

MILLE MIGLIA STORICA 2010

Report from the AMOC Press Room on Wheels

By Don Rose

Photography by Jesse Rose

For many, one of the greatest pleasures of classic car ownership is DRIVING the cars. A Sunday cruise, early in the morning on smooth country roads is always in good taste, but there are now a plethora of organized driving events and rallies as well as numerous club activities. Historic racing suits some of us, at the other end of the spectrum. And then there is the Mille Miglia.

It's glorious and it's grueling. It's competitive and it's chaotic. And it's the most prestigious classic car driving event in the World.

Much has been written of the Mille Miglia; I have little to add to its celebrated past as a road race (1927-1957), as a premier event in the early years of the World Sportscar Championship. Today's MM is a continuation of its resurrection in 1977 as the Mille Miglia 'Storica,' run sporadically since then in the form of a timed rally event. Ostensibly, this incarnation as a rally took into account the fact that all cars were then 20+ years old (now 50+, some 85 years old!) with mostly amateur drivers and a nod to safety. Just a nod, you understand...

375 cars are chosen from 800 or so entries. Therefore acceptance is highly selective, with the decision-making process sometimes inscrutable but always based on cars built through 1957, all examples of models which had run the original Mille Miglia di Velocita, with FIA or FIVA papers certifying their authenticity. This year's group included no fewer than 63 cars which themselves had period MM history, a remarkable number.





Participating cars ranged from Bugattis to Bugs (VW) but most were significant sports and GT racers. No fewer than 20 Aston Martins were represented, featuring eight prewar examples, all Le Mans models and including the 1931 Team Car LM7. Of the 12 postwar Astons, there were seven Team Cars, beginning with the spectacular 1949 DB2 (UMC 272, Waltenberg/Wagner) and the storied, extremely original 1950 DB2 Vantage (VMF 64, Rothenberger/Rothenberger), which finished 5th OA at Le Mans (1950), won the Alpine rally (1951) and was reconfigured with an updated bonnet for the 1952 Earl's Court Motor Show, retiring as the personal transport of Sir David Brown, before being sold for the first time in 1957 to a cousin of Queen Elizabeth II. VMF 64 was acquired for the first time by a member of the 'public' by its current owner Helmut Rothenberger in October, 2009. Rounding out the Team Car saloons was a DB2/4 (56 DMF, Hormann/Hormann), a Monte Carlo Rally, and Mille Miglia, participant in period.

Then there were the sports racers, all of which were Team Cars, all of which were Mille Miglia period participants, which I will list by chassis:

- DB3/1 (Prevosti/Macron), Goodwood podium finish, 1952 [Argentine history; see TVP Argentine report in 2003]
- DB3/4 (Melling/Melling), crashed at Le Mans, 1952 and at Sebring, 1953; redeemed as 16th OA finisher at Mille Miglia, 1953
- DB3/5 (Louwman/Louwman), 1st in Class, Sebring 1953
- DB3S/5 (Lombard/Maunoir), driven to many victories by Parnell, Salvadori, Moss, Collins; more

Rounding out the field were an impressive selection of five more DB2s and DB2/4s; overall a feast of eye candy for Aston fans!

There was also a bit of motorsport royalty participating in the run, with racing legend Jackie Stewart, along with his son Paul in a Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing, both decked out resplendently in Scottish tartan. F1 aces Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard were in another Gullwing, this one the W194 factory racer with MM and Carrera Panamericana history. And Jay Kay (Jamiroquai to you rock fans), a well-known connoisseur of fine sports and GT machinery, appeared with his magnificent black Frua-bodied Maserati A6G2000.

I myself applied for the first time this year with my 1957-built Aston Martin DB2/4 MkII. It was small consolation that I made the waiting list of 100 cars over the 375 initial acceptances, but failed to clear for official participation. Pressing on regardless, it is thanks to you, dear reader, and The Vantage Point that I obtained media credentials and followed along with my son Jesse (a fledgling vintage racer himself) in our UK-based DB5.

Without the pressure and distraction of timing clocks and strict adherence to the specified route, we mixed in freely with the event cars, and often circumvented the route to get ahead to watch the lovely, breath-taking procession of many of the world's best road-worthy sports cars, a photo-op par excellence!

No relaxed tour, the Mille Miglia Storica pays homage to its past as a serious endurance pursuit with all the lack of creature comfort, not to mention sleep deprivation, of its progenitor. The big news before the start this year was the weather, pre-

dicted to be continuously rainy across the entire route for the 2 1/2 day duration. And indeed in days immediately prior it rained buckets all over Italy. But we are thankful that, although the rain did arrive, it was intermittent and mixed with periods of sunshine, dry roads and everything in between (including snow). Many open sports racers had no weather protection at all, with their hardy pilots facing extremes of wet and dry, cold and hot with many 'wardrobe changes' required as a result. Cheers to them, the real heroes of today's MM in my opinion.

Many participants had extra peace of mind in the form of a chase crew with mechanics and spares. However many more travelled with little more than a tool roll and an oily rag.

Stunning scenery is promised- and delivered, as the convoy wove its way through rich landscape of central Italy, Brescia to Rome and back via circuitous routing. I looked forward to the Futa and Raticosa passes, traversing the magnificent Tuscan countryside; but by far this year the most dramatic moments were from the mountains of Terminillo on the way down to Rome. Climbing swiftly through endless hairpin curves uphill we started to see remnants of snow. Soon snow was everywhere with the roadside lined with ice 'cliffs,' some over six meters high, just as thick fog and mist set in. So thick in fact that 'cut it with a knife' was no exaggeration, and made for some exciting moments culminating with a crowded checkpoint scene at the peak, both bizarre and wondrous. Jesse described it as entering 'The Twilight Zone,' and he was not far off.

Another unique aspect of the MM is the cooperation of the 'carabinieri;' police motorcycle escorts are provided to the front runners, and all involved are typically waved through red lights and nobody need worry about speeding tickets. However, as the event is held on open public roads, the procession is interrupted all too frequently by local car clubs, tourists and motorcyclists out for a lark in the middle of the action. Careful now!

With the adrenaline on the wane at the end, one has to get it up one more time for the midnight parade of finishers back to the starting ramp in Brescia. With the klieg lamps ablaze, and charismatic multilingual commentary by Simon Kidston, the champagne flowed as the winners were feted. First place was awarded to a 1939 BMW 328 Mille Miglia Touring Coupe (as was the winner of the 1940 MM) with husband/wife pilots Cané Giuliano and Lucia Galliani. Prize for second place went to another veteran driver and multiple MM award winner Luciano Viaro, with American navigator Marc Gessler in an Alfa Romeo 6C 1500 Gran Sport. Both these cars had period MM history. Third place was claimed by Ciravolo Enzo and Maria Leitner, with their 1937 BMW 328, cementing a big podium finish for the Germans! Not at all far behind, however, was one of the prewar Le Mans Astons, a 1933 model piloted by the Italian team of Mozzi and Bianca. It is also notable that four of the top 13 finishers [on formula—Ed.] were Le Mans model Aston Martins, an impressive showing.

At the end of the day—er, weekend, rather—290 cars finished among 375 starters. Either way, I expect it's worth the trip as it is an uncompromising and unrepeatable opportunity to properly exercise such wondrous machinery. 🍷

