

CHALLENGING TIMES

**CHALLENGE.** WITHOUT IT WE WOULDN'T HAVE THE MOTOR CAR: SOMEONE HAD TO DECIDE THAT A HORSE AND CARRIAGE WERE NOT THE BEST WAY FORWARD (LITERALLY) AND RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF INVENTING SOMETHING BETTER. WE CAN ARGUABLY THANK MR BENZ FOR THAT ONE.

TEXT Simon Kidston · FOTOS Kidston SA



Since then, there have been many who thought they could go one better. Plenty have failed but others have helped pave the way for the technology we enjoy today. The early motor racing scene was about as dangerous as the sports played out in Roman amphitheatres two thousand years earlier: the notorious Paris-Madrid city-to-city race of 1903 was stopped in Bordeaux when the body count reached nine, including Marcel Renault of the eponymous company. And yet both motorsport, along with war (not dissimilar in human cost but without the

sponsors), present engineers with challenges which the winner has to overcome, and those solutions eventually filter down to make our everyday lives easier.

The motoring world is full of tales, some perhaps apocryphal, of inventiveness triumphing over adversity. When the Grand Prix racing world's governing body launched a new formula in 1934 which allowed teams to run almost anything as long as it tipped the scales at no more than 750kg, the German teams devised some of the most sophisticated machinery ever to take to the race track, financed by a customer who went out of business in 1945. Legend has it that on the first day of pre-race scrutineering, when the immaculate new Mercedes-Benz and Auto Union single seaters were wheeled out for inspection, they were found to be over the weight limit by just a few kilos. The engineers scratched their heads for a solution - weight had already been pared to a minimum thanks to all manner of exotic alloys drilled with more lightening holes than a Swiss cheese - until a bright young mechanic innocently suggested that they could just scratch the white paint off the body... and thus, gleaming in their polished aluminium skin, the legend of the Silver Arrows was born.

Consider that in less than a decade, racing car technology went from engines producing less than 200 bhp and top speeds of barely 200 km/h to the ultimate Silver Arrows of 1937 (the last and wildest year of the 750 kg formula) which boasted up to 725 bhp and, with streamlined bodywork, reached speeds which peaked at 432 km/h (not a misprint). Seldom is the pace of technological development faster than in racing.

The challenges which have shaped the evolution of the motor car extend far beyond motorsport, of course. Headstrong Italian entrepreneur Ferruccio Lamborghini, a man of humble origins but fearsome ambition who had built a post-war business empire making tractors and heating equipment, could afford the most expensive motor cars on the market for his own enjoyment. Having sampled Mercedes-Benz and Maserati, he turned to Ferrari and bought a 250 GT but found it lacking: it seems to have had a voracious appetite for new clutches, although history doesn't record whether this was down to Enzo Ferrari's seeming indifference to build quality or Ferruccio Lamborghini's unquestioning belief in his own driving abilities. Whatever the truth, and this is another of those tales which both men have since taken to the grave, the dissatisfied Mr Lamborghini is said

to have been dismissed by Il Drake (Ferrari's nickname) with an offhand rebuke along the lines of "Why don't you stick to tractors?" The rest, as they say, is history: Cavaliere Lamborghini stormed out and recruited the best young engineering minds in the business, and three years later Ferrari's management was dumbfounded when the upstart rival wowed press and clients alike with the world's first production mid-engined supercar: the Miura.

Over 40 years later, most self-respecting car manufacturers place the engine behind the driver in their ultimate performance models, and sooner or later someone else would have thought of it if Cavaliere Lamborghini hadn't ... but he did, and all thanks to 'Old Man' Ferrari's challenge.

Apart from the obvious obstacles which automotive engineers have to overcome today - and there are more than ever, with increasingly demanding safety and emissions laws coming into force almost every month - there are very different challenges for those whose passion is focused on motoring of a bygone era. Car collectors don't tend to spend hours agonizing over the Cx coefficient of their pride and joy, nor (dare I say this out loud) how thirsty it might be at the fuel pumps. In fact, there is an emerging group, 'specollectors' if you like, who worry far more about the investment potential of their 'assets' than how they drive. These are certainly testing times for investors in any field, and owners of valuable cars are no exception. Every day the newspapers and television tell tales of financial woe in far-flung places, from Wall Street to Tokyo, and yet the classic car market has proven remarkably resilient to these latest challenges. Sure, values are down and buyers are more cautious than ever - they can't rely on a rising market to correct their mistakes any more - but deals are happening at almost the same pace as before at the top end of the market.

Perhaps the difference nowadays, if there is one, is in the character and motivation of buyers. Gone for the most part are



the 'easy come, easy go' newcomers who simply liked the idea of telling dinner party guests that they owned 'an old Ferrari' with a knowing nod implying that it was better than money in the bank. In their place the old school enthusiasts are returning, armed with both enthusiasm and knowledge ... although it helps when they also have the financial wherewithal to indulge their passion.

Life without challenge would be dull. Like an athlete whose muscles atrophy if they don't compete, both collectors and their cars need to be tested to remain at their peak. In business or on the race track, the motoring world tends to attract competitive personalities and the cars they collect reflect their own success. And everyone likes a winner: look at the difference in value between a car which won Le Mans and one which tried but failed, and you won't tell me that "it's the taking part that counts".

DER AUTO-BIOGRAF



SIMON KIDSTON, 40, war lange Jahre Europachef des Auktionshauses Bonhams. Sein Spezialgebiet: hochwertige Klassiker. Deshalb weiß er auch: Ein altes Auto ist immer so wertvoll wie seine Geschichte. Und Kidston kennt diese Geschichten. Alle. Deshalb ist er auch als Moderator, Auktionator und Sachverständiger auf den bedeutendsten Sammlertreffen, allen voran Pebble Beach in Kalifornien und Villa d'Este am Comer See, gefragt. Mittlerweile arbeitet Kidston höchst erfolgreich in eigener Sache. Sein Unternehmen Kidston SA in Genf fädelt für den Privatsammler Käufe und Verkäufe ein, erstellt Expertisen, liefert Policen und regelt auch gerne die komplette Finanzierung. Was ihn auszeichnet? Die Nähe zum Markt, sagt der einer Rennfahrer-Familie entstammende Kidston mit dem Selbstbewusstsein zwanzigjähriger Berufserfahrung.

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