

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Meet the passionate team pushing to digitise the European collector car market

### Lead

Automobile.com is a new online-only auction platform serving continental Europe where you can buy and sell collector cars smartly, simply, securely and inexpensively. Surrounded by wonderful cars, we spoke to the brain behind the project Jari Brzon...



### Could you tell us about your background prior to Automobile.com?

Classic cars have been my hobby since I was four-years old, when my father first took me to a classic car event. My professional life was more connected to numbers – I was a professional stock and derivative market trader for almost 20 years. In 2006, as soon as I began to earn good money, I fuelled my passion by starting to collect interesting, special and rare cars. I searched for them everywhere: small ads, eBay, Bring a Trailer and the main auction venues around Europe. My first collection was built around rare British cars. I owned two Morgan Plus 4 Plus's, for example, the rare glass-fibre coupé of which just 26 were built.

### What prompted the decision to establish Automobile.com?

I realised that I could connect my career around numbers with my passion for cars and launched an investment fund for classic and collectable cars. As I needed to buy and sell more and more special cars, I looked for an effective, quick and inexpensive means of doing so at fair market values. The traditional auction houses are too expensive, specialist dealers are too slow and online classified adverts are not effective. eBay was not specialised in this segment and Bring a Trailer was not accommodating to European cars, though the latter did a great job of establishing a modern online model in the US. Collecting Cars is now doing the same for right-hand-drive cars in the UK. But nobody was serving Europe in the same way, which is why, two years ago, I decided I had to build such a platform on my own.



### Why do you see so much potential in this project?

The collector car market has to digitalise and move online, even more so now with the coronavirus crisis. This is the future for this market, and you can see it's already happening in the US. The traditional mediums are too expensive, inefficient and slow. The digitalisation of the market brings costs down radically and the secured payment system protects both the buyer and seller more so than ever before.

### How has the initial reaction to the project been?

The reactions have been highly positive and the European market is hungry for these possibilities. Of course, we're a new platform and not very well known, so we need to earn the trust of buyers and sellers. But it's moving forward very quickly.

### I have a car and I want to sell it - how does Automobile.com work?

You simply have to register on our website, upload the car to the platform and provide proof that you own or are authorised to sell the car. You do not need to transport the car to an auction venue, which saves costs. We also help prepare a description of the car and present the car on our social media and on our partner websites such as Classic Driver. If we agree on the conditions of the sale, the car will be published and in a couple of weeks, you can get a fair current market price for it.



### How much will it cost me?

The registration and submission of the car is free. The listing fee is 99 euros, but if you submit the car with no reserve price, not only is the listing free but you also get a one-percent share of the final sale price, which includes a 4-5-percent buyer's premium of the hammer price depending on the type of bid. This premium is a maximum of 5,000 euros for cars valued above 100,000 euros.

### Can I inspect a car for sale in person or do I have to rely on photos and videos?

It all starts with a 'coming soon' phase, so that you can request an appointment to visit the car in person. But 95 percent of sales are completed without a personal inspection.

Potential buyers can ask for more documentation, photos and videos. After winning a lot, buyers mostly use the Trusted Checkout option for a secured payment, an escrow account in their name at the French bank Credit Mutuel. After the bank confirms the payment, the car is transported to the buyer. When the car is received, the bank sends payment to the seller. It might not be personal, but it is effective, quick and secure. And that's the future for this market.



**Who are your customers?**

It is currently the younger generation, who are used to the online world. Most of our bidders are in their thirties and forties. The same can be said of the sellers, but we also cooperate with other collectors or dealers who want to try a more effective way of selling their cars.

**Which cars are you going to offer in the future?**

We will focus on cars where there are not so many options. The main focus will be on interesting cars valued between 5,000 and 100,000 euros. We only want to offer cars that are special, have a story to tell or interesting histories, are fun to drive or have simply been loved by their owners.



**What are your plans for the future?**

We want to bring special cars based in Continental Europe to loving new homes around the world in an effective way for all parties involved. We started this project to fulfil our own needs as collectors and enthusiasts – we are not car dealers and we do not live from selling cars. But we would be very happy if this project is able to help other collectors and enthusiasts.

**Could you tell us about your team?**

The project would not be possible without my wonderful team. I cannot name them all, but I've brought with me today the face of our project, the B2B head Katerina Trnkova. Katerina has a wealth of experience in the classic car world having worked for several years at Scuderia Prague, the official Ferrari and Maserati dealership for Czech. She also has another eight years of experience working with one of the biggest classic car collectors in the Czech Republic.



**Why are you based in Estonia?**

Our official residence is in Tallinn, Estonia. Because they are oriented around digital business, our accountants and lawyers are based over there. Our operating headquarters, however, is here in Prague, where we have the best programming team, our experienced team of specialists evaluating cars and our marketing team, which comprises skilled journalists for our blog section and our great photographer. Czech Republic has a long tradition with classic cars. I'm proud that we could win last year's Chantilly Arts & Elegance and finish runner up at Pebble Beach with a car restored here in Czech. We are now also preparing to open satellite offices with our foreign partners. Cologne in Germany should be the first, and we are also discussing northern Italy and London. A special thank you goes out to all the car collectors and enthusiasts who have partnered with us at the beginning of this project. It really would not have been possible without them.

Text: Frantisek Vahala / Photos: Ondrej Kroutil for Auctomobile.com © 2020

**Gallery**









