

CLASSIC DRIVER

Lake Tahoe Concours d'Elegance is like Pebble Beach, but for boats

Lead
No doubt your social media feeds are overloaded with automotive content from this year's Monterey Car Week, hence why we're highlighting a different kind of concours event — the Lake Tahoe Concours. Held in Homewood, California, the beauty pageant showcased the finest wooden boats in the world...



With rows and rows of polished wooden classic boats filling the docks, glistening in the Californian sunshine and shimmering in the cool waters of Lake Tahoe, you'd be forgiven for thinking they were all the same. But after a walk down the piers, you'd quickly notice the small details — the signature designs of marques such as Chris-Craft, Gar Wood, and Riva — which set each apart from the other. Taking place on the fresh waters of the 'Land of the Free', the Italian vessels were sparser, with American nautical royalty very much dominating the 'field'.

Fun for all





As a public event, with inviting weather and melodic jazz filling the air, there was no hint of the formal stiffness more often associated with concours competitions. In fact, it was quite the contrary — we felt embraced by a welcoming community of boat lovers, each of whom enthusiastically showed off his or her floating steeds to the judges and the public alike.

What's in a name?



Aesthetically, all the vessels were simply stunning, but what gave each its own unique identity was the lovingly hand-painted name scrolled on the stern. As tradition has it, to sail a boat without a name is to ask for bad luck, and many owners obviously took the chance to get creative. Our favourites had to be *Miss Puddle Duck*, *Fin & Tonic*, and *La Dolce Riva*. The visiting crowds clearly shared our affinity for the latter, deeming the sleekness and timelessness of the Super Tritone worthy of the People's Choice award.

Thunderstruck



America's most recognisable (and possibly most valuable) wooden speedboat — christened *Thunderbird* — returned to Lake Tahoe after a four-year hiatus to celebrate the concours and participate in the ceremonious handing over of the award it directly inspired: the Thunderbird Perpetual Trophy, for the most unique boat among the fleet of wooden wonders. Numerous other awards were distributed throughout the day, including Best in Class, the recipients of which received a Frederique Constant Runabout, in addition to an intricate glass trophy. The Jordy Carlton Memorial prize, for the overall Best of Show, was awarded to *Midnight Thunder*, a 1937 triple-cockpit Gar Wood Custom Runabout beautifully restored by Sierra Boat Co.

Fan favourites



Personally, we believe many could have sped away with the top honour, including *007*, the 1955 Chris-Craft Cobra with its massive gold fin and phenomenal shape; *Maybe Not II*, the 1926 Nunes Brothers-built stepped hydroplane adorned with American animist Tex Avery's cartoon wolf; or the 1955 Barracuda Sportster — not just for its shape, automotive-inspired fins, or its unusual white and peach colour combo, but also for its story, as the owner's father and uncle had built the boat, the last of seven, and the owner found it discarded in a barn some years ago and brought it back to life.

Roaring success



After all the awards had been handed out, and as the sun began to dip, the event culminated in the annual 'Roar Off'. The momentous occasion where a 'Guard of Honour', comprising modern watercraft, lead all the concours entrants on a lap of the lake — allowing those frolicking on the shores of Lake Tahoe to see and hear the boats at full throttle and those taking an afternoon dip to ride the waves of the wooden wonders.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2017

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