

CLASSIC DRIVER

Why Journées d'Automne is one of our favourite classic car events

Lead

Outstanding food and wine, locations that slap you around the face with their beauty and a selection of automotive treasures that will have you yearning to own an old car, Journées d'Automne is a fantastic weekend of casual classic motoring. Our man J. Philip Rathgen headed to this year's edition...



Journées d'Automne. It sounds a bit like the title of a romance novel by Rosamunde Pilcher, but it's actually a wonderful classic car meeting that takes place every October just east of Paris. What began several years ago as an autumnal outing for a small number of car-minded friends has evolved into a large yet intimate get-together and an insider's tip for celebrating the end of the events season in style.

"You'll love it!" Rémi Dargegen assured me when I told him I was finally going to make Journées d'Automne. The special meeting, which is organised *by* a group of friends *for* a group of friends, has been on my bucket list for many years. And indeed, as the *asado* (an Argentinian-style barbecue) sizzled against the backdrop of the spectacular 13th-century ruins of Château de Fère-en-Tardenois on Friday evening, it felt like a good old-fashioned family reunion.



Enthusiasts and friends travelled from France, England, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, America and even Argentina to enjoy great food and wine (we were in the Champagne region, after all), even better locations and roads and a truly diverse selection of classic cars. Wilhelm Schmid – the ever-passionate CEO of A. Lange & Söhne, Journées d'Automne's low-key title sponsor – drove his stunning Porsche 911S from Dresden together with his wife Yvonne. "For me, this event is the highlight of my personal motoring year," he told me. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."





On Saturday morning we headed to the small but challenging Circuit des Écuyers for the most relaxed of track-days. The field of participants in its entirety, which ranged from the 1912 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost affectionately known as 'Nellie' to a 1973 Lotus Elan, covered a vast spectrum of automotive history and catered to virtually every taste. In fact, never before have I seen such mutual appreciation among classic car owners as I did during the past few days.



On the track itself, the going was more cheerful than competitive - each driver was allowed to complete as many laps as they liked and dig deeper into their skillsets throughout the day. We even saw a number of people sharing their cars, which goes to show how relaxed the atmosphere was. The banter was abundant, too. It was brilliant and so refreshing.

Devon Macneil was one of the attendees from across the pond and was blown away by the event. "It's special because of the eclecticism of the cars," she told us. "I went around the track in a Mercedes-Benz 300SL 'Gullwing' and right after I jumped in a Lotus 7 - the difference was so cool to experience. I suppose the bucolic French countryside didn't hurt, either!"



Dirk Rumpff, who organised [the recent Flitzer Club meeting in Berlin](#), took advantage of the event and turned Journées d'Automne into a cross-continental road trip with his beautiful dark-green Maserati Khamsin. And on that note, I was struck by the sheer number of young participants. It seems the familiar and relaxed concept really strikes a chord with the younger generation. We noted a father-son duo in a beautiful yellow Alpine A110 1600S and a few lone-drivers proud as punch to show off their very first classic cars.



In short, Journées d'Automne is the kind of classic car event that, in my opinion, has a very bright future. There's none of the strictly enforced itineraries and timetables you find at many other established meetings. Nope, here the 'live and let live' principle reigns supreme and works very well indeed. Ultimately, Rémi was absolutely right. I loved Journées d'Automne and will definitely be returning – next time with a classic car!

Photos: Mathieu Bonnevie for Classic Driver © 2019

Gallery



















































































