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classiccars

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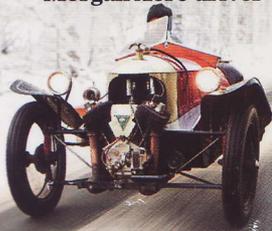
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SEPTEMBER 2011 £4.30



ALFA V8 MYTHS BUSTED + RARE PEUGEOT 403 TESTED + TALBOT-LAGO T26C



Best in show: the 1939 Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 S Berlinetta bought by Benito Mussolini for his mistress



Aston Martin DB4 GT Zagato



Bentley Continental formerly owned by Lord Carnegie



Lord Foster's 1934 Dymaxion re-creation



Tatra T600: winner in the Oddballs class

Salon Privé calls Syon House home

London concours' move to Middlesex venue proves popular. Alfa Romeo gifted to Mussolini's mistress takes Best of Show

IT'S TAKEN a few years for Salon Privé to establish itself. But with a move from The Hurlingham Club in Fulham to the London home of the Duke of Northumberland at Syon Park, the sixth running of the luxury lifestyle-themed event in June demonstrated maturity, and the new venue is perfect for future growth.

This is the fifth time the supercar event has included a classic concours d'elegance element, with 11 classes

(three of those for motorbikes) and 55 cars, judged by a panel including sports car racing legend Derek Bell, designer Peter Stevens and international classic car authorities Adolfo Orsi and Marcel Massini.

Gary Snell's astounding 1939 Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 S Berlinetta was the runaway Best of Show winner. Ordered new by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, it was given to his mistress Claretta Petacci, who made

her last journey in the car before being arrested and executed with Mussolini by members of the Communist resistance in April 1945.

2010 Classic Car of the Year finalist Ivan Margolius won the class for Oddballs with his 1949 Tatra T600 Tatraplan, trumping the wonderful 1934-type Dymaxion re-creation built by Crosthwaite and Gardiner for architect Lord Foster. Classic Cars contributors Simon Kidston and

Kevin Kivlochan both entered cars for the event: Kidston's 1936 Bugatti Type 57 Atalante in the same class as the winning Alfa Romeo, while Kivlochan's freshly restored AC Cobra 289 MkII FIA lost out to George Missetzis' ex-Peter Berry semi-competition 1961 Jaguar E-type 3.8 roadster in the Road Racers class.

Rolls-Royce centred its Spirit of Ecstasy centenary celebrations on the event, with more than a dozen concours examples including an ex-Alpine Rally 1933 Phantom II, a vivid purple 1914 Silver Ghost, and Richard Raynsford's 1932 Graberbodied 20/25 drophead that was pulled from Lake Geneva in 1939 after its Afghan prince owner overshot a bend. The Fiennes Restoration-restored car won its class, adding another accolade to its Masters Class win at the Rolls-Royce



600bhp supercharged Interceptor R



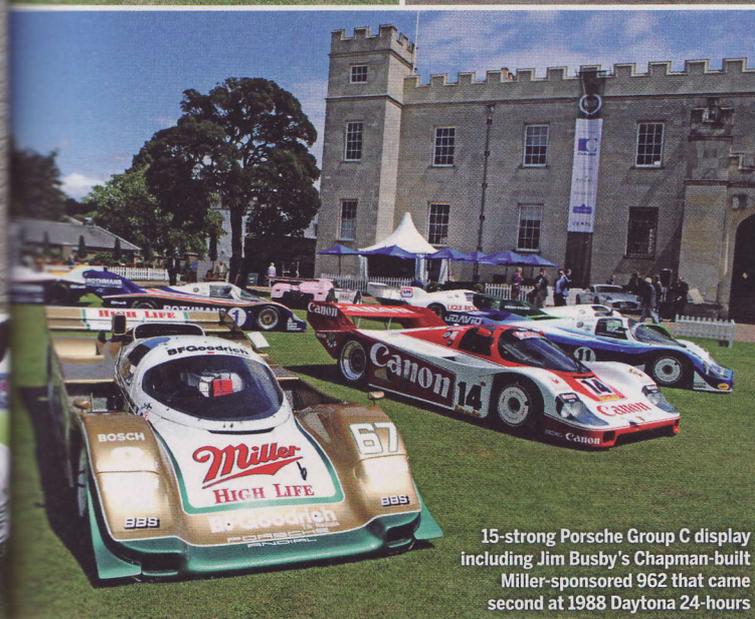
Simon Kidston's 1936 Bugatti Type 57 Atalante



1934 Alfa Romeo P3



Kevin Kivlochan's restored AC Cobra



15-strong Porsche Group C display including Jim Busby's Chapman-built Miller-sponsored 962 that came second at 1988 Daytona 24-hours

Enthusiasts Club's concours the previous weekend.

New additions this year further bolstered the appeal for classic car enthusiasts: a dealer area included Rolls-Royce and Bentley specialist Frank Dale and Stepsons, historic racing specialist William l'Anson and Kensington-based Hexagon Classics, while auction house RM held a sale on site too.

A special feature in front of the house showcased 15 cars from The Historic Porsche Group C Collection. Never seen in public together before, the collection boasts six works cars, including the prototype 956 from 1982 and the Le Mans pole-position qualifying 962s from '86, '87 and '88.

In the supercar display area Eagle E-types unveiled its latest all-aluminium fuel-injected 4.7-litre Lightweight Speedster – a

comprehensively re-engineered Jaguar E-type – and Jensen International Automotive debuted a 600bhp supercharged version of its reworked Interceptor R. The firm also now offers an R Classic package, applying the 'R' mechanical upgrades including Corvette LS3 engine and independent rear suspension where a full restoration is not required.

And, if you weren't too busy enjoying the lobster luncheon and limitless Pommery Champagne, you could take a ride in 102EX, the only Experimental Electric Rolls-Royce Phantom in the world – Rolls-Royce being keen to test reaction to the idea of an electric flagship. With a whoosh that's more spaceship than milk float, and unparalleled refinement – not unlike the atmosphere at Salon Privé itself – we're sold on the idea.

...of an encyclopaedic knowledge of Cooper Bristol chassis numbers, they're just ordinary folk who see the cars that we've admired so much for so long as deeply special. And that's a good thing. What was also pleasing about Dino man was that he didn't use the word 'investment' once. He has no plans to sell, no eye on a making a profit, he's just delighted to know that he now owns a car that radiates more magic and allure than his modern Lambo. Dare I say it, but old cars are nibbling round the mainstream.

I also know a yummy mummy who's even more conventional. Drives a BMW 320 convertible, everything in the house is magnolia, white kitchen, hanging baskets, Pleasant Valley Sunday, the absolute picture of suburban conformity. But she's done the same thing. Traded in the Beemer and strongarmed her husband into buying her a 1987 D Mercedes 420 SL. For a woman who's spent her entire life making safe and predictable decisions to suddenly swap her two-year-old cabrio for a 25-year-old V8 Teutonic cruiser is pure *Jack and the Beanstalk*. And she couldn't be happier. I see her rumbling off in the mornings in her Jackie O sunglasses, top down, blonde kids strapped into the little seats in the back, looking absolutely gorgeous.

For classic cars to have penetrated the suburban psyche so deeply indicates a seismic shift in perception. Sure, these people aren't short of a few quid, but they're not the types who take risks. They always go for the safe option. And they don't live on the Fulham Road either – both of them live in rural Warwickshire. Instead of the market being propped up by stony-hearted speculators we're getting real people coming into our hobby simply because they love the way our cars look. And swapping ancient for modern is a big deal for someone who's unfamiliar with old cars. That's the bit I find the most heartening of all.

So the market uplift we've been witnessing over the last couple of years isn't all down to investors and opportunists. There are plenty of decent people completely disinterested in money that are buying old cars for the same reasons that we always have: good old-fashioned enthusiasm. This is one of the most significant developments ever to have happened to our hobby and one that will keep it fresh, solvent and busy for many years to come. Welcome to our passion.

Quentin Willson came to fame by appearing on BBC TV's Top Gear every week for nine years, plus his own show The Car's the Star. He's been passionate about cars from childhood and started trading up from an Austin-Healey Froggy Sprite as a teenager. He's written ten motoring books, including The Ultimate Classic Car Book and Cool Cars.