

CLASSIC DRIVER

Celebrating 15 seconds of automotive fame at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance

Lead

Last Sunday, 216 cars from 18 countries pulled onto the manicured lawns of the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, representing the greatest moments in automotive history. To us, these cars were the most remarkable.



Attending the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance can feel a bit like going to the Academy Awards - wherever you look, there's a world-famous celebrity parading down the red carpet, smiling for the the paparazzi, only to be pushed aside by an even bigger star claiming his or her 15 seconds of fame. But while teeth withening gel and Botox are replaced by extra vergine motor oil and high-end car polish in Monterey, the insurance sums in Pebble Beach certainly range in the same league as in Hollywood.





With more than 200 classic cars lining up on the lawn of the famous Pebble Beach golf course on early Sunday morning, all of them A-list celebrities representing their marques and coachbuilders, it can be difficult to focus on single automobiles, let alone pick a favourite before they disappear between the crowds. Luckily, the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance has recruited 160 judges to inspect and compare the competing cars – and pick a winner car that, for one year, can be considered the most remarkable automobile in the world.



This year, the automotive community had been speculating if the concours would break with its tradition – and present a classic car from the post-war era with the highest award. But the jurors thought otherwise, and picked four precious pre-war automobiles as nominees for the “Best of Show” title: A 1930 Mercedes-Benz 710 SS Special Roadster from the Auriga Collection in Germany, a 1937 Mercedes-Benz 540K Special Roadster owned by Jim Patterson from Kentucky, a bright blue 1932 Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Corto Figoni Cabriolet from a British private collection brought to California by Gregor Fisker and a 1939 Delahaye 165 Figoni et Falaschi Cabriolet from the Peter Mullin Automotive Museum Foundation in Oxnard, California. In the end, the “Best of Show” trophy went to the Special Roadster that had once belonged to Mohammad Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan. To keep it safe during World War II, the king hid the Roadster in the Afghanistan embassy in Paris, where it remained until 1948. For owner Jim Patterson, it was already the third overall win at Pebble Beach. “In Kentucky, you know, we talk about winning the Derby. Well, there’s such a thing as winning the Triple Crown. This is a Triple Crown for me.”



The "Best of Show" winner was not the only remarkable Mercedes-Benz in the field: Two special classes celebrated the mighty Mercedes-Benz S, SS and SSK from the late 1920s and early 1930s that had been tailored by once-famous coachbuilders Barker, Gangloff, Gläser and Murphy to match the tastes of their flamboyant owners. One of the most talented and creative coachbuilders of the pre-war years, however, was Joseph Figoni, who produced some of the most elegant body styles of all times between 1923 and 1937, before joining forces with Ovidio Falaschi.



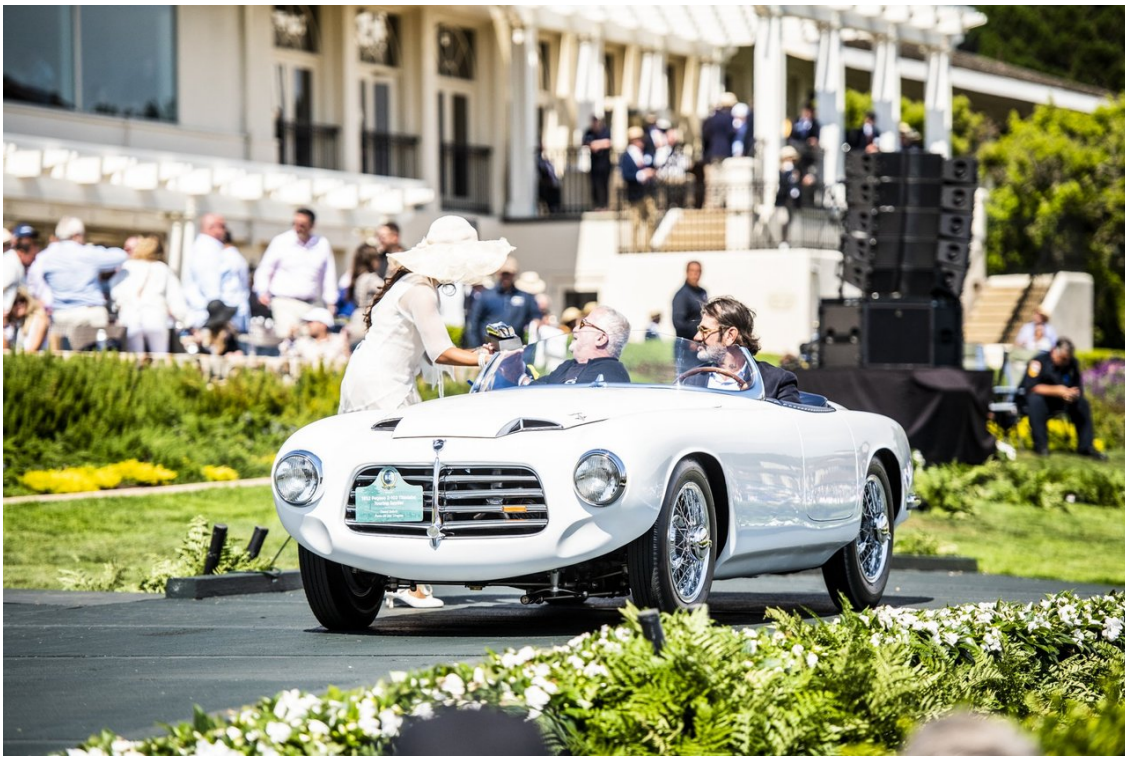
The most remarkable cars brought to California for the Fogni Centennial celebration included a breathtakingly beautiful 1937 Talbot-Lago T150 C-55 Fogni et Falaschi Teardrop Coupé, a fantastic 1933 Alfa Romeo 6C 1750 Gran Sport Fogni Coupé and the aforementioned Delahaye from the Mullin Museum. And while the Duesenbergs, Packards and Rolls-Royce that Pebble Beach is so famous for competed for the limelight, it was a 1937 Bugatti Type 57SC Atalante from Fritz Burkard's Pearl Collection that excited us (and the jury) most among the pre-war automobiles. Somehow, the Bugatti's aura was even more alluring and bewitching within the trademark Pacific morning mist. Or was it Fritz Burkard's cigarette smoke?



If you are into Ferraris from the 1950s – and who isn't, we may ask – Pebble Beach is the place to be. This year, we fell in love with three particular cars: The 1953 Ferrari 212 Inter Vignale Coupe, a silver 1957 Ferrari 250 GT Scaglietti Berlinetta and the 1961 Ferrari 400 Superamerica Pininfarina Coupe Aerodinamico.



But unlike other year's, the prancing horses from Maranello did not own the spotlight, as there were other players claiming a piece of the cake: The famous Spanish brand Pegaso was celebrated with a special class, with a rarer-than-rare 1952 Pegaso Z-102 Tibidabo Touring Spyder winning the class.



Among the post-war sports cars it was the 1954 Aston Martin DB2/4 Bertone Coupé that caught our eye – with its rectangularly shaped grille, the coachbuilt one-off almost seemed to tease Newport-Pagnell’s 1970s design language. A rare sight was also the 1957 Maserati 200SI Fantuzzi Spyder brought up the coast by Jonathan & Wendy Segal from San Diego.



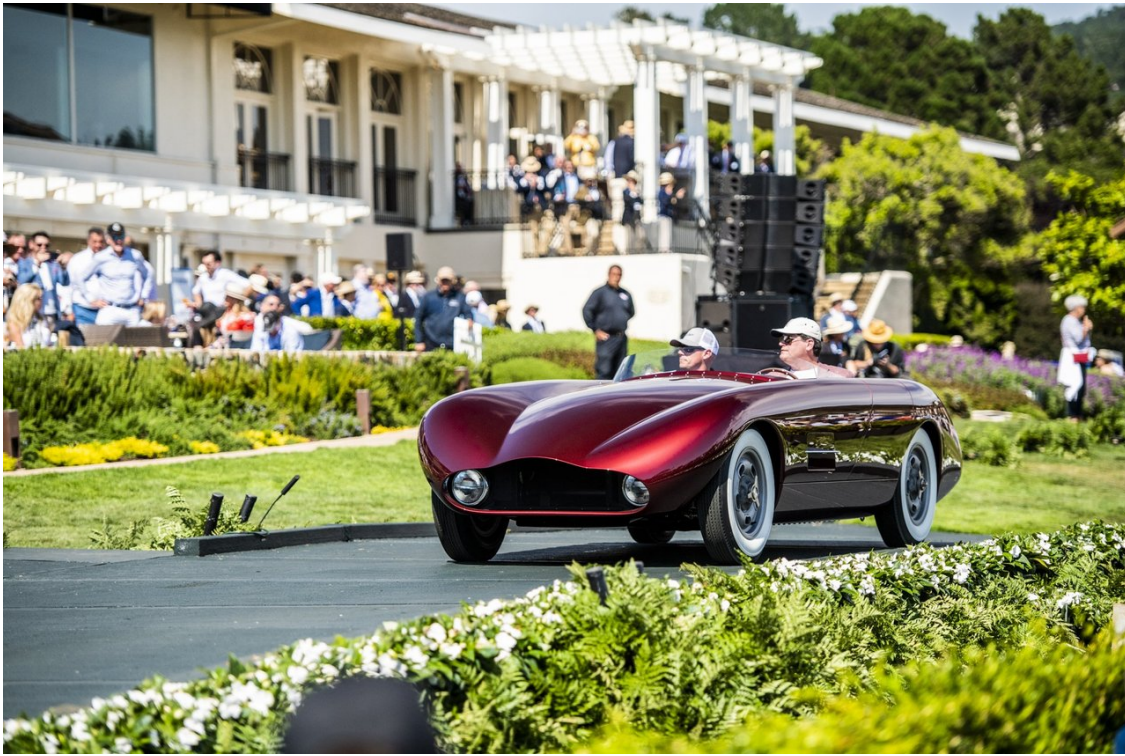
And of course, there was the 75th birthday of Porsche – and could there be a better place to celebrate the anniversary than California? While the black-and-yellow Porsche 906E raced by Ed Hugus and John Cannon at the 1967 12 Hours of Sebring was certainly the most eye-catching car in the concours, the jurors were convinced by other cars in the field, among them a 1972 Porsche 916 Karmann Coupe and a 1973 Porsche 911 Carrera RS Touring. The class win deservedly went to Alois Ruf for the 1963 Porsche 901 Prototype “Quickblau” which he had received as a present from his father for his 18th birthday. He kept the car ever since.



Meanwhile, Lamborghini's 60th anniversary was celebrated with a line-up of impressive bulls made in Sant'Agata - and of course it was a Miura, which many consider to be the most beautiful car ever built, that claimed the class win. The P400 Bertone Coupé was owned by Raphael Gabay of Philadelphia, while the second place went to a Series 2 Espada from Wisconsin and a bright blue Diablo SE30 from New York made the 3rd place. Still, the rarest bull of them all was certainly the Lamborghini 3500 GTZ Zagato.



1963 was also the year that Bruce McLaren founded his company - and the 60th anniversary display put together in his memory saw some of the wildest cars that ever roamed the Pebble Beach lawns. Egon & Birgit Zweimüller from Austria even brought a 1965 McLaren M1A racer that was once piloted by Bruce McLaren himself, while the class was won by a 1967 McLaren M6A Can-Am Race Car from Washington, followed by a 1988 McLaren MP4/4-2 Formula 1 Race Car from Mouse Motors in Chicago and a 1995 McLaren F1, owned by Chris & Ann Cox from North Carolina.



Still, the most outlandish cars were to be found in the class dedicated to the custom-built “American Dream Cars of the 1950s”. And while a Kurtis Sorrell SR-100 Roadster, an Edwards America Convertible or a Fageol Pataray Roadster might not be as famous and iconic as a Ferrari 250 GTO or a Mercedes-Benz 540K, these quirky cars are integral parts of American car culture - and it’s great to see them celebrated among the blue-chip classics in Pebble Beach.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2023

Gallery

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