

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The most exhilarating moments from the Passione Caracciola 2017](#)

Lead

A champion hill-climber, a three-time European Drivers' Champion, and a key cog in the Silver Arrows' pre-War machine, Rudolf Caracciola has now been honoured with a rally in his name: the Passione Caracciola. Together with IWC, we headed for the start line in Milan...

Arriving in Milan in the height of a heat wave, one couldn't help feeling apprehensive — a field of classic cars was about to head off on an epic four-day tour, encompassing Monza, St. Moritz, Davos, Arosa, and Lugano, and I knew the temperature would prove challenging, as much for me as the machines. The first port of call was IWC's boutique in Milan, where the watchmaker's CEO, Christoph Grainger, was due to arrive in fine style — at the wheel of [Classic Driver dealer Mechatronik's](#) Mercedes 300SL 'Gullwing', sat alongside racing driver Carmen Jordá.

Mighty Monza



The most memorable sight from the first leg of the Passione Caracciola was the gathering at Monza, where we were treated to the visceral pleasure of Frank Rickert's Mercedes 300 SLS bellowing around the circuit like a World War II fighter. A morning time trial around the old banking provided some much-needed shade before an ear-piercing taxi ride in a DTM car after lunch. An ex-AMG engineer, Rickert founded Mechatronik in 1997, in order to fuse modern technology with old cars, retaining originality while updating the things that matter. Take the Pagode in which we were tackling the rally, for example — there's nothing to hint that beneath the sultry exterior there's a new five-speed gearbox and a supercharger.

Beautiful backdrops



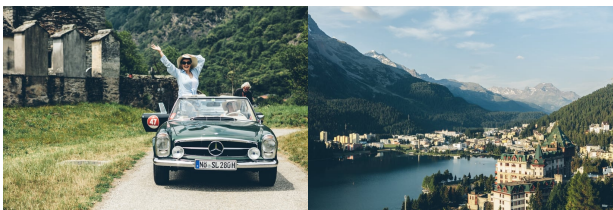
Eardrums still ringing from the afternoon ride, we headed for the first overnight destination in St. Moritz. Following a swift breakfast the following morning, the sun began to make its presence known as the crowd of drivers set off at minute intervals. Between the plethora of Mercedes-Benzes, including Rickert's wife's 300SL Roadster that was originally built for Tiffany & Co., there were myriad makes and models. From Jaguars and Citroëns to Ferraris and even a Dodge with a rubber duck affixed to its bonnet, it was an eclectic group that put smiles on the faces of competitors and spectators alike. After a series of ever more beautiful backdrops, including the sensational Flüela Pass, we arrived at our stop in Arosa, accompanied only by the sound of the cars ticking cool and distant cowbells.

War of attrition



The following morning, we were greeted by yet another cloudless sky for our final journey to Lugano. The day's route traversed the Lukmanier Pass, which had enough tight switchbacks and breath-taking views to make you giddy. Time trials along the way retained the rally's competitive element, but the heat was taking its toll, causing a number of terminal failures. Ever the engineers, Rickert and his support team stopped to help as many as possible, but alas, a Maserati GT suffered a fuel pump failure, an E-type was plagued with electrical issues, and two ladies in a Pagode lost drive on the very last stretch before Lugano.

Arriving in style



A police escort accompanied us across the finish line in the town centre, where the lake seemed to beckon us towards its mercifully cool water. Unfortunately, there was no time for a quick dip — we had one final climb to make in honour of Rudolf: the hilltop hotel with its panoramic views across Lugano. As the sun dipped and the bar bill rose, everyone began to reflect on the trip. Ecstatic and tired in equal measure, Mechatronik's support crew had precious time to enjoy the conversation (and dinner!), for the cars were to be driven back to the headquarters near Stuttgart, Germany, the next morning. Rickert kindly checked in to make sure everything, and everyone, was in order, and warm thanks were met with his final question: "When are you going to come and see us in Germany?" Soon, Frank, very soon.

Photos and text: Alex Lawrence (The Whitewall) for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

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