

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Step inside Belgium's collector car hall of fame at RNR Classics

### Lead

Based in Belgium, RNR Classics has grown over the last decade into a Mecca for everything automotive, spanning from sales to in-house restorations and even rally support. We spoke to Thijs and Anthony about their rapidly growing car paradise.



**Thijs and Anthony, thanks for chatting with us today about [RNR Classics](#). Before we get to your company, what are some of your earliest automotive memories that sparked your passion?**

Thijs: "The fire in me was lit when I was on a trip with a friend and his grandparents. I was nine at the time, and I spotted a huge Ferrari book in a shop which depicted a then-recent Testarossa on its cover. With the help of my friend's grandparents, I bought it on the spot and devoured it for many evenings during my childhood. The passion for classic and sports cars never left me and now that I have a Prugna Metallizzato Testarossa of my own, it has come full circle! What also never left is the book, it is still, albeit in a bit more "used" condition, on the table in my living room!"

Anthony: "For me, it all started at a very young age. I can't even remember the first memory or anecdote - my dad is a huge car fan and in everything we did or wherever we went, cars were a part of it. It became a challenge for me to know and recognise every make and model. Everything about it fascinated me. Whenever I heard an engine in the distance, I had to figure out which car it was. When I was about the age of 12 I developed a huge obsession for the Mercedes 190E and in particular the 16V versions. Buying one as my first car at the age of 18 - when they were still affordable - was the start of the classic car experience."







**It's no surprise that you're both lifelong petrolheads! However, could you tell us a bit about your backgrounds and the origins of the business?**

Thijs: "My grandfather started his motorcycle business in 1949 and worked until his death in 2001. He was a BMW motorrad-dealer and also sold Suzuki and Kreidler. I literally grew up between the old, unrestored FN's, Saroléa's, Villiers and of course BMW's, Suzuki's and Kreidlers. I still have some of these bikes! The bikes made me interested in old machines and the book made me interested in cars. Ever since I was nine it was clear to me: classic and sports cars were what I wanted to do!"

Anthony: "With my passion for cars it was clear to me that I wanted to do something in the classic car business. But as a student just graduated from university with an economics degree where do you start? On top of that the classic car industry is a niche sector where the job opportunities are a few and far between. Then about 6 years ago I met Thijs and RNR Classics and I immediately felt that this was where I belonged. Together we managed to transform RNR Classics from a start up to a professional one-stop-shop that supports clients over the whole world."

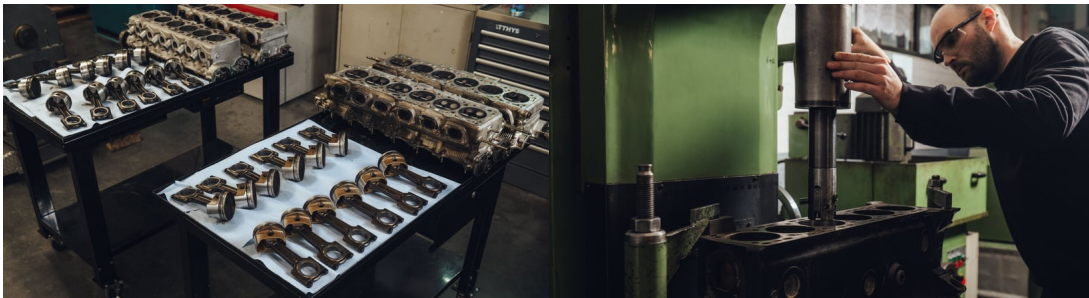


**It sounds like you two were destined to meet. How would you describe the early days of the business?**

Thijs: "At the end of 2015 it was crystal clear that the classic car business was in need of professionalisation. I saw an opportunity to utilise the experiences gained by working in one of the biggest Mercedes-Benz dealerships in Belgium and insert these in a classic car business. The beginning was hard, having to start from scratch with virtually no budget, no clients, no cars and no technicians, only a firm belief in the plan. Very soon luck struck for the first time and our first and now master technician joined the party. Our very first client was somebody whose Aston Martin DB4 broke down just a couple of miles from our first workshop. He googled a shop and found us, just as we thought the days of our not so impressive shop were numbered. The car turned out to have a boatload of problems, all of which the owner let us fix. He was so pleased with the quality of the work that he has let us fix some of his other cars and told his friends to visit us as well. This not only meant a first real income for us, but he has never left RNR since. This cemented our ethos: whatever you do, never deliver anything less than the best quality!"

"During the first years, we experienced the ups and downs one could expect, but we kept on growing at a very fast pace. We found the best Carrossier around and have secured an equally talented engine rebuilder, who both grew and ran their own divisions. Anthony joined the squad at just the right time and together we brought RNR to a whole different level. Three years ago, we were able to buy our new workshop and since then things really got started! RNR now consists of a total of 25 skilled professionals and every single one of them has the passion burning and fuel running through their veins, which allows us to tackle all the hardest and most challenging tasks and deliver an excellent result."





**RNR Classics handles everything from sales, to restoration, and even engine rebuilding. It sounds like you offer a wholistic solution for any current or prospective classic car and performance car owner?**

Thijs: "Indeed. The idea from the beginning on was to do everything in house, this way we are not depending on others and we can have a firm grip on quality, budget and timing. It also makes us future-proof in a world that is constantly evolving. Our different divisions are: sales, workshop, engine- and gearbox rebuilding shop and bodyshop. We have just finished the acquisition of a shop that specialises in the restoration and rebuild of electrical components such as starters, distributors and dynamos. So starting next month, we'll have another division and extra personnel at hand!"



**How does your restoration service compare to others in the industry? Being able to perform so many different services in-house, from engine rebuilds to paint and bodywork, must help streamline the restoration process?**

Anthony: "The all-in-house approach was a tough nut to crack initially, but the last couple of years it has proven to be a true blessing for both ourselves and our customers. We have invested a lot in streamlining processes, organisation and efficiency to not only be able to offer the best possible communication towards our customers, but to also optimise internal workflows. We strongly believe in the Belgian motto "Unity creates strength" and it shows in all we do. Each department strives to become the best in what they do and all gains, improvements and quality wins are communicated with and implemented in the other departments where possible. For us, organisation is an equally important department as all the rest and, just as with everything we do, quality and results are demanded!"





**What is your restoration philosophy - do you focus on 'factory fresh' rebuilds or sympathetic restorations, or is it determined by the specific car?**

Thijs: "Of course, each car needs a specific approach and its owner always has an idea in mind of how his or her car should be repaired or restored. We always strive to attain the result the owner desires, but we never deviate from our simple basic principles. Firstly, we never cut back on quality. If, for one reason or another, we are not allowed to strive to perfection on a restoration or repair, the project is not meant to be tackled by us. Our name will remain connected to a finished car for decades to come, so each individual project needs to be a testament to our knowledge and craftsmanship.

"Secondly, we always strive to keep a car as original as possible. If a part, panel or piece can be saved, we will bring it back to its original condition and re-use it on the car. It is easy to take away the soul and character of a car by replacing its parts with all-new ones, but that is not what we stand for. Quality can go hand-in-hand with originality if you know what you do and understand what needs to be done."



**2024 wasn't the strongest year for the industry, what do you think 2025 has in store for the collector car world?**



Anthony: "2024 proved to be a challenging year, but our constant strive for improvement has actually made it a good year for us. We had already started buying and selling more youngtimers before and by doing so our workshop now already has a lot of experience with these cars. It was obvious that for the past 1.5-2 years the youngtimer and performance cars have stormed the market, however, we see this not as a replacement of the classic cars, but as a welcome addition to both the market as our workshop. It's a positive evolution that activates and involves different people in the exciting world of collectable cars! A lot of cars will continue to see a "normalisation" of their values whilst the "blue chip" cars will continue to rise to new heights. The centre of gravity of the market will keep on shifting towards younger models, but we believe that the basic principles will remain the same."



**RNR Classics have an incredibly diverse array of cars in stock, but which cars excite you the most at the moment, both from an enthusiast and collector's point of view? Are there any specific models or types of car you'll be keeping an eye on this year?**

Thijs: "We indeed are lucky enough to be living our passion and our dream and yes, this means that we love all kinds of brands, types and versions of cars. Lately, we've had a lot of different Ferraris and Lamborghinis and they always do well, the more special the better. We always look for very nice big-engined Benzes like the SLR or SL65 AMG and we strongly believe that the top versions of the previously less popular Porsche 996s will be amongst the strongest of risers. You can give me a 996 GT2 Clubsport all day, any day. Of course, Ferrari's big five and classics will always do well and don't forget the more exotic supercars of the nineties and noughties. A truly original prewar Bugatti with a great history makes our heart pump and almost every car with a quirky colour or different set of options will do great. We even personally bought some of the best series one Twingos with sunroofs and Suzuki Samurais with crazy decals, just for the fun of it!"



**We're glad to hear we're not alone in our Twingo obsession! If a customer wants to use their new ride for racing or rallying, is that something you can assist with? What other after-sales services do you provide?**

Anthony: "Though we race motorcycles as a hobby and do our fair share of trackdays with classic and youngtimer cars for which we build our own tuned engines, we are not really professionally active in the racing world. We are, however, very active in the classic car RT-rally scene and service a vast amount of those cars a year. We are the exclusive technical partners for the two biggest and most important classic car rally events in Belgium — The Zoute Grand prix and Le Grand Tour/Le Petit tour — where we send up to five service teams consisting of two technicians each per event. We are also the exclusive distributor of the best rally-tripmeter brand there is: Blunik. You can of course also find us servicing a selection of our best customers' cars during events such as the Mille Miglia, Spa Ferrari days and The ICE St. Moritz. And yes, we not only service these events but we ourselves also compete and try to attain good results and have fun whilst doing so! Last year, we achieved first prewar and second overall at the Zoute Grand prix with a stunning 1936 Veritas, great fun that was!"



**Excuse the pun, but you seem to be on a roll at the moment. What does the future hold for the business?**

Thijs: "Ah, in Belgium we have a saying: standing still is going backwards! For a year and a half we have been working on project that has been put into sixth gear recently. We have now entered the test phase and the first results look very promising. It's too early to say more but fear not, news is coming!

"In other news, we'll be at this year's Retromobile in Paris, so make sure to swing by our stand and have a Belgian beer with us!"

*Photos: Sian Loyson*

**Gallery**























































































