

CLASSIC DRIVER

At Kessel Classic, the art of restoring Ferraris is very much alive

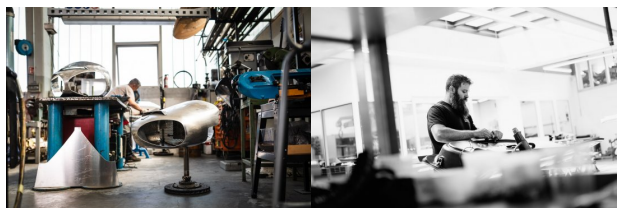
Lead

In 1971, the Swiss racing driver Loris Kessel began repairing Italian sports cars to fund his Formula 1 activities. Almost five decades later, the automotive empire he started in Lugano, now overseen by his son Ronnie, dedicates an entire department to maintaining and restoring the very same cars...

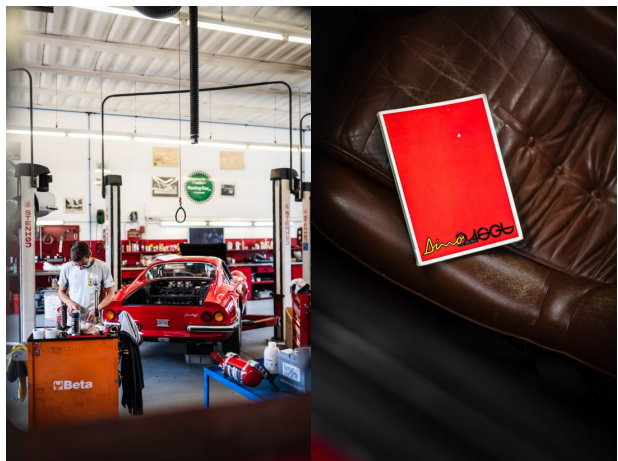


Kessel is a name synonymous with Ferrari and arguably the biggest business associated with Prancing Horse in Europe. Head to any sports-car race meeting and you'll invariably find Kessel supporting preparing and running Ferraris on behalf of their owners. And in the pretty Swiss lakeside town of Lugano that the automotive empire calls its home, F8 Tributos, 812 Superfasts and GTC4Lussos from the company's official Ferrari concessionaire regularly prowl the streets.

But did you know that Kessel has a dedicated Classic department carrying out high-quality maintenance work and award-winning Classiche-certified restorations?



"We speak today about the Classic department, but when my father started the business in the early 1970s, the cars we now refer to as classics were new or nearly new," explains Ronnie, [founder Loris Kessel's son who now helms the 100-strong company](#). "I remember a wonderful photo of him and Clay Reggazzoni sharing a beautiful green Dino – at that time they were teammates at Ensign and repairing these cars was the job to be done between Formula 1 races!



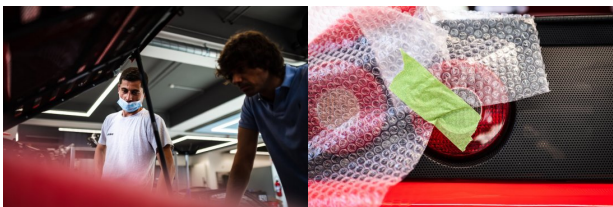
"Today, we race on Sundays and restore on Monday. But that's exactly what my father was doing in the beginning, except he was repairing and maintaining the cars as they didn't need restoring by that point. Nothing has changed – the workshop is still in the same four walls." That Kessel as a business has been working on these cars for decades and, as a result, boasts a wealth of knowledge and experience only serves to add value to its Classic arm.



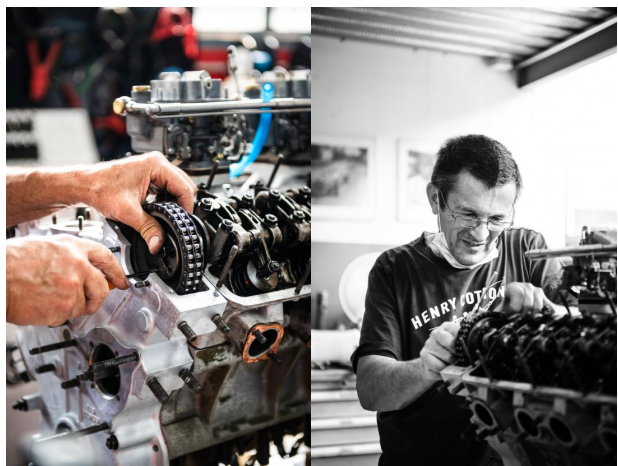
From minor remedial work to comprehensive frame-off restorations, the breadth of work offered by Kessel Classic is impressive. And by no means are its activities limited to Ferraris – Italian cars in general are the focus here. “We’re passionate about Alfa Romeos, Lancias, Lamborghinis, De Tomasos and Fiats, and they have all passed through our workshops over the years,” Ronnie proudly exclaims.



Taking anywhere from eight months to one year to complete, Kessel Classic’s full restorations are notable in that every step of the process is carried out in-house by experienced craftsmen and engineers who cut their teeth working on these old cars when they were new. And originality is of the utmost importance – extensive historical research and original spare parts are encompassed to preserve it.



“From the hand-beaten bodywork and the engine to the gearbox and the electronics, there’s not a single procedure that we need to outsource – we even have a master saddler for the interiors,” explains Ronnie. “This is better because customers needn’t spend money transporting the car from specialist to specialist and they can visit us at any time and clearly see the progress of their restoration.”



Many of Kessel's skilled craftsmen and engineers cut their teeth working on these old Italian cars when they were new, though modern technology and know-how is now incorporated with the traditional techniques to maximise quality. Furthermore, Kessel is one of the few businesses in Europe authorised by the Ferrari factory to award Classiche Certification which, as we know, is a must-have for today's discerning collectors. "We've taken part in a number of prestigious concours d'elegance events and won several trophies, which we're very proud of. It's fantastic to have the quality of our restoration work recognised by well-respected industry experts."



Further strings to Kessel Classic's bow include car storage and supporting customers who wish to go historic racing. "We're very active in historic racing," Ronnie comments, noting his victory in the 2016 Rallye Monte-Carlo Historique with an Alpine A110 as an especially proud moment. "We support 10 cars there, which is a big operation. We have also won at the Grand Prix de Monaco Historique with my father's old Ensign Formula 1 car, and we're always at the Mille Miglia and the Bernina Gran Turismo. We like to prove that these old ladies can still run fast!"



A holistic classic car ownership experience, from purchase to restoration, is what Kessel strives to provide, and Ronnie is taking steps to broaden the burgeoning departments appeal and reach – construction of a new facility in Lugano solely for restoration is already underway. We wonder how many of the prancing horses that were once fettled by Loris Kessel in the 1970s will re-enter the hallowed halls of Kessel Classic in the coming years. If the hardworking and ever-entrepreneurial Ronnie has anything to do with it, the answer is many.

Photos: Andrea Klainguti for Classic Driver © 2020

Gallery

