

PEBBLE BEACH CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE®

INSIDER

CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF THE AUTOMOBILE



A Legacy of Coachbuilding

GIOVANNI BIANCHI ANDERLONI

ENDURING MEXICO'S
DISTANCE RALLY

LA CARRERA
PANAMERICANA

MY LIFE IN CARS

LORD MONTAGU
of BEAULIEU

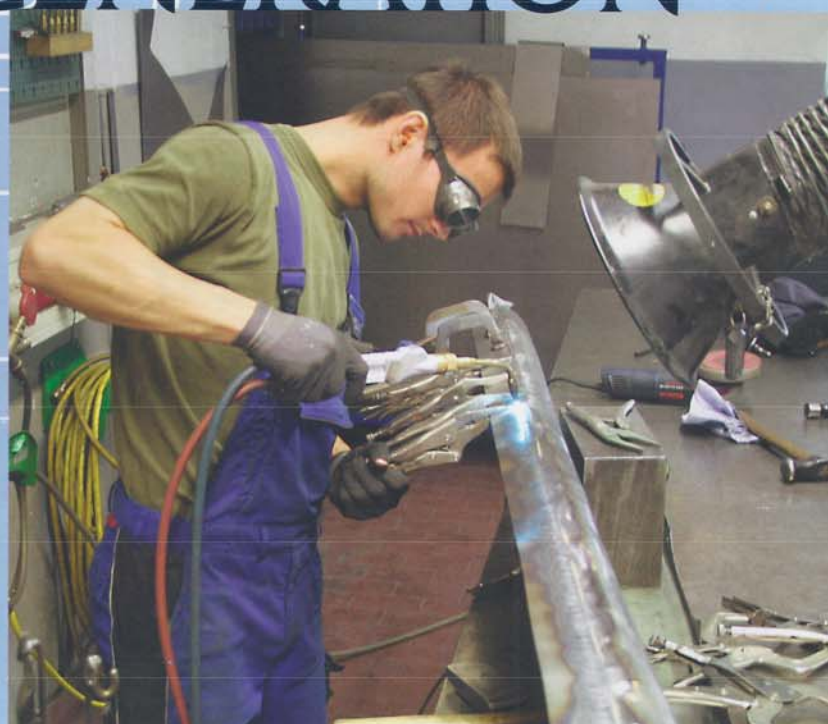


1951 Cunningham
C-3R Race Car
Frank & Eleanor
McClure Collection

FROM
CUNNINGHAM
TO COLLIER

THE EVOLUTION OF A COLLECTION

THE NEXT GENERATION



New Restorers, New Tools *and* New Techniques

BY KANDACE HAWKINSON

The cars we love are often tied in our mind to a particular historic time and place—and even, perhaps, a person. We think of them as a gift from past to present, a gift we hope to pass on. In fact, the lives of cars are ongoing; they run in tandem with ours for a time and may continue long after we are gone.

A new generation is emerging to care for these cars in the coming decades—and they are eager to put to use new scientific knowledge, new tools and new techniques.



René Große

MESHING OLD AND NEW, EAST AND WEST

René Große has a history that works to his advantage in the world of automotive restoration. He was born and raised in Brandenburg, when it was a part of the German Democratic Republic.

There, he notes, all trades related to the automobile “were highly appreciated” as new cars, or spare parts for older automobiles, were in very short supply: “The repair shops had queue times of about four months just to get a simple regular inspection of your car.”

He started to restore vehicles in his early youth, and against the advice of nearly everyone he knew, he opted not to go to college but to



A restorer at Autoservice René Große planishes a large panel using a pneumatic hammer; the wooden frame of a Hispano-Suiza is given a partial restoration; this model for a Bugatti fender was made by laser-scanning an intact fender, flipping the image, and using a water-jet cutter.

vocational training to become a mechanic. He was “particularly taken with the craft of shaping panels,” so he specialized in coachbuilding. But, of course, he did a bit of everything.

Over time, he learned skills that had not been taught in the West in decades—skills like the best techniques to use when painting a car with one-pack coatings. He also learned to use his ingenuity to find a solution when none was evident.

“On many occasions, we had to make our own spare parts, which developed our ad-lib talents, our creativity, our inventiveness. Saying ‘It just won’t work’ was not an option.”

In 1989, with his own options for advancement being limited, René fled to the Federal Republic of Germany via the German embassy in Prague. And there, he found he had to learn his craft anew; although his knowledge and skills were respected, he didn’t begin to know how to use the tools and techniques in a modern repair shop. To say he gained a great appreciation for these new things and new possibilities they offered would be an understatement.

In 1996, after the Wall between East and West Germany was torn down, René returned to his hometown where he worked for years as the director of a classic car company. And then in 2003, he realized a dream; he founded his own firm, blending East and West, old and new.

His work completely restoring the long-lost BMW 328 Mille Miglia Touring Coupé a couple years later, put his firm on the map, bringing many other projects his way.

Today, René talks with excitement about the many ways automobiles are being preserved and restored with ever-increasing respect and sensitivity, using every available tool and technique. He talks about

old techniques, like gas fusion welding, tin coating, and hand panel beating. And he talks about laser measuring and scanning, computer cutting and printing.

Photos of his work show, for example, how the damaged left fender of a Bugatti emerges from the mélange of all these things: the right fender of the car is scanned with a laser, the details are reversed, a water-jet cutter creates a new vertical wood framework, and then a new fender is hand crafted over that model.

What else is possible now? What will be possible in the near future? All things. Just ask.