

CLASSIC DRIVER

Warming up for Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este during the Prelude Tour

Lead

Before the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este kicked off in style, BMW Classic invited participants to a prelude tour and a stint to the Autodromo di Monza. Classic Driver came along in a BMW 328.



If you visit Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, you can be certain to see some of the world's most elegant and sophisticated automobiles in one place – no matter which cars the selecting committee has chosen for the particular edition. Still, it's always a pity to not see the cars in action and being driven just like they were supposed to. So the annual Prelude Tour, in which concours participants get the chance to warm up for the weekend during a casual two-day road trip in Northern Italy, is a good opportunity to get a glimpse of the year's competing classics before they line up at Grand Hotel Villa d'Este on the shores of Lake Como – and to get a taste of their engine note, too!



This year, the Prelude Tour started in Erbusco, a little town in the famous Franciacorta wine region south of Lago d'Iseo, from which it followed the twisted country roads near Bergamo before reaching the Monza racetrack and, finally, Lake Como. While some collectors – like Corrado Lopresto from Milan, who brought his alluringly elegant Lancia Florida – basically had a home game on the Lombardian turf, others had traveled from afar.



Eizo Tomita had shipped his lime green and golden Lamborghini Miura P400SV all the way from Japan, while his countryman Hidetomo Kimura had not only brought along his pale gold, Touring-bodied Maserati 3500 GT Coupé, but also his wife and children who stylishly lingered on the back seats during the drive. Meanwhile, Jonathan and Wendy Segal from San Diego joined the tour in their remarkable Maserati A6G/54 Berlinetta Zagato.



Rémi Dargegen and I had the pleasure of nicking a bright red BMW 328 from BMW Classic's fleet of treasures, and we couldn't have picked a better car than the small and agile roadster to move back and forth between the priceless classics. For quite a while, we were tailed by a slightly larger coeval, the mint-green 4 ½ litre Bentley Coupé de Ville coachbuilt by James Young, while the most enjoyable part of the drive might have been a brief cat-and-mouse game in downtown Como evening traffic with the black 328 from the May Collection.



Among the younger concours cars it was the 'Skittles' lime-green, unrestored and highly original Porsche 911 Carrera RS 2.7 from the Auriga Collection that left us speechless, while the orange BMW M1, once owned by Christopher Cross and now taken from Boston to Europe for the very first time by Neal Heffron and his wife, clearly enjoyed the Italian tarmac. Meanwhile, Harrie van den Anker injected some well-needed synthwave spirit into the tour with his 1986 Isdera Spyder and matching helmets for him and his co-pilot that made us think of Star Wars and Daft Punk alike.



Still, the award for the most unusual car of the tour would have gone to the Citroën SM Espace Heuliez owned by Thierry Dehaeck from Belgium: The aubergine-metallic open-top coupé with its retractable, stainless-steel targa roof and bolder-than-bold green leather interior must have been the dernière cri in terms of fashion and automotive extravagance when it was coachbuilt in 1971.



The highlight of the day was a stint at the Autodromo Nazionale di Monza. Rented for a track day by the mythical Munich Gentlemen Drivers, the Concorso crowd joined the racers and their jaw-dropping armada of track toys. After the drivers had their chance to explore the track in a selection of contemporary BMW M cars and the mandatory group shot had been taken, we were allowed to storm the circuit for some encore laps in our classics. Seeing the diverse field of cars speed through the chicanes before they present themselves well-mannered and groomed on the concours lawn was a sight to behold.



Naturally, it was Simon Kidston who left our ears ringing, after putting the pedal to the metal and overtaking our modest roadster in his bone-shaking Alfa Romeo Giulia TZ2 to casually commemorate the 60th anniversary of Autodelta. Once again, well played, Simon.



In the late afternoon, the cars arrived in the harbour of Cernobbio where they were greeted by the public and a big band, getting everyone into the mood for Como Car Week and the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este. After a glimpse into the catalogue, this year's line-up of cars promises to be better than ever and we are especially excited to further explore the cars that have been chosen to celebrate the 75th birthday of Porsche and the 100th anniversary of the 24 hours of Le Mans. In this sense, see you soon on the lake.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver

Gallery

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