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La Voiture Blanche – we're all dreaming about this white Bugatti EB110

07 July 2020 | Classic Driver

For the French photographer Kevin Van Campenhout, an early morning rendezvous with a brilliant white Bugatti EB110GT in Paris could only be capped by a spirited dash to Molsheim to meet the ground-breaking 1990s supercar's spiritual successor, the Centodieci...

It's 14 September 1991, 110 years to the day since Ettore Bugatti was born, and the Champs-Élysées in Paris is chock-a-block with cars, motorcyclists and daring pedestrians all hoping to catch a glimpse of the French heart-throb Alain Delon piloting the newly unveiled Bugatti EB110GT.



What the thousands of people – from top-level automotive industry execs to hardcore Bugatti aficionados – who travelled to Paris for the launch of the ground-breaking Gran Turismo don't realise is that the lavish ceremony at the Place de la Défense very nearly didn't go ahead at all.

As Romano Artioli, the charismatic Italian businessman responsible for audaciously resurrecting the Bugatti brand in the 1980s, told us when we visited his family home in Trieste last year, "A week before the reveal, my wife Renata had to go to Paris because the authorities there had thought that we wanted to stage a small event but had found out that we'd actually invited more than 5,000 people from across the world.



"They thought it was too dangerous, so we had to hire hundreds of private security guards to form a perimeter around the entire event. They also told us we couldn't do overt advertising, but Renata got around that by arranging a huge bouquet of flowers in the shape of the Bugatti logo." Thankfully, the day went off without a hitch.

Fast-forward 29 years, and on a bright and early summer's morning in the French capital, the streets are all but deserted. That is save for the brilliant white Bugatti EB110GT prowling the glitzy boulevards, the raspy and mechanical thrum of its 3.5-litre, five-valve-per-cylinder, quad-turbocharged V12 trailing in the car's wake.



It might have been controversially built in Italy rather than France (the lure of Emilia-Romagna's pool of talented automotive engineers was impossible for Artoli to ignore) but the four-wheel-drive, carbon-chassis EB110 truly embodied Ettore Bugatti's 'Nothing is too beautiful, nothing too expensive' mantra.

That Marcello Gandini's fundamental design for the EB110 was finalised by the architect of the magnificent avant-garde factory in which the car was built is but another fascinating footnote in this car's ultimately ill-fated story. Amid a global economic downturn and alleged industrial sabotage, Bugatti Automobili S.p.A. was declared bankrupt on 23 September 1995 and closed immediately. Only around 115 production EB110s were built in Campogalliano.



In its original GT guise, we reckon the EB110 is a discreet and devilishly handsome beast – far more so than the aggressive, track-focused Supersport and especially in the ultra-rare shade of Bianco Monaco (just a handful of EB110s were finished in the colour). More remarkable is its Jekyll and Hyde nature. Beneath 5,000rpm, while cocooned in the remarkably comfortable leather-swathed cockpit, the EB110 is a docile and luxury cruiser.

But push that loud pedal further towards its stop and 550 Italian force-fed thoroughbreds are unleashed in a frighteningly quick stampede. And if the back-thumping accelerative whoosh doesn't put a grin on your face, the dramatic concerto of chirrups from the four turbochargers when you come off the gas will leave you laughing out loud.



It felt only fair that today's VW-owned Bugatti officially acknowledged Romano Artioli and the marque's Italian chapter last year. Perhaps more surprising was the striking modern homage to the EB110, christened the Centodieci and actually [revealed at La Fabbrica Blu in Campogalliano](#)



The EB110 might not have been born in Molsheim but taking the Italian Bugatti to the marque's historic home after our morning in Paris was an unforgettable experience, nonetheless. Especially when the 1990s supercar's spiritual successor was waiting for us. Like the EB110, in many ways the Centodieci defines a cult era of supercar outrage and extremity. Whether the Chiron-based hypercar stands the test of time quite so well remains to be seen.

Photos: Kevin Van Campenhout for Classic Driver © 2020

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