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Concorso Villa d'Este

A true spectacle and a celebration of the finer things in life

First staged in 1929, the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este owes its special status among the world's prestigious events for historic vehicles to a number of elements. These include the elegance of the event, its long and illustrious tradition, its unrivaled flair at a beautiful location situated directly on the shores of Lake Como, and the small and impressive grouping of historic cars.

Among the many great cars that starred at the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este were three striking machines featured today. Earliest of the trio is this Maserati 300S, which was built for works driver Stirling Moss. An other car that was impossible to miss was the Lancia 12 hp brought by Corrado Lopresto. Not only is this the only one of the

three surviving examples in private hands, it is also the oldest surviving Lancia in the world. Also benefiting from a recent restoration was this Lamborghini Miura P400. It was ordered new by the son of Sherlock Holmes author Adrian Conan Doyle and finished to his specification in red with green and gold stripes.

By Filippo Pignatti Morano (*)

One of the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este's unique tradition is that the Coppa d'Oro, or best of show trophy, is picked by public referendum. This year, the public awarded the Coppa d'Oro to the most sympathetic of entries; the tiny Lurani Nibbio. This car was built by the Giovanni 'Johnny' Lurani around a Moto Guzzi motorcycle engine in 1935. Clothed in a bullet-shaped body, it became the first 500cc car to break the 100mph barrier.

What made the Villa d'Este entry so special was that the car was presented by Lurani's grandson Frederico Gottsche Bebert. He recalled how his grandfather would lock him in the car when he misbehaved as a kid. Also on hand to receive the trophy was Lurani's daughter and Frederico's mother, who was visibly touched to see her son take top honours in her father's old record breaker. The specialist jury awarded their best of show the following day to the equally striking Alfa Romeo Giulietta SS Prototipo, which also resides in Corrado Lopresto's collection.

Proving to the collector car world that demand for the finest pre-WW2 stock remains strong, the superstar of RM Sotheby's bi-annual drive past gig beside Lake Como during Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este weekend was the 1937 Talbot-Lago T150-C SS 'Goutte d'Eau' with Teardrop Coupe coachwork by the automobile sculptors at Figoni et Falaschi. Considered by auto-art lovers to be one of the most attractive, aerodynamically inspired automotive designs of all times, the car sold under the gavel for a card-melting 3,360,000 Euros (£2,940,000 with premium).



Body beautiful 1930s French coachbuilding is still in demand eight decades later, as the 1937 Bugatti Type 57 Atalante Prototype, one of three, was right behind the results-topping Talbot-Lago, bringing 3,024,000 Euros (£2,940,000), setting a record for a non-'S' model Type 57.

But such 'Concours Belles' (or, more accurately, 'Trailer Queens') were, upstaged by an early 1961 Jaguar E Type Series 1 3.8 roadster selling for 582,400 Euros (£509,600 including premium) to establish a new world record auction price for a non-competition model E Type. During the 1962 and 1963 seasons, the Portuguese first owner drove his production E Type to four victories in Portugal and Angola, beating Ferrari, Porsche and Maserati equipped rivals in the process.

The more than half a million pounds paid for what has become very much a restored road car these days can be explained by two value-enhancing factors – period race history, plus this E Type's eligibility for all the high profile pre-63 and pre-66 Historic GT retro-events. All factory-applied numbers were claimed to still match though and some original features from the car's weekend competition past had been preserved during restoration.

Although 67% of Porsches driven past the RM Sotheby's grandstand in the Villa Erba grounds sold during a £21.4m evening in Italy, including a 1993 911 Carrera RSR 3.8 with only 10k on the odo sold for 2,016,000 Euros (£1,764,000), a record for any 911 Type 964, 40% of Ferraris did not. For six Prancing Horses had to be transported back to their stables without new jockeys. (Source RM Sotheby's)



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Many cars coming to auction do the rounds and are criticised for their downfalls; of course, once the car has been to auction and failed to sell, it is 'burnt', tarnished by its inability to find a new owner. The wider audience will know about its existence for the wrong reasons, and have concerns about it that would never have materialised had the car been sold in the first place. We are seeing fewer high-value cars starring at auctions to pull in the crowds. At the same time, a lot more 'no reserve' cars come to the floor taking over the function of attracting buyers. One would be wise to remember the auctioneer can bid the cars up to the reserve, if there is one.

Far more cars than before are now being advertised and sold under the radar: they will be the cars of higher value, good history or major event winners. This says a lot about the market, the value attached to genuine lots, and who the movers and shakers are.