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Front suspension of ex-Jacky Ickx Matra F2 car was ripped off in crash



Demo smash mars Excellence weekend

A CRASH THAT badly damaged two historic racing cars marred September's fourth Week-End de l'Excellence de Reims in France.

On the second day of the demonstration event Roland Urban's ex-Carroll Shelby Lister-Jaguar Knobbly tangled with Jean Paul Humbert's Matra MS5 – the Matra's front suspension was ripped off and the Lister was left severely bent. Both drivers escaped serious injury.

The 1.6-litre Cosworth-powered Matra MS5-11 is the car that Jacky Ickx qualified third on the three-litre F1-dominated grid at the Nürburgring for the 1967 German Grand Prix.

Unconfirmed reports also say Jean-Marie Muller's ex-Jochen Rindt Brabham BT23-5 F2 car was involved too, catching fire – smoke was seen rising above the circuit after the accident and the Brabham didn't take any further

part in the event. The organiser insists: 'The Brabham was not implicated in the accident and none of the cars caught fire.'

Proceedings were spoilt by accidents more than once despite organisers' pleas for drivers to respect the cars, other entrants and the circuit, and to remember it was a demonstration event and not a race.

More than 5000 visitors attended the event at the historic Reims-Gueux road circuit, which also brought out a host of weird and wonderful French sports racing cars among the entrants.

Ex-Rindt Brabham won the last single-seater GP at Reims



Unipower GT alongside Peugeot 205 T16 on the Reims-Gueux grid



Simon Kidston

Scared senseless by a 2-tonne British bruiser

EVEN IN UNCERTAIN TIMES I don't imagine many bankers are too anxious about their next meal, beyond getting their favourite table at Le Gavroche. Most tech tycoons are probably barely old enough to drive but don't care because they go everywhere by private jet. Alas, the rest of us may not be able to retire at 40 (or 50, or 60 for that matter), but there are upsides. Any job that finds you starting the day with a leisurely drive to Goodwood in a pre-war Bugatti with the autumn sunshine and ends with you watching the sun set as you skim the coast in a vintage biplane can't be all bad.

It's easy to forget how lucky we are now. A generation ago there were just a handful of opportunities to get together with like-minded enthusiasts and share our eccentric old cars. These days we're spoilt for choice, from Goodwood to Le Mans Classic, the Mille Miglia and the Tour Auto... Whether it's re-enacting the Fifties in period costume or battling across China in a 100-year-old jalopy, someone's probably thought of it and wants you to join them. You wonder if 50 years from now the Goodwood Revival will showcase the Eighties and invite entrants to arrive with shoulder pads, big hair and Bucks Fizz blaring out of their white Ford XR3i convertibles...

Talking of cars from not so long ago, a couple of weeks ago I rounded up some friends (two of them professional drivers) to ferry some younger classics to a quiet Alpine destination and shoot some action footage on the almost deserted local roads for my website. The drivers have been promised anonymity. The cars? Three Lamborghini Countachs, from wedge LP400 to *Rocky V* Anniversary model; an obscenely fast and loud Aston Martin V8 Vantage pumped up to 6.4 litres; Lewis Hamilton's former Mercedes CLK Black Series company car, the oldest production Lamborghini in existence – a stunning 350 GT that looked positively delicate in this company – and a McLaren F1 which, tellingly, was the most understated of the bunch.

Revelations? You'll have to wait for the videos, out in time for Christmas (and free), but here's a foretaste. First of all, put any of these cars in the hands of a pro and it's amazing what it will do; even if it's your car and you drive it all the time, you probably haven't scratched the surface (I certainly hadn't). All three Countachs showed that if you can fit in them, they'll go like the clappers, even around corners, and sound great doing it. The modern Merc highlighted how far brakes and handling have come, and just what fun even a modern car can be, no matter that it looks like the local beautician's Sunday cruiser on steroids. The 350 GT burned no rubber, upset no neighbours and appeared to glide everywhere: an Italian GT in the best tradition, and bystanders all wanted to know what it was.

The Big Mac? A journalist brave enough to be a pro driver's passenger on a mountain pass came back smiling from ear to ear but hasn't spoken since, so I don't know. Most surprising of all was the two-tonne British bruiser, the Vantage. It scared everyone senseless but stayed with everything older than the Mac in a straight line, and even around corners if you hung on and prayed.

Like I said, it's a job that has its moments. Especially when the local police showed up...

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.