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Why Riley's hot Twenties motor lasted 31 years

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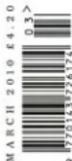


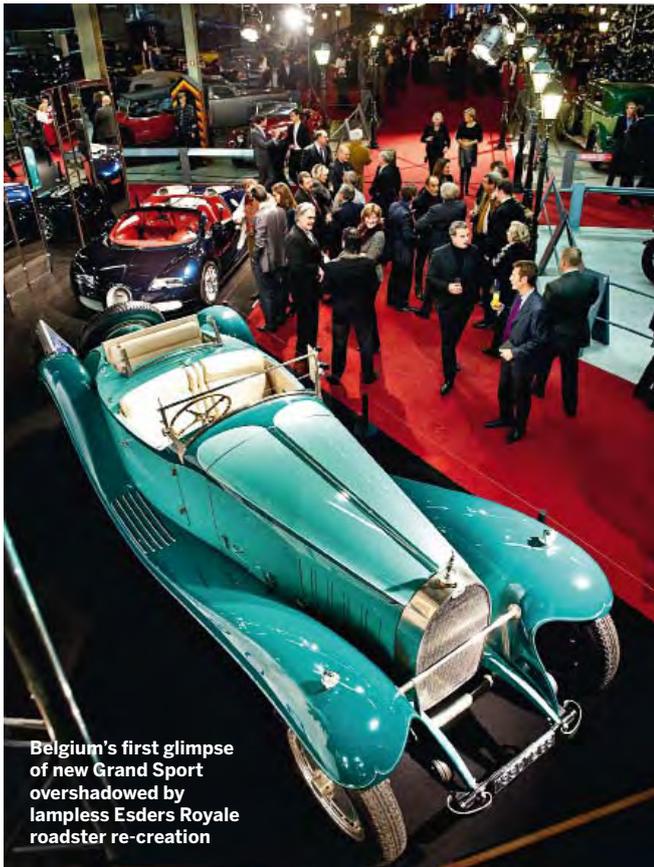
MG MAGNETTE

The joys and risks of buying this handsome sports saloon

356 CARRERA GS

Driving the Porsche of choice for real Fifties road racers





Belgium's first glimpse of new Grand Sport overshadowed by lampless Esders Royale roadster re-creation



Also appearing is the land speed record-holding British Steam Car, which eclipsed Fred Marriot's 103-year-old steam-powered vehicle record of 127mph with a 139.843mph average set by Charles Burnett III in the Mojave Desert, California, last August. Project manager Matt Candy and engineer Nick Bass will explain how it works.

Adult tickets are £15 per day (£20 on Friday 12), with VIP tickets including lunch, refreshments and preferential parking available from £60 per day. See www.raceretro.com

Ex-GP star Giacomelli (far left) heads a mecca for Alfa fans at Race Retro. Speed record-holding British Steam Car (above) there too



Simon Kidston

Witnessing history before it's too late

AN INEVITABLE PART of growing up, I guess, is that those around you slowly start to disappear. One of the great things about the old car world is that it's full of interesting people: usually charming, sometimes a handful, but almost never dull. It's

been a privilege to meet characters I'd only read about before: drivers, designers, collectors... even famous mechanics you'd recognize from faded race photographs. They're all part of motoring history, and the chance to hear their tales first hand – while they're still around to tell them, full of subtle personal detail – is fascinating yet fleeting. A friend of mine once joked that dealing through a broker was like kissing through a gas mask; I suppose you could say the same about researching history without being able to speak to the people who made it.

This went through my mind a couple of weeks ago as I hustled the black Gullwing along foggy mountain roads up to Gstaad, heading for the memorial service of an old friend. Peter F Baumberger was a serious 'car guy' with some great stories to tell. Born to Swiss parents in London during the Roaring Twenties as heir to a 200-year-old brewing dynasty, life didn't start too badly. By the Fifties, his education complete, he embarked on a fast-track career which made him a big hitter at RCA Records in New York while still in his thirties. He even lunched with Elvis.

Peter worked hard and played the same way. Most weekends he'd head for the track – Watkins Glen, Lime Rock and Bridgehampton were favourites – where he became a popular competitor at the wheel of his Porsche and an entertaining raconteur at the bar afterwards. Just two years after taking up racing he was SCCA East Coast champion in his class. Never one to do things by halves, with some friends he bought six cars from Colin Chapman and ran them as Team Lotus USA.

For 1959 Peter and his buddy Walter Cronkite – the legendary broadcaster named by opinion polls as 'The Most Trusted Man in America' – decided it would be fun to enter a Zagato-bodied Lancia for the Sebring 12 Hours. A third friend came along for the ride, and despite Cronkite serving as race commentator for nine of the 12 hours, they still managed 40th overall and fifth in class.

However, the powers that be at RCA didn't relish the publicity their manager's racing exploits were generating, so Peter hung up his helmet. A move to Switzerland followed marriage to Campbell's Soup heiress Mary-Alice Dorrance, and with her two teenage sons the family set up home in Geneva, renting a Gothic castle – later the backdrop for an episode of *The Persuaders*.

Peter decided that a season of motor racing would be good for the boys' education, and bought not one but three new Ferrari 275 GTB/4s (two steel, one alloy) for the family to campaign in European hillclimbs under the newly created Three Bears banner. University curtailed the boys' racing careers, but their stepfather never slowed down: he served on the boards of Lindt, ABN Amro and Swatch and usually arrived at meetings in a road-stained Ferrari or Porsche, and he stood out as the most senior participant in historic events such as the Tour Auto with his stable of Three Bears liveried Carrera RSs.

These days the 'gentleman driver' title is used loosely, but it could have been made for Peter Baumberger. He was a link to another era and I'm glad to have had a glimpse of it.

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.