

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Argentina 'Mil Millas Sport'



Argentina is a country of Italians. Italians who speak Spanish, live in French houses and dress British, but Italians nonetheless. As such, it's no surprise that in Argentina there's a revival of the Mille Miglia, just as there is in Italy. The South American version (the *Mil Millas Sport*, organised by the Club de Automoviles Sport de la Republica Argentina) is a more relaxed affair, however, with a much broader range of cars - just about anything sporting built prior to 1980.

Although I'd long been aware of the Argentinean MM, it was not until 2006 that I was actually to take part. Bruce Crocker agreed to co-pilot with me in the MM: an event we knew fairly little about. All we were sure of was that it centred around a world-class mountain lake resort in the heart of Patagonia, with the promise of stunning scenery, smooth, uncongested roads, red meat, red wine and 150 or so classic cars. Oh yes - and springtime in December!

We were not to be disappointed on any score.



Among the various **Ferraris, Alfas, Maseratis, Corvettes, Jaguars** and **Bugattis** which made up the bulk of the entries were two **Aston Martins**: a gobsmackingly pretty **1.5-litre Le Mans** once owned by **Sir Malcolm Campbell**, and hence sporting an attractive livery of 'Bluebird blue'; and an Argentine-owned **DB6 Vantage** piloted by a glamorous team of ladies. Other marques represented included **Delahaye** and **Invicta**, as well as a fabulous recreated **Mercedes SSK roadster**; and even a hilarious **Ford Model T special**.



Bruce and I managed the rental of a **MkII Jaguar 3.8**, an altogether suitable machine for covering long distances with both spirit and comfort. Ours was seemingly stripped of all safety equipment: no seatbelts, no side mirrors, no horn. But the tyres looked new. Thus reassured, we made up for any remaining danger by mounting a bobblehead Buddha on the dash, which my wife Nina had thrown into my bag for good luck. We were advised to rub its bald head whenever uncertainty struck. *No problema.*

The MM comprises three solid days of breathtaking drives, sandwiched between four nights at the massive Llao Llao Resort and Spa. Located in Bariloche, in the heart of ski country, it features world-class golf in the temperate off-season, all surrounded by stunning mountain lakes.



As MM participants, however, we were up against the clock. I had mentioned to Bruce that he might want to pack a stopwatch as the event had a precision timing element. And perhaps a clipboard too. And pens. My own digital Robic expired the first morning, so it's a good thing Bruce did bring his stopwatch. Even though it was only a windup model, we were clever enough to back it up with a cheap travel alarm clock which we scotch-taped to the console, lending an air of jet cockpit ambience to our 'office'. All set!



Or so we thought. As we scurried around *parc ferme* on the first morning, packing the Jag (route book – check, clocks – check, pens – check, water – check, chocolate – double check), it was soon time to fire up. No choke pull. And it proved impossible to fire in the cool morning air. We were getting worried about this, but not yet despairing, when a helpful man appeared out of the mist and flipped an unmarked toggle under the dash. Pressing the button again, the car roared to a start. “Por que?” I asked. “Electric choke,” he replied. Never heard of it before but I’m a quick learner when fun is at stake – and it served us well on each subsequent morning.

Rub the Buddha head, then. But that’s not all. As the Jag was idling comfortably we took a stroll around for our first good look at the other cars. Most seemed to have something in common – with each other and not us: computers! Sometimes several. One guy had five. Five! All pre-programmed the night before. That sinking feeling again...



We had flipped through the route book the previous night but by the time we'd figured out that *Curva Peligrosa* meant Slow Down! we had fallen asleep. Better take a closer look at that route book. Ohmigod. There are multiple checkpoints at each stage, usually strung together in a sequence, sometimes as many as five. Some are long, others as short as seven seconds with differing average speeds. Results are measured in hundredths of seconds. Whose idea was this?

I am pleased to report, however, that the MM welcomes all participants, those serious and those... not. We resolved to make lemonade out of lemons and press on regardless.

Now in full realisation of our lack of technological parity (and basic competence), we devised a diabolical plan. Since our start time each day was 30 seconds behind the ladies in the DB6, why shouldn't we just follow them, and cross the checkpoints 30 seconds after them? There were other reasons why this appealed, not least of which is that we admired the view from behind that voluptuous DB6. Plus there was far less maths and timekeeping involved. So: often wrong, but never in doubt, we set forth.

Part Two to follow...





By Don Rose, East Coast Consignment Specialist, RM Auctions.

Excerpted from the forthcoming article in The Vantage Point, the quarterly journal of the Aston Martin Owners Club, North America.

Photos: Bruce Crocker and Don Rose



Editor's Note: This was the very last event in which the charismatic Swiss Grand Prix driver Clay Regazzoni participated before his death in a road accident in Italy on 15th December. One of the greats of the sport in

the 1970s, Regazzoni was a team mate to Niki Lauda at Ferrari, and won five of his 132 Grands Prix in an 11-year career, which ended when he was paralysed from the waist down in a crash at Long Beach in 1980. He gave the Williams team its first Grand Prix victory, at Silverstone in 1979.

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