

CLASSIC DRIVER

La vie en bleu - On the road with 110 vintage Bugattis in the South of France

Lead
For this year's International Bugatti Meeting, 110 vintage cars from 1909 to the early 1960s came together for a week-long celebration in France's Occitania region. Photo reporter and die-hard Bugatti enthusiast Rémi Dargegen joined the road trip for Classic Driver.



I was lucky enough to photograph my first International Bugatti Meeting in Provence, back in 2015. With the blue blood of the Bugatti brand running through my veins, it was a real dream for me to be surrounded by so many of these cars in such beautiful landscapes. As I've been a member of the Bugatti Club de France since my teenage years, it was quite obvious, for them and for me, that we would work together again for this year's edition.





From the start, the International Bugatti Meeting 2022 promised to be even more exceptional, as it would be the biggest gathering of Bugatti cars of the pre-war era. In fact, it's a world record: 110 cars together, all driven by their owners on the stunning roads of the Occitania region in the South of France, between the departments of Tarn, Aveyron and Lot.



Even if I've been around the cars from Molsheim for years now as a photographer, it's always special to see one in person. But imagine meeting not one or two, but 110 Bugattis all at once, representing almost all types ever produced. And not even static at an exhibition or concours, but driven flat-out through some of the most marvelous landscapes France has to offer! It wasn't a week of work. It was a dream. I think I have never been so amazed since I quit my day job and started my career as a photographer eight years ago.



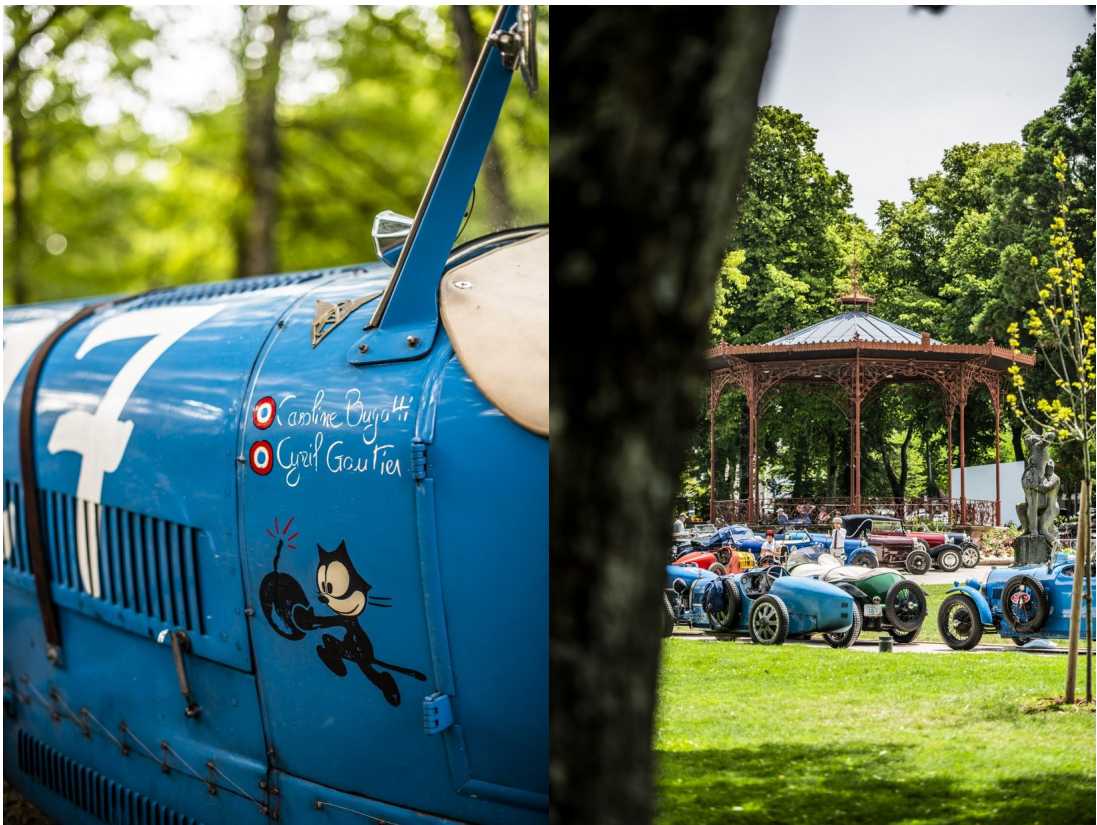
The cars are one thing, sure. They impressed with their quality, their quantity, and their presence. A Bugatti is a Bugatti – and you can't compare it with anything else. Even the more modest cars have this little je-ne-sais-quoi that makes them mesmerizing. The most impressive cars were certainly the Bugatti Type 59 and the Type 54 with its enormous 5.0 litre engine. Still, I have a soft spot for the Brescias – they are so tiny, so agile, and still so fast. There were plenty of highly original Type 37s, the super elegant Type 55 Cabriolet Vanvooren, and a very desirable pair of Type 57 Cabriolets. But more than the cars, it was the spirit of the meeting that gave me goosebumps all week.



Today Bugatti is arguably the most prestigious car brand on the planet – and even in the era of Ettore Bugatti and his sons the cars they made were only accessible for the wealthiest clients. Still, the atmosphere during the tour was anything but luxurious. It was all just about enjoying these little precious moments of life in great company. Like stopping in the middle of nowhere to go for a swim in a river, with the wet swimsuits and underwear dangling from the mirrors and exhausts of the cars to dry. At the end of the week, I felt I was part of a new family.



The participants came to drive their cars from all over the world, some even made it here from the US, New Zealand, and Australia. And these Bugatti enthusiasts drive their valuable machines no matter the distance and no matter the weather conditions – in 2015 we had rain, hail and thunderstorms, this year we had a crazy heatwave. Compared to the international meetings organized by other countries, the French one is known foremost for the driving. You come here to do a lot of driving, and that's what makes all the difference.



You have to consider that the majority of the cars are 100 years old, or even more, and all of them made it to the end, thanks to the fantastic assistance crew. They had to fix a few minor issues every evening, but all the teams made it to the end, some of the drivers being over 80 years old! All of this demands a huge amount of respect!



There was this British couple in a tiny Bugatti Brescia Type 13 that I had a particular affection for. I had noticed them back in 2015 in the Provence, but seven years later they were still driving way faster than any of us in our modern cars, always motivated, always smiling, and just enjoying every minute of this fantastic week!



I also greatly enjoyed the sight of the Bugatti family, coming with their two daughters in the back of the Bugatti Type 43 Grand Sport. Or the girls casually driving their Grand Prix and touring cars in the spirit of the great French model, dancer, and racing driver Hellé Nice. After all, Bugatti is a brand that is meant to be shared with our partners, sons and daughters, the younger generations. So why not let everyone drive?



The reactions of the public in the villages and towns all along the route was the best reflection of the spirit of Bugatti: People of all generations love these cars! They asked so

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many questions about the cars, and showed so much respect to the teams. Some could liken these cars to dinosaurs, but one thing is for certain: if they continue to be celebrated like this, they will not go extinct anytime soon. Here's to many more decades of enjoying Bugattis on the roads. Vive la marque!

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2022

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/cars/la-vie-en-bleu-road-110-vintage-bugattis-south-france>
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