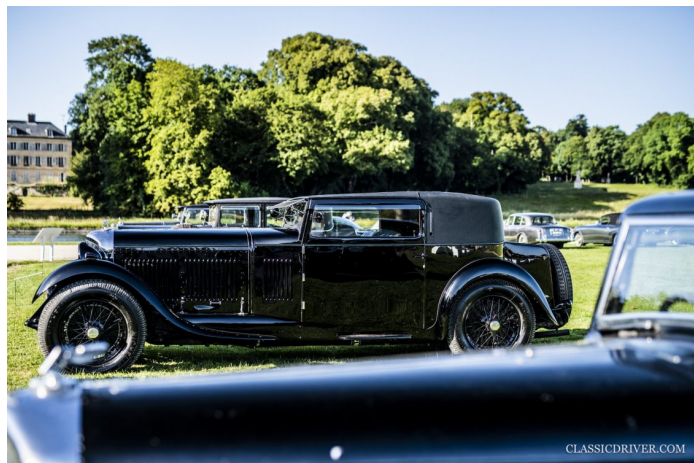
Automotive kings of the Emperors' ground



It all began on Saturday morning beneath the shade of the Chantilly forest with a short tour, which brought together an unusual mix of cars ranging from a pre-War Bugatti Brescia to contemporary supercars. There was also a strong contingent of Bentleys and in pure Woolf Barnato style, the owners of most had braved the heat and driven to the Duke of Aumale's gardens in Chantilly from their respective homes across the channel or in Belgium.

The tour headed to the Château de Compiègne, a former residence for both French royals and emperors famed for being the biggest neoclassical château in France. We're not sure Napoleon Bonaparte could have imagined welcoming Claudio Rodaro's Gulf-liveried Porsche 917K on his gravel driveways. The prototype, which has miraculously been road registered, completed the entire rally – quite the achievement considering the route encompassed medieval paved streets, narrow bridges, and numerous speed bumps. In terms of popularity among the hundreds of car spotters situated along the route, it definitely paid off.

Turning 100 – the new pinnacle



Bentleys will star at most major concours events this year as it celebrates its 100th birthday. The opulent cars with the famous winged Bs affixed to their noses felt right at home at Chantilly with no fewer than three classes in the Concours d'Etat, showcasing pre-War and post-War open and closed models. The superb 1931 Bentley 8-Litre Coupé brought to France by William E. 'Chip' Connor, a top-level concours usual regular, will return to Hong Kong with the pre-War 'Best of Show' award.

Another brand beginning with the letter B and celebrating its centenary is Ballot, whose Paris-built cars, which were made famous for tackling the Indianapolis race from 1919 onwards, received a well-deserved celebration. On the contrary, Citroën did not get a special mention for its 100th anniversary. Only one Citroën, the GS-based Camargue concept, starred on the lawn in the class for cars designed by Marcello Gandini. Enthusiasts of the marque had to get their quirky fill by venturing into the generous club area instead.

A French affair



If the ‘Voisin cars with Voisin coachwork’ looked like a niche class on paper, in reality, it attracted a superb mix of cars that testified to the curiosity and versatility of Gabriel Voisin’s genius. The Clairière and the Aérodyne would have both been worthy ‘Best of Show’ winners.

The post-War ‘Best of Show’ in 2019 did go to a French car, which combined elegance, rarity, and myriad eccentric details. The 1948 Talbot-Lago T26GS with bodywork by Figoni and Falaschi benefitted from a world-class restoration that showcases all the design details specified by its original owner, a French industrialist who made his fortune in zips. All things considered, it was a logical, well-deserved, yet safe choice for the award.

Creating classes is not easy



Creating different classes for concours events must be fun for the organisers, but also very tricky and that can lead to mixed results. Some of the classes at Chantilly gathered truly exceptional cars while others didn’t meet the standards one would expect. The Japanese sports car category looked rather poor and the Facel Vega class could have easily welcomed a few more additions and at least a little more variety. The tribute to the 50th anniversary of the Porsche 917 only attracted three cars, surprising for Peter Auto, which has welcomed many examples of the legendary sports car in its historic racing grids.

Racing in your genes





It might be entitled Arts & Elegance, but competition is definitely in Peter Auto’s genes and it’s become a key pillar of the Chantilly concours over the years. The circle of Matra racing cars assembled to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Sir Jackie Stewart’s maiden Formula 1 World Championship was situated right at the entrance to the concours this year, while it was impossible to miss the impressive display of McLaren competition cars, from the Le Mans-winning F1 GTR and the Richard Mille-sponsored Senna GTR.



The colourful post-1994 Endurance GT class showcased the cars we’re more accustomed to seeing in Peter Auto’s Endurance Legends grids, while the exceptional post-War Aston Martin racing cars grid featured the Gulf-liveried LMP1 Lola, legends including a DB4GT Zagato and a DBR1, and a DBRS9 exhibited by [Classic Driver dealer Dylan Miles](#). To this end, the ex-Count Rossi Porsche 917K, which is in beguilingly original condition and hasn’t been seen publicly for a long time, would have been a daring ‘Best of Show’ winner, especially given title sponsor Richard Mille’s love of racing cars and the show’s DNA.

From Art de Vivre to lifestyle



If the first editions of the Chantilly Arts & Elegance showed a strong commitment to French etiquette and strict rules, this year saw a sharp move towards a more lifestyle-oriented event, mixing classics and modern supercars, the latter of which made an emphatic entrance on the lawn. For the first time the event’s five-year history, Bugatti had more of its modern-era cars shown than pre-War models. Pagani also chose the immaculate grounds of Chantilly to celebrate 20 years of the Zonda, while Bentley showed off the new Flying Spur and Ateliers Diva presented its brand-new carbon-fibre coupé alongside [the sensational Targa we drove earlier this year](#). McLaren chose to exhibit the Speedtail in the Concours d’Elegance, which mixed prototypes and concept cars with high fashion (not easy during Paris couture week) and won the ‘Best of Show’ award.



This move towards a combination of the past, present, and future makes perfect sense as the Paris Motor Show has lost its splendour and luxury brands are keen to showcase their cars in an elegant yet relaxed environment. We think it's only a matter of time until Chantilly Arts & Elegance becomes a two-day event rather than one. Bets are open, but for us, it would be an entirely deserving move.

Text: Etienne Raynaud / Photos: Rémi Dargegen

Gallery

