

# Pebble to the metal

Few classic car events can match the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, which is widely regarded as the finest exhibition of antique automobiles in the world, as **Guy Bird** discovers

Without question, Pebble Beach is the world's biggest classic car show. Nestling on the Monterey Peninsula in Northern California, some 400 miles south of San Francisco, the occasion has turned into a week-long series of events held every August and is now brought together under the Pebble Beach Automotive Week.

The 66th edition of the festival, which starts its engines on Tuesday 16 August 2016,

showcases not only some of the best cars on the planet from the early 20th century onwards, but also offers many of them for sale at various high-end auctions. RM Sotheby's and Bonhams – the latter at the ultra-exclusive Quail Lodge event – are two of the biggest and best-known auction houses in attendance at Pebble Beach Automotive Week, and where the rarest and best-kept vehicles regularly fetch millions under the hammer. But even if

you're not personally in the market for a million-dollar classic Aston Martin, Mercedes or Maserati just yet, these events are definitely worth attending for the sheer theatre and thrill of witnessing big, big money changing hands for seriously beautiful cars.

If classic racing is your thing, Pebble Beach Automotive Week also plays host to The Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion, held at the world-famous Laguna Seca Raceway. Aside from seeing

– and definitely hearing – the classic motorsport vehicles in action on the track, you can also wander around the paddock to get up close and personal with the cars, and their drivers and team managers too, unlike your average Formula 1 race event. There are also dozens of excellent automotive memorabilia stalls within the circuit's perimeter that sell everything from small-print run, but large-format coffee table books covering your favourite marque, to retro race clothing, beautifully-made scale model cars and other hard-to-find accessories too.



While the crowd at Laguna Seca is decidedly enthusiast, petrolhead and down-home, the vibe at the centrepiece of this annual series of events – the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance – is more sedate but much more sophisticated. Smart (but comfortable) attire is essential and lots of big, rare and classic cars are the order of the day. In the context of other important classic car shows in Europe, classic car expert, Max Girardo, of Girardo & Co sums up the US event's comparative size perfectly: "Villa d'Este is like a rural village event compared to Pebble Beach. It's the Mecca".

Before daybreak on Sunday 21 August, hundreds of classics – not dozens as at the Italian Villa d'Este event – will trundle down to the gently-sloping 18th fairway of the immaculately manicured Pebble Beach golf course, which faces the sea at the southern edge

of the Monterey Peninsula, and will await to be judged in various categories, as well as aiming for the coveted overall 'Best in Show' award, announced at the end of the day.

The 2016 category titles give plenty of clues as to the rarity and specific nature of the vehicles expected. One group will celebrate 100 years of the legendary German brand BMW, very much still going strong, while another is dedicated to the exotic but long-since defunct French marque Delahaye, which found brief success in the 1930s in racing and beyond. A third category is due to go even more niche by celebrating the long career and wonderfully elegant work of Paris-based coachbuilder Henri Chapron, who began his design work in the 20s (including a few Delahayes) right through to his famous late-career, custom-made versions



of the Citroen DS for the French President Charles de Gaulle. Rarer still, will be the category devoted to the work of short-lived Italian racing and GT brand Bizzarrini, formed by disgruntled ex-Ferrari employee Giotto Bizzarrini. Briefly boasting the immense talents of individual designers like Giorgetto Giugiaro, it burnt brightest and best for only half a decade within the mid-to-late 1960s.

Talking of the famous Italian 'Prancing Horse' marque, Ferrari is always well-represented at Pebble Beach, but don't expect 'any old'

250 GTO or 275 for the 2016 expo. Only ultra-rare versions with special bodies or provenance will be let in to exhibit on Pebble Beach's hallowed turf.

From 8.30am on the Sunday, the judges – including many top-end current and retired automotive designers – will descend to the fairway to decide which among

**Above: Classic cars displayed on the fairways of Pebble Beach's iconic golf course**  
**Below: Laguna Seca Raceway also plays host to the event**





the best of the best will win their various categories, based on specific criteria that Pebble Beach's organisers describe thus: "The Concours is not a contest of speed, but of excellence. Automobiles are judged for their historical accuracy, their technical merit and their style". Once arranged and judged, the event opens at 10.30am to the general public and, due to the expansive layout, it's easy to wander among the automotive exotica without

feeling jostled or short of space. To offer a modern moment among all the classics, on a separate but also immaculate lawn the other side of the golf club's main buildings, there are always a small number of new cars and concepts unveiled, usually one-offs or limited runs, in keeping with the week's exclusive nature, and even some global firsts too. In years past, well-known names like Bentley, Aston Martin and Cadillac have unveiled key models

or variants at the event, sharing space with smaller exotic marques including Spyker and Laraki. Admission prices for the Concours are high but keep things exclusive. General admission tickets cost US\$325 in advance or US\$375 on day of the show, rising to US\$750 for a Club d'Elegance ticket and US\$2,500 for the Chairman's Hospitality Package for more exclusive offers and access. However, while you're having fun, it's good to know that more than

US\$1m from the event is raised annually for local causes from children's charities to scholarships. All in all, even if you only have a passing interest in classic cars, Pebble Beach is an event to earmark visiting at least once in your lifetime. For one week every August, there really is nowhere like it on earth. ■ [www.pebblebeachconcours.net](http://www.pebblebeachconcours.net)

**Pictured: Pebble Beach's golf course offers a superb setting**

