

From Munich Legends to Classic Heroes



FOR THE FIRST TIME since 1967 East Sussex-based BMW specialist Munich Legends is under new management. Following the retirement of company founder Tony Halse, Directors Mark Ayton and Dan Norris have appointed company veteran Stuart Draper as general manager, while Alex Turk heads up the workshop team. Call 0844 880 2870 or see www.munichlegends.co.uk

Classic BMW expert Halse hasn't totally retired from the classic car scene though, and is involved with his son Barney's new business Classic Heroes. Barney, who was at Munich Legends for 20 years, says: 'Munich Legends product was

moving on, as it had to, but I wanted to get back to what I enjoy most: the cars of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties – cars I'd want to own myself.' While father and son remain committed to the Munich marque, Tony says: 'I'm looking forward to working with Barney to widen the company's interests, to embrace a more eclectic mix of sporting icons.' Current stock includes a one-owner E12 (first shape 5-Series) Alpina B6 and a prototype 3.0CSL.

Classic Heroes will move into new premises near Heathfield in early December. Call 07939 512551 (01825 830227 from December 1) or see www.classicheroes.co.uk

Russo and Steele targets China

AUCTION HOUSE Russo and Steele is aiming to get in early with the classic car scene in China. The US firm has agreed in principle to a joint venture with luxury car importer China Auto Logistics that would see Russo and Steele auctions taking place in the People's Republic.

With a population of more than 1.3 billion and rapid industrialisation it's easy to understand why China is now the world's largest automotive market, but the level of interest in classic cars is proportionally tiny. China Auto Logistics has a 3000-strong client base to target, and Russo and Steele owner Drew Alcazar is bullish: 'As our company

celebrates its tenth anniversary, this is a very exciting step for us... I believe the potential for success is very high.'

In such a vast country the pair is looking seriously at developing a sophisticated online auction process. Tong Shiping, president and chief executive officer of China Auto Logistics adds: 'Recently, [Russo and Steele] have begun to utilise the internet for adding new bidders and participants via a live online auction process. Together with our knowledge of the market, this is an area where the technology we are utilising in building new web-based auto-related services in China should prove helpful.'



Simon Kidston

Wonders of one-owner one-upmanship

FLICK THROUGH AN auction catalogue – it doesn't have to be for cars – and you'll notice what a fuss is made over lots that have been in the same hands for a long time. 'One owner from new' is used and abused ad nauseam. 'Fifty-two years in the original purchaser's family' was the headline for a wonderfully scruffy ex-works Aston Martin DB2 which came up for auction in London last month, and when the hammer fell at half a million pounds it left no doubt that the wait had been worthwhile, at least for the seller.

Why the big deal? Because long ownership implies that whatever is being sold has been well cared for, part of the family perhaps, rather than an unloved liability punted from one owner to the next. And serious collectors can never resist a bit of one-upmanship – the chance to turn up at the next major gathering at the wheel of a car your peers have been trying unsuccessfully to buy for years is the automotive equivalent of persuading gorgeous Miss Unavailable to accompany you to the college ball... and showing her off at breakfast the next morning.

The trouble is, what next? One-ownership is an ephemeral concept. It's all very well persuading the original owner to part with his or her pride and joy, but when you finally become the next custodian, some of the magic has gone. It may have been a 'one owner from new' before, but it isn't any more, despite the flowery description when it's inevitably re-offered.

It's the same with celebrity's cars. Being able to boast 'I bought it from Elton John's collection' makes for a good story, but 'I bought it from someone who bought it from...' starts to sound a bit sad, which is probably why most of his cars were offloaded for a fraction of what had been paid for them when the buyers at his original auction finally lost interest.

Consider something else as well. Last month a one-owner Lamborghini Miura SV came up for auction: 'Let there be no mistake that this not [sic] is a car which has ever left the ownership which it is currently in,' trumpeted the catalogue dyslexically. The trouble is, the man who bought a Miura new in 1972 is rather different from the one who buys one today. Seventies Miura man was younger, more carefree, and much more interested in the conquests that his Latin love machine would facilitate than carefully storing servicing bills or the ubiquitous 'books and tools' (Does anybody remember what they're actually for these days anyway?) I mean, what normal person back then would ever have dreamt that decades later collectors would lose sleep over this stuff?

The irony is that the type of cool first owner whose aura adds romance – and value – to a sale price is exactly the kind of person you wouldn't want to buy a car from. Think Rod Stewart: rock-star driving style, rock-star interest in maintenance.

Ultimately, though, nothing is forever. We can't take our cars with us, so they all change hands eventually, and that's what makes those that haven't yet done so special beyond all logic. Short of a time machine allowing us to collect the keys to a gleaming new Daytona at the factory from Enzo himself, buying one from the man who did is the next best thing. Even if he hasn't spent a penny on the old rust bucket since then...

Simon Kidston lives and works in a world filled with the finest classics. In between acting as a consultant to collectors and performing as the multi-lingual presenter at top European events, Geneva-based Simon (www.kidston.com) finds time to enjoy his own cars, including a Porsche 911 Carrera 2.7 RS and a Lamborghini Miura SV.