

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Grand Touring Royale with a Bristol 404 to the Windsor Castle Concours](#)

Lead

Exploring the Cotswolds and Brecon Beacons en route to its final destination of Windsor Castle for the 2016 Concours of Elegance, the Great West Tour saw a selection of the world's most treasured cars grace some of the U.K.'s most scenic roads. We joined the cavalcade in a delightful Bristol 404...



Our first encounter with the charmingly tail-finned 404 came 18 months ago, when it was one of several cars we gathered for a [Bristol 'homecoming' at RAF Bicester](#), the home of the Bristol Blenheim bombers during their years of active service. With some equally historic destinations on the itinerary for the three-day Great West Tour - the dynamic prequel to the 2016 Royal Concours of Elegance held at Windsor Castle - the early-1950s coupé seemed quite apt, particularly given the fondness of the marque held by Royalty the world over. Despite being valued at a fraction of some other participants (this car will soon come to market for around £160,000), the 404's unusual lines and the feisty song of its BMW-sourced straight-six drew numerous compliments, and it didn't once look out of its depth.



For these three days - the final of which included a majestic parade from the Guards Polo Club to Windsor Castle's famous Long Walk - the subject of values appeared to be temporarily forgotten, with each entrant driving their steed as enthusiastically as the next. American collector Jon Shirley set a notable example to the entrants who chose to have their cars trailered directly to the Concours lawn by embracing the tour in his 250 GTO, while other insurance broker's mind-bogglers included an ex-Mike Hailwood Jaguar E-type, Gianni Agnelli's unique Ferrari 375 Coupé Speciale, the [Aston Martin DB4 GT to be auctioned by RM in London](#) next week, and the impossibly beautiful Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 256 Touring coupé (winner of the coachbuilder's dedicated class at Pebble Beach last year). Indeed, current Touring Superleggera head of design Louis de Fabrice - himself piloting the company's latest creation, the Disco Volante Spyder - was just as captivated as everyone else. "I have a lot of inspiration to take back to Milan with me," he told us. "I cannot wait until I can get back to my drawing board." Considering his form in recent years, the feeling is mutual...

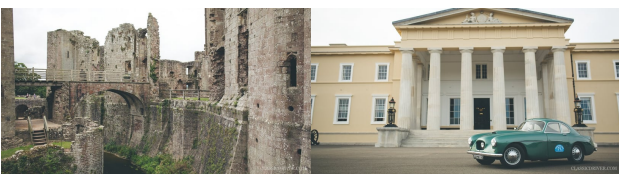




Vying for acoustic supremacy everywhere it went was the ex-Sultan of Johor Mercedes SS which, when the switchable supercharger was engaged, howled through the hills. Presenting the most credible aural challenge was the ex-Ecurie Francorchamps Ferrari Daytona Competizione – fresh from two decades in storage – piloted by David and James Cottingham of DK Engineering, who had to wear headsets (impressively colour-coded to the car) to discuss directions above the thunderous bellow from its side-piped engine. Another father-and-son-crewed car was the family-heirloom Lancia Aurelia B20 GT, while the strikingly purple Mercedes-Benz 630 Saoutchik Stadt Coupé was heroically navigated through the countryside by an ultra-enthusiastic German family.



It was perhaps fate that saw us arrive at the penultimate destination, Sandhurst's Royal Military Academy (the 'home of the British soldier'), at the same time as HRH Prince Michael, the Royal Concours' official patron. "Over the past two days, I've had an amazing time for two reasons," His Royal Highness told us. "First of all, with an open car you really get to embrace the experience. This Bentley was prepared by the late Stanley Mann, and it performed wonderfully throughout the tour. Secondly, the route was amazing. I've driven these old Bentleys all over the world, in locations such as Russia and Africa, but there's nothing more appropriate than taking one through the English countryside. Over the two days, we've travelled along some of the most beautiful roads the country has to offer, and it's been a thoroughly enjoyable experience."



After the interview formalities, the Prince fervently inspected our Bristol, not only immediately identifying the model, but also the correctly pointing out that its Sage Green paint was actually an Aston Martin colour. For us, this moment of shared passion between one automotive enthusiast and another was perhaps the most poignant moment of the whole trip, proving enthusiasm for the motor car capable of bridging any gap in social status. Who'd have thought a Bristol could do that?

Photos: Tom Shaxson for Classic Driver

Gallery

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