

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mille Miglia Storica 2010



It's glorious and it's gruelling. It's competitive and chaotic. And it's the most prestigious classic car driving event in the world.

Much has been written of the **Mille Miglia's** unique and celebrated past as a road race (1927-1957) and as a premier event in the early years of the **World Sportscar Championship**. Today's MM is a continuation of its resurrection in 1977 as the **Mille Miglia 'Storica'**, run sporadically since then in the form of a timed rally event. Ostensibly, this incarnation as a rally took into account the fact that all cars were then 20+ years old (now 50+, or even 85 years old) with mostly amateur drivers and a nod to safety. Just a nod, you understand.

From perhaps 800 or so applications, 375 cars are chosen, hence acceptance is highly selective. The decision-making process is sometimes inscrutable but always based on cars built through 1957, and all of them makes and models which ran in the original **Mille Miglia di Velocita**, with FIA or FIVA papers certifying their authenticity. In fact, this year's group included no fewer than 63 cars which themselves had period MM history, a remarkable number.



Participating cars ranged from the rarefied and sublime (**Bugattis**, various **pre-War 8C** and **6C Alfas**, famous **Ferrari**, **Maserati** and **Aston Martin** sports-racers, coachbuilt BMW 328s) to many charming small-bore entrants (a **Citroën 2CV**, a **VW 'bug'**, plus the best amalgamation of Italian *etceterini* this writer has ever seen). Among the most ubiquitous and, to me, perhaps the most 'practical' MM cars were the various 50s **Zagato-bodied berlinettas**, which came in many flavours, including **Alfa 1900**, **Maserati A6G** and, most numerous of all, the **Fiat 8V** variety, one of which sported the famed **Zagato** double bubble roof. Another of my personal favourites was the **Abarth 750 Zagato Double Bubble**.

There was a bit of motorsport royalty participating in the run, with racing legend **Sir Jackie Stewart**, along with his son **Paul** in a **Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing**, both decked out in Scottish tartan. F1 aces **Mika Häkkinen** and **David Coulthard** were also spotted in another **Gullwing**, this one the **W194 factory racer** with **MM** and **Carrera Panamericana** history. And **Jay Kay** (**Jamiroquai** to rock fans), a well-known connoisseur of fine sports and GT machinery, appeared with his magnificent, black, **Frua-bodied Maserati A6G2000**.



I myself applied for the first time this year with my **1957-built Aston Martin DB2/4**. It was small consolation that I made the waiting list of 100 cars, additional to the 375 initial acceptances, but in the end I failed to manage official participation. Pressing on regardless, and thanks to you, dear reader, I was able to obtain **Classic Driver** media credentials and follow along with my son **Jesse** (a fledgling historic racer himself) in our UK-based **DB5**.

Without the pressure and distraction of the timing clocks and strict adherence to the specified route, we were able to mix in freely with the event cars, often circumventing the route to get ahead and watch the breathtaking procession of many of the world's best and most roadworthy sports cars, a photo-opp *par excellence!*



No relaxed tour, the **Mille Miglia Storica** pays homage to its past as a serious endurance pursuit with all the lack of creature comforts, not to mention sleep deprivation, of its progenitor. The big news before the start this year was the weather, predicted to be continuously rainy across the entire route for the 2½-day duration. And indeed, in the days immediately prior, it was raining buckets all over Italy. But thankfully, although the expected rain did arrive, it was intermittent and mixed with periods of sunshine and dry roads and everything in between (including snow). A great many open sports-racers had no weather protection at all, with their hardy pilots facing extremes of wet and dry, cold and hot, and many 'wardrobe changes' as a result. Cheers to them, the real heroes of today's MM.





Many of the participants had extra peace of mind in the form of a chase crew with mechanics and spares. However, there were also many more travelling with little more than a tool roll and an oily rag.

Stunning scenery is promised and delivered, as the convoy wove its way through the rich landscape of

central Italy from **Brescia** to **Rome** and back, via circuitous routing. I was looking forward to the **Futa** and **Raticosa** passes, traversing the magnificent Tuscan countryside; but by far the most dramatic moments this year were from the mountains of **Terminillo** on the way down to **Rome**. Climbing swiftly through the endless hairpin curves, we started to see remnants of snow. Soon it was snow everywhere, the roadside lined with ice 'cliffs', sometimes over six metres high, just as the thick fog and mist set in.



Another unique aspect of the MM is the cooperation and encouragement of the *carabinieri*; the motorcycle escorts provided to the front runners, who typically wave the cars through red lights with no worry about speeding tickets. However, as the event is held on open public roads, the procession is interrupted all too frequently by local car clubs, tourists and motorcyclists out for a lark in the middle of the action. So take care...



With the adrenalin on the wane, one has to rouse oneself once more for the midnight parade of finishers back to the starting ramp in **Brescia**. With the klieg lights ablaze and charismatic multilingual commentary by **Simon Kidston**, champagne flowed as the winners were feted. First place was awarded to a **1939 BMW 328 Mille Miglia Touring Coupé**, with husband/wife pilots **Giuliano Cané** and **Lucia Galliani**. Second place went to another veteran driver and multiple **MM award winner**, **Luciano Viaro**, with the American navigator **Marc Gessler** in an **Alfa Romeo 6C 1500 Gran Sport**. Both these cars had period MM history. Third was claimed by **Enzo Ciravolo** and **Maria Leitner**, with their **1937 BMW 328**, further testimony to

the view that the **BMW pushrod six** was among the most advanced and reliable pre-War engines powering road cars.



At the end of the weekend, 290 cars finished from among the 375 starters. Either way, I expect it's worth the trip as an uncompromising opportunity to properly exercise such wondrous machinery.

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