

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bringing International Style back to Como with a one-off Bentley Continental T

Lead

Just days before the most flamboyant Bentley Continentals from the 1990s are celebrated at Fuoriconcorso on 26 May, we drove this rather remarkable example of Crewe craftsmanship to Como for an unusual photo shoot...



Driving into the ballroom of The Ritz with a dirty racecar might have felt audacious in the 1920s, but arguably the most daring stunt an affluent 'Bentley Boy' can pull off in 2019 is to leave his Continental in the no-stopping zone in front of the Italian tax police's headquarters, walk to the bar next door for a coffee, and casually observe as the officers duly cross-check the number plate with his latest wealth declaration files. Luckily, the owner of this Bentley's only illegitimate offshore activity was speeding with his motor yacht on the waves of the Cote d'Azur. Calling the captain of the Guardia di Finanzain Como and requesting permission to photograph the car in front of the headquarter's main entrance was thus no hara-kiri mission, but a surprisingly pleasant and non-bureaucratic endeavour.





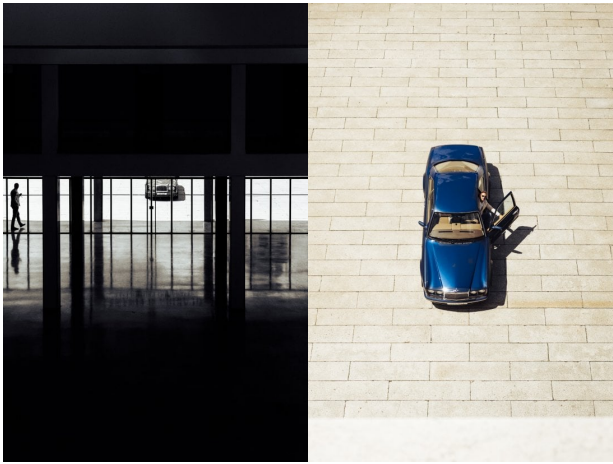
Architectural geeks will already have noticed that the modernist building in our photos is not a random police station, but one of the most famous Italian examples of the International Style, which was associated with Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1920s and '30s. Designed by visionary architect Giuseppe Terragni and built between 1932 and 1936, the rationalist building overlooking Piazza del Popolo was used by Benito Mussolini and his fascist party, yielding it the unfortunate name Casa del Fascio until it was renamed the less-controversial *Palazzo Terragni* by the locals and taken over by the *Guardia di Finanza* in the 1950s.



Still, the geometric building, with its 110-foot-wide facade resembling a giant Rubik's cube, is one of Como's most extraordinary landmarks and therefore the preferred backdrop for our photo shoot with one of the most interesting cars built in Europe in the 1990s.



Owned by Guglielmo Miani - the Milanese fashion entrepreneur, publisher of [an exquisite new Bentley book](#), and creative force behind [Fuoricorso](#) - the dark blue Grand Tourer in the photos is a one-off Bentley Continental T Mulliner Special Commission that was built and tailored in the spring of 1998 at the mythical customisation department and sports a number of exciting special features. James Carter LeBlanc, the New York-based client who ordered the car, knew exactly what he wanted - and didn't mind the eye-watering cost that accrued with every single made-to-measure detail.



Choosing the top-of-the-line Bentley Continental T Mulliner with its shorter wheelbase, greater power and torque, and stiffer ride than the Continental R, the future owner had the car painted in elegant Cobalt Blue over a two-tone Sandstone and Tan leather interior. The most remarkable specification was the replacement of the rear seats – which, due to the shortened T chassis, offered no noteworthy legroom anyway – with a luggage compartment and two secret lockers under the floor.



Following the fashion of the time, the client went for a flamboyant mix of colours and materials for the interior of the car, again making very particular requests – ‘not soft tan but the old tan’, as a comment in the factory documentation states, for example – and turning the cockpit into a showcase of contemporary British craftsmanship. The steering wheel was upholstered in tan and black leather, the column in tan, and the central console in tan and sandstone. On the car’s exterior, the owner chose a traditional chrome finish and a badge bar for the radiator grille and a ‘Winged B’ that was elegantly stored away in a bespoke pouch unless the car was exhibited. Though Guglielmo Miani has replaced the somewhat old-school vertical vane radiator grille with the sportier ‘egg-crate’ version, he’ll certainly respect the original owner’s wishes and affix the mascot when the car is displayed among its siblings at Villa del Grumello during *Fuoricorso* on 26 May.



While the Bentley Continental T Mulliner bearing the chassis numer WCX67148 is certainly an impressive display of the artisan skills in Bentley’s dream factory at the dawn of the new millennium, one only has to press the accelerator pedal into the thick carpet on one of the twisty roads around Lake Como to marvel as the 6.75-litre turbocharged V8 mobilises its impressive torque and thrusts the vast 2.5-tonne vehicle with mind-boggling force.



And while 23 Continental Ts were built to Mulliner specifications, Miani is certainly the only Bentley driver on the shores of the lake who is greeted with an approving salute not only by fellow gentlemen on their Rivas and Boeschs, but also by the eagle-eyed officers on the *Guardia di Finanza* patrol boat. In the end, there's nothing as luxurious and pleasant as a clear conscience, don't you think?

Photos by Andrea Klainguti for Classic Driver © 2019

Gallery

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