



Seattle Post-Intelligencer

WHEELS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2003 SECTION F ★ + ●

AUGUST AUTO SALES

Favorable month for the industry:

General Motors Corp., Hyundai Motor America and Nissan North America posted hefty sales in August as the industry racked up its strongest month so far this year. And although Ford Motor Co. also had one of its best months of 2003, volume was down sharply from a year ago when the industry recorded one of its best-ever tallies. Along those same lines, DaimlerChrysler AG's Chrysler Group had its second-best August in company history, despite a 6.3 decline in overall sales. GM set an industry record for monthly truck sales, which rose 5 percent. On the car side, excluding the Saab nameplate, business was off 8.3 percent. Overall, GM's August volume was down less than 1 percent, topping most Wall Street forecasts.

CHEVY GOING RETRO

GM to challenge PT Cruiser: A Chevy version of the PT Cruiser is on the way. About five years after the debut of the highly successful Chrysler retro wagon, General Motors will roll out its own take on the PT Cruiser. Called the HHR – for “high heritage roof” – the new vehicle was shown fleetingly in slides on the wall behind GM North America President Gary Cowger as he spoke during recent management briefing seminars in Michigan. It is scheduled to go on sale in 2005 probably as a 2006 model, and according to Cowger, it will be priced to sell, probably in the same ballpark as the PT Cruiser, whose prices start under \$17,000. GM has released a sketch of the HHR along with the 1949 Chevy Suburban, upon which both the PT Cruiser and Chevy HHR designs are loosely based.

INSIDE THIS SECTION

The Puyallup Fair, which begins its three-week run today, features a diverse array of live music and other attractions. What's Happening has the full lineup.



Dealers care about surveys – so be honest

TOM AND RAY MAGLIOZZI

CAR TALK



Dear Tom and Ray: What's up with dealer customer-satisfaction surveys? After I get my car serviced, the dealer sends me a four-page, already-filled-out survey identical to the one Honda is going to send me – with “excellent” checked in every box. The dealer tells me that if I can't check “excellent” on every item, I should call his customer service manager. Should I play along with this? Does Honda really think its dealers are all perfect? What's the point of the survey if it tells you what results it wants? – Rob

Ray: Great question, Rob. Over the past 10 years or so, car companies have become obsessed with the notion of customer satisfaction. That, in itself, is not a bad thing.

Tom: And a whole industry has sprung up to measure this quality called “customer satisfaction.” J.D. Power and Associates is probably the best-known of the bunch.

Ray: Anyway, to encourage their dealers to improve customer satisfaction, car companies started putting some teeth in the survey results. In some cases, they based executive pay increases on customer-satisfaction scores. The executives, in turn, used customer-satisfaction scores to influence dealer allotment – how many of the desirable, or highly profitable, cars a dealer gets to sell each month.

Tom: So with all this stuff riding on their customer-satisfaction scores, is it any wonder that the dealers don't want to leave anything to chance?

Ray: It's against the rules for them to literally fill out the survey for you and sign your name, but they'll do everything short of that to get good scores.

Tom: The intent of the mailing is to influence your opinion, and, if you're not satisfied, the dealership wants you to call it first to give it a chance to make you satisfied.

Ray: Or, barring that, convince you somehow that your lousy experience must have been at some other dealership, not this one. And if that doesn't work, it wants a chance to send Tony Soprano to take you out before you ever have a chance to check “pretty good” on one of its surveys.

Tom: So our advice would be to fill out the survey any darn way you want. Suggesting that you put “excellent” in every category makes the survey meaningless.

Ray: If your experience really was excellent, by all means, say so in the survey. That'll reward those dealerships that really do go out of their way to provide excellent and honest service.

Tom: But if your experience was average, mediocre or downright lousy – if you weren't treated well, your car wasn't ready when they said it would be or you were surprised by the final price of the repair – say so in the survey and send it on in. The results are obviously important to the dealer. And getting lousy marks will give those dealerships that need it an important message: You can't cover up bad service one customer at a time. . . . It's time to shape up, guys.

Write to Car Talk, c/o the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, P.O. Box 1909, Seattle, 98111. “Car Talk” is heard at 9 a.m. Saturdays on KUOW radio, 94.9 FM, and at 10 a.m. Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays on KPLU radio, 88.5 FM. The “Car Talk” Web site is <http://cartalk.cars.com>

PEBBLE BEACH CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

Bugatti – high-power style

Automaker unleashes Veyron's 1,001 horses for a cool \$1.2 million

BY EVAN McMULLEN
Special to the P-I

A saxophone wailed, and the fog machine pumped out ersatz Carmel Valley mist on cue, stylishly backlit for maximum effect. The extravagantly fed and watered crowd gaped, then gasped.

The Bugatti Veyron had arrived. It was the car world's first look at the famous automaker's newest triumph – a suave, sculpted, shaken-not-stirred beast on steroids, glossy in red and black formal wear, but reputedly capable of 250 mph from 1,001 horsepower. And if you had to ask how much, darling, you were at the wrong party. The answer? A million Euros, or if you insist, \$1.2 million.

The car slid down a custom cantilevered ramp into a swirl of rumors – performance problems, delays in its release, a designer's neck on the chopping block – but it still managed to wow the crowd Bugatti had assembled at Stone Pine Lodge. Nobody was talking officially, but word was the company, now owned by Volkswagen, took as many as 10 orders and deposits for what will be the world's most muscular factory-built street-legal automobile.

It was just one way that the Bugatti marque dominated this year's Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance weekend Aug. 15-17. The Veyron's equally elegant ancestors were also triumphant.

At the Concours itself, recognized as the world's primary collector-car showplace, an unprecedented field of nearly 50 vintage Bugattis were on display, and they won top honors in multiple categories, including Best in Show. That prize went to Peter Williamson's 1935 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic. It's one of two proper examples of that car extant. The other, which belongs to Ralph Lauren, won the same prize in 1993.

This year, Lauren won the Strother McMinn Trophy best competition car for his 1934 Type 59. Among other Bugattis honored was Seattle collector Charles Morse's 1939 Type 57C Gangloff Atalante, which took third place in its class.

It was a year in which many important restorations were on display for the first time, and that made the event a major milestone in Bugatti history. The tone was set by Concours co-chairs Sandra Kasky and Bainbridge Island's Glenn Mounger, who arrived stage-side in a 1932 Type 41 Royale. At \$16 million, the Royale holds the Guinness World Record for the most expensive type of car ever sold.

As exciting as the Veyron was as a party centerpiece, the sight of it zooming down the straightaway at Laguna Seca was a sensation. The Veyron served as a pace car for the Rolex Monterey Historic Automobile Races, which



RICK MAYNARD

The Bugatti Veyron is readied for its North American debut in a pace lap at Laguna Seca. The heir apparent in a long line of the automaker's elegant triumphs, it caused a sensation down the straightaway and later for the designer.

along with the Concours itself and the Concorso Italiano, completes the Monterey Weekend's “triple crown” of events.

Again, Volkswagen spared no expense in setting the stage, flying in a cadre of chefs, fresh seafood, Alsatian delicacies, case upon case of Louis Roederer Champagne – and a bevy of celebrities.

Caroline Bugatti-Rinaldi, the only living descendant of founder Ettore Bugatti, mingled easily with the pampered guests in the Bugatti tent. An hour before race time, faux European decorum gave way to a near-deafening, well-lubricated and opinionated babble in at least four languages.

A stunning stream of Bugattis of all types and vintages streamed into position for the demanding, potentially catastrophic 10-lap race. The smells of hot metal, rubber and aviation gas filled the air as the Veyron led about 40 exquisite cars around the track – a rolling, revving museum of some of the world's most important Bugattis.

Suddenly, the Veyron veered out of control on the Andretti hairpin, spinning wildly, but it

quickly recovered to complete the pace lap. And the Bugattis were off – about \$10 million worth of automotive history thundering down the track.

Major carnage was averted, and 10 laps later, German Michael Gans took the checkered flag in a Type 35B – a red and white supercharged, open-wheeled two-seater worth nearly as much as the Veyron.

The third jewel in the Monterey crown, the Concorso Italiano, was founded and is chaired by Frank and Janet Mandarano of Mercer Island. It began as a Maserati awards event in 1981 and has since grown rapidly into one of the most impressive exhibitions of Italian autos in the world.

At the request of Bugatti, Cargolux airshipped six authentic, well-driven Bugattis for the weekend events, and the Concorso offered enthusiasts a chance to see these working classics up close in a relaxed atmosphere. Each offered grace, patina and the evidence of healthy use typical of the European car culture. These were exemplary workhorses, not “trailer queen” show cars.

Caroline Bugatti-Rinaldi walked among the cars bearing her family name. “Don't take my picture,” she said quietly. “You should take your pictures of these cars.” Rinaldi and her husband carry on the family tradition as operators of their own racetrack not far from Molsheim in Alsace, where Ettore Bugatti built his first automobile.

As the weekend came to a close, rumor became fact. Dr. Karl Heinz Neumann, the Veyron's designer, who was a courtly presence in Monterey, was abruptly fired. Der Spiegel reported that Neumann was sacked Sunday night. According to Bugatti News, Neumann's dismissal resulted from continuing aerodynamic problems and overheating issues. When the Veyron lost it briefly in the Andretti turn, did Neumann's job spin out as well?

Nevertheless, if the current “Year of the Bugatti” is any indication of things to come, both the Veyron and the marque itself have a long, welcoming stretch of open road ahead.

Evan McMullen is the proprietor of Cosmopolitan Motors in Seattle.

▶ Ettore Bugatti's legacy lives on in celebrations of the vintage auto class he helped create

The man behind the elegant cars

Ettore Bugatti, one of the most innovative and artistic designers in automotive history, was born in Milan, Italy, in 1881. The son of a well-respected carpenter and furniture restorer, Bugatti worked in the family business until he was 20, when he saw a motor tricycle belonging to a family friend.

Almost immediately, Bugatti plunged into the burgeoning motor car business, quickly joining the firm of Prinetti and Stucchi where he immediately established a reputation for ingenuity, excellence and artistry. In 1909, Bugatti immigrated to Molsheim, a small town in the Alsatian region of France. By the '20s and '30s, the Bugatti residence at Molsheim was functioning as a full factory, farm and international “showroom” that attracted a continuing flood of aristocrats, industrialists and royalty. Bugatti quickly developed a reputation for showmanship as well as innovation, building a hotel and Calvados distillery with which to entertain the visiting dignitaries.

Here, on his sweeping pastoral estate, Bugatti rapidly developed a succession of revolutionary, elegant designs that today stand as among the most valuable in the world. One of the first, a Type 13 racer, became a model for what was to become the modern race car. Proliferating mod-



RICK MAYNARD

An original Bugatti Type 35 Grand Prix among the vintage cars at Concorso Italiano, which is chaired by Frank and Janet Mandarano of Mercer Island.

els and types followed – touring cars, racing cars and others. The Bugatti Royale became one of the premier status symbols of the 1930s.

Bugatti's son Jean joined the family business and, by the time of his death in a racing accident at age 23, had already produced what many consider some of maker's most so-

phisticated and accomplished designs, including the Atlantic and Atalante.

Within a few short years, the “Bugatti Era” would end abruptly, the victim of international depression, family tragedy and the onset of World War II.

– Evan McMullen

Monterey Weekend auction highlights

As always, Monterey Weekend featured some of the most important auction offerings of the year. Highlights of this year's auctions:

▶ Christie's

All in all, Christie's sold 48 of 74 lots for a grand total of \$5,716,509 in sales.

Christie's Web site reports that this year's collectors “bid enthusiastically for motor cars with exceptional ownership history, as seen by the strong prices achieved.” A 1967 Ferrari 365 California Spyder led the pack at \$ 634,500 – well into Christie's estimated range of \$500,000-\$700,000. An exceptional 1931 Alfa 6C-1750 exceeded all expectations with a gavel price of \$447,500. A historically remarkable 1952 Siata 400L went for \$337,500. Of the cars that sold, many performed well on the block and several exceeded the published valuation estimates.

▶ RM Auctions

Although there is no published total for the two-day, approximately 500 lot event, RM is clearly the granddaddy of the Monterey Auction scene. Several vehicles commanded well over \$1 million, including a 1956 Ferrari 860 Monza (\$2.057 million) and 1966 Ferrari 250 GT SWB California Spyder (\$1.3 million). Several fine Bugattis crossed the block as well. Of these, a Bugatti Type 38A Grand Sport topped the list at \$132,000.

▶ Russo and Steele

Lamborghinis led the charge toward the auction's \$2,882,898 grand total, with top honors going to a 2003 Lamborghini Murciago at \$264,600. A 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle LS6 placed second at a reported \$172,800 and a well-mannered 1996 Lamborghini Diablo sold for \$135,000.

▶ Bonhams and Butterfields

Bonhams' Quail Lodge event offered a diverse and interesting array of fine automobiles and automobilia, with apparent good results for almost 300 lots. A 1932 Ford Roadster fetched the highest sum at \$192,000.

(For more auction results, visit www.christies.com, www.rmcar.com, www.butterfields.com or www.russoandsteele.com)

– Evan McMullen