

CLASSIC DRIVER

[A change of key: Pianist Lang Lang in a Beetle](#)

Lead

Lang Lang, the revered Chinese pianist, is one of the best in his genre – a virtuoso of the ivory keys. In his classic rally debut at the Schloss Bensberg Classics, the musician was paired with Classic Driver editor J. Philip Rathgen in the cockpit of a Beetle ‘Hebmüller’ Cabriolet...

“This is so cool!” said Lang Lang, as he entered the inner courtyard of Schloss Bensberg for the first time in the elegant VW Beetle ‘Hebmüller’ Cabriolet. The 31-year-old pianist from China had never sat in the car before, let alone participated in a classic rally. Undeterred, his enthusiasm and anticipation shone through.

“This is one of the slowest, but most beautiful experiences of my life...”

The Beetle (known as a ‘Hebmüller’ courtesy of its famous coachbuilder) – fresh from Volkswagen Classic – is beautifully restored but a bit of a diva, and hence required some TLC from a VW mechanic to get it going. Lang Lang found this amusing, even sympathising with the car. “The Beetle has a mind of its own,” he said, comparing it to a historic piano that would demand even more attention than the car.

After a successful start, the rally led through picturesque areas of mountainous country. Lang Lang compared the ride through the hills with a Beethoven Symphony, thank to its natural beauty. For someone more used to aircraft and limousines, the leisurely power and pace of the Hebmüller Cabriolet was a completely new experience, and one that the pianist clearly relished. As the rally headed toward Moitzfeld, Lang Lang laughed, proclaiming, “This is one of the slowest, but most beautiful experiences of my life.”

But all good things must eventually come to an end, and the experience-rich young artist and his team aboard the Beetle finally arrived on the ramp at the finish. Who knows – maybe Lang Lang will remember the slow ride through the landscape while next interpreting Beethoven’s 5th Concerto.

Photos: Kai-Uwe Knoth, Tim Brown, Volkswagen

Gallery

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