

CLASSIC DRIVER

[These cars stole our hearts at Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este](#)

Lead

With anniversary classes for Maserati and Rolls-Royce, as well as a line-up of quirky one-offs and video-generation supercars, the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este once again defended its title as the quintessential collector car event of the year.



It was 5 o'clock on Saturday afternoon when this year's Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este reached its glorious peak: the sun was shining from a bright blue sky, the wooden yachts were dancing on the lake, the air was thick with petrol fumes and cigar smoke. The last few cars of the parade – a beautifully patinated Bugatti Type 35 with its roaring engine and the original Ruf Yellowbird driven by Alois Ruf and his daughter Aloisa – had already been praised by the assembled hautevolée with standing ovations. Now Simon Kidston was leading the Aperol-sipping crowd on the grand hotel's terrace to the day's grand finale, the announcement of the winner of the Coppa d'Oro Villa d'Este trophy voted by public referendum. "It goes down as one of the best marketing stunts in the history of motor racing," Kidston jokingly reported, "That the 1995 Le Mans 24 hours were won by an extraordinarily persevering McLaren F1 GTR sponsored by Uneo Clinic – a Tokyo institution specialized in penis enlargements – in a climatic victory." Now the guests of the Concorso d'Eleganza had picked the victorious F1 GTR's road-legal sister car, a subtle two-tone wedge known as chassis 043, as the winner of this year's Coppa d'Oro.





One of the most original McLaren F1 road cars in existence, chassis 043 was owned by Motokatzu Sayama, owner of the fabled Ueno Clinic in Tokyo and sponsor of the McLaren F1 GTR chassis 01R – the car that famously won the 1995 Le Mans 24 hours. Both cars were painted in the same grey, two-tone colour scheme – apparently to match the owner’s Mercedes-Benz SL. It’s rather unusual for a modern-day supercar to claim the Coppa d’Oro Villa d’Este and we are particularly thrilled about it, since we already adored the alluringly subtle yet special car [at our joint Kiklo and Classic Driver ‘Uncovered at Thirty’ McLaren F1 anniversary event two years ago](#). Now Tony and Chris Vassilopoulos as well as his wife Juliette Loughran not only claimed this wonderful and well-deserved award – they also demonstrated the F1’s capabilities as a proper three-seater family car, with their little daughter taking over the wheel for the victory lap.



The car had competed against a stunning assembly of modern supercars. There were three Lamborghinis – a brutalist Diablo GT hailed by factory test driver Valentino Balboni for its sound, the only Countach 25th Anniversary Edition painted in a stunning ‘Arancia Miura’ and a purple-and-white Countach LP400 Periscopica once owned by Princess Dalal bint Saud al Saud, the daughter of King Saud of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Porsche lovers had to choose between the dark blue Porsche 959 Komfort once piloted by music conductor Justus Frantz and the aforementioned Ruf CTR “Yellowbird” – once ranked as the world’s fastest car as it reached 339 km/h in 1987. Go search the Nürburgring video on YouTube – it’s a classic!



Despite the younger speed machines exciting the crowds, the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este has certainly not lost its old-world charme. Milanese collector Corrado Lopresto had brought a torpedo-shaped 1923 Diatto Tipo 20S with a sleek boat-tail styled by Mouche & Cie from Lyon. Among the pre-war jewels we were particularly fond of two cars from the preservation class: the first being a wonderfully battered 1928 Bugatti Type 35 C in time-warp condition from the Victoria Collection that was driven across the grand hotel's terrace in true grand prix racing spirit by its young custodian.



Right next to it stood an equally alluring 1932 Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Spider by Figoni. Twice campaigned in the Paris - Nice rally in the early 1930s, the bright blue and highly original car was owned by the same keeper for 77 years before it surfaced in France in 2014. It's latest owner visibly enjoyed taking over the wheel and writing the next chapter in this exciting car's history. [Deservedly, the jury awarded this outstanding Alfa with the 'Best of Show' trophy on Sunday night.](#)



Rolls-Royce has been called the best car in the world for 120 years now and, naturally, the Concorso's selecting committee celebrated the anniversary with a class of its own. The line-up spanned from a 1914 Silver Ghost to a 'Smoke Green' 1961 Silver Cloud II LWB, but we only had eyes for Lord Bamford's black-and-burgundy 1933 Phantom II Continental that featured a highly modern razor-edge design established by Freestone & Webb. The perfect proportions of the endless bonnet and very low roofline should leave today's car designers pale with awe.



Meanwhile, Maserati celebrates its 110th birthday in 2024. We cannot think of many brands that fit so well into the Concorso's signature mix of elegance and sportiness than the honored Modenese brand. US architect and car collector Jonathan Segal had brought his stunning black-and-white 1955 Maserati A6GCS/53 Frua Spider that already claimed the 'Best of Show' at last year's Concours of Elegance at Hampton Court, while Roberto Quiroz from Mexico displayed a fascinating 1956 Maserati A6G/54 bodied by Zagato and featuring the famous 'double bubble' roof. If we have had to pick a car for a quick drive to Liguria, it would have been the 1959 Maserati 3500 Spider Vignale Prototipo penned by the great Giovanni Michelotti.



The Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este is always a great opportunity to meet your hero cars in the flesh and we couldn't keep our eyes (and ears) from the 1957 Ferrari 335 S brought to Europe by Brian Ross. Apparently, the car was driven to second place by Count Berghe von Trips in the very last Mille Miglia - if you watched Michael Mann's current Ferrari movie, you will know what we are talking about. Another extraordinary Ferrari we would have picked just for its colour was William E. Heinecke's Ferrari 250 GT Speciale Aerodinamica painted in the mouthwatering shade of 'Nocciola'. Gelato, anyone?



Even more spectacular were the 1960s Aston Martins on display: one of only 19 DB4 GT Zagatos and one of 12 DB5 Shooting Brakes converted to its glorious form by Radford. The car's owner from the Golden Age Collection displayed some more exciting Aston Martins down the road at FuoriConcorso.



While it's always a wonderful experience to inspect these mythical automobiles in detail, what excites us even more is to stumble upon a car that we have forgotten about or even haven't heard of before. Among all the blue-chip classics at this year's Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este that we simply couldn't stop staring at, the first we must mention was the highly interesting 1967 Fiat Dino Aerodinamica styled by Paolo Martin for Pininfarina and shown at the Geneva Motor Show in 1968. Powered by Ferrari's 2-litre V6 Dino engine, the Kamm-tailed Fiat was supposed to help the Scuderia in the homologation process for the Formula 2 championship.





Leaping from the jewels of the past to the retro-inspired cars of the future, the concept car class was won by [the Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale](#), a modern reinterpretation of Franco Scaglione's masterpiece of the 1960s. It won against [the all-electric Triumph TR25 concept](#) by London design studio Makkina and [a contemporary variation of the Can-Am racer](#) by Lotus.



As another concorso weekend came to an end, we couldn't help but congratulate the BMW Group for preserving the spirit of this unique event with great sensibility. In this sense, the premiere of [the highly elegant BMW Skytop concept car](#) as well as [the new BMW Art Car created by artist Julie Mehretu](#) that made a pitstop at Lake Como before it competes at the Le Mans 24 Hours tied in perfectly with the glamorous setting of the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este. That being said, we cannot wait for next year's edition – and seeing many of our friends again for another round of automotive worship on the shores of Lake Como.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2024

Gallery

