

BY LAURA KUKUK · PHOTOGRAPHS: BMW CLASSIC (13), PETER SINGHOF (1)

# ELEGANCE AND EXPERTISE

## JUDGING AT THE CONCORSO VILLA D'ESTE 2021

At just 28 years of age, automotive engineer Laura Kukuk has established herself as one of the leading experts in the field of appraising classic, racing and sports cars. Laura and her father Klaus Kukuk travel the world conducting forensic inspections of rare and sought-after cars, researching their origins, condition and originality down to the smallest details. In her AUTOMOBILSPORT column, she provides exclusive insights and exciting stories from the vehicle appraisal world – this time around, she takes us with her working rather differently and yet on some of the most amazing cars around the globe. Together we dive into the prestigious Concorso D'Eleganza Villa d'Este and a fascinating weekend filled with expertise and enthusiasm at Lago di Como.



**ABOVE** Technical discussions and lively exchanges among jurors lead to the best decisions. Pictured here are Ian Cameron, Laura Kukuk and Adolfo Orsi (left to right) in conversation.

**TOP RIGHT** Unique flair: this beauty pageant for cars has been taking place on the shores of Lake Como since 1929.

**BOTTOM RIGHT** The 1968 Howmet TX's gas turbine caused a ruckus when it was fired up – the noise and heat were remarkable.

Form follows function – a famous mission statement we all know and appreciate. But it's the elegant shapes of the 1920s and '30s, those curved lines, chrome trim and foray into aerodynamics, that we still cherish to this day. The bodywork, the craftsmanship and the evolution of the design has been celebrated since its heyday. The original concours d'élégance for cars, which began in the early 20th century, were beauty contests, an opportunity for the coach-builders of the time to showcase the most modern, innovative and beautiful creations, much like when prototypes are unveiled at motor shows these days.

The Grand Hotel Villa d'Este still hosts one of the most famous, prestigious concours events in the world of historic cars. The Villa, on the shores of Lake Como in Italy, has hosted the Concorso d'Eleganza since 1929. In 1949 an Alfa Romeo 6C 2500, styled by coach-builder Touring, won the Coppo d'Oro prize. To date it is the only car that carries the name Villa d'Este in its designation. The classic form of the event ended in 1952. In the mid-1980s it was revived, and today it is run by German manufacturer BMW.

After a two-year break and given the challenges of the pandemic, the selection committee once again did a wonderful job of securing a number of exceptional cars from all eras and around the globe. In total, nearly 50 classics were eligible for the 2021 Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este. The spectrum ranged from rarities from the 1920s, a time when aesthetics started influencing car design in addition to functional considerations, to the spectacularly designed hypercars from the 1990s.







As part of the jury, we spend months before the event meticulously researching each car and documenting our findings. Obviously, we focus on the groups or cars assigned to us and exchange information among our jury group. That exchange of our knowledge, some of it privately archived information, some of it from our excellent network, enables us to study the cars in detail so that we are as prepared as we possibly could be for the presentation.

During the evaluation phase on the lawn, we only have 15 minutes to watch the owner's presentation, conduct the appraisal and distribute the points. Every little detail counts, because the details decide who wins each class. It's critical to clarify all unanswered questions, to fill in any blanks in the car's history and to evaluate the condition of the car.

In the original concours d'élégance in the 1920s, originality and authenticity didn't play a big role – after all, the cars were brand-new prototypes and production cars at the time, so authenticity was guaranteed. In order to honour the original events, it's necessary to highlight the cars that come closest to the condition they were delivered in. The more historic the individual components with continued function, the more valuable the preservation of cultural assets and history. Whether we're a juror, presenter, organiser, car owner or spectator, we're all enthusiasts and we are united by our passion for classic cars.

Being a juror at a major international concours, like the Concorso d'Eleganza, requires detailed knowledge of the brand and individual models as well as a keen eye for detail and accuracy. It's also important to know the historical context of the car so it can be compared to others of the era. These days the judging criteria also include the current condition and the authenticity of the components.

Events like this thrive on emotion, but it's important to keep them in check when evaluating a car so that objectivity is ensured. What's great is that monetary value is not considered as a factor. A Mercedes-Benz Gullwing can score maximum points, but so can a Fiat 500. Cars worth millions of euros compete against cars worth a few thousand – it's very democratic. So, if you really want to find the best car, you have to focus on the smallest of details.

The vehicles are divided into classes so that the evaluation can take place within a category. Each class is assigned a group of judges, led by one person. The team of judges then evaluates the cars in specific areas – historical accuracy (in relation to the original manufacturer or builder's specification, with supporting documentation if necessary), condition (quality of components or how the car has been preserved/restored), and accuracy and consistency of the workmanship. To be considered for 'Best of Show', the entry has to have won its class.



**TOP LEFT** Racing legends: Alpine M64, Ferrari 250 GT TdF and an Osca MT4 Siluro.

**TOP RIGHT** The OSCA MT4 Siluro at this year's Concorso is the second produced. Apart from a number of F2 races from 1950 onwards it lined up at the start of the Mille Miglia 1949.

**BOTTOM** The chase: a Ferrari 250 GTO hunts down a tiny Fiat 508 CS 'Ballila Aerodinamica' during the prelude tour.





**ABOVE** Judges at the 2021 Conours: Mariella Mengozzi, Laura Kukuk, Yasmin Le Bon and Quirina Louwman (left to right).

**TOP RIGHT** One of the rare Silver Arrows of the modern era: a Mercedes-Benz CLK-GTR.

**BOTTOM RIGHT** A rare gem: the Siata 208 CS during judging.

For me, one of the most emotional and memorable moments of the weekend was the presentation of the Fiat 508 CS 'Ballila Aerodinamica' (1935). It was the first popular car from the Fiat brand. Following the aerodynamic fashion of the time, the 508 CS looked like a shrunk-down Bugatti Atlantic. Standing there among its bigger rivals, the little Italian with its 995 cc four-cylinder engine drew a lot of attention. Part of that was down to the presentation from the Dutch owner and restorer, which was vividly and elaborately documented on wooden panels. The restoration was carried out in collaboration with a group of young people with disabilities, who featured in the photos. 'You wouldn't believe how much joy preparing and polishing the chrome and trim brought to one boy who suffers from autism,' said the owner. 'It was a pleasure in so many ways to restore this car.'







The 1968 Howmet TX race car, equipped with a jet engine, also caused a stir. It's a prototype and was the first and last jet-powered car to win a race. Since I'm a big Alpine fan, the Le Mans history of the M64 was also one of the highlights for me. The car was designed by Colin Chapman and Jean R  del  . In 1963 it took a class win in the 1,000-kilometre race at the N  rburgring.

We take a lot of these unique moments and memories home with us, and thinking back to the beautiful cars and the conversations with fellow enthusiasts always brings a smile to my face.

Every year there is some exciting and intense discussion around the decision for 'Best of Show'. During this exchange we look at all the class winners, share insights and weigh up the arguments for and against each car.

**ABOVE** Fireworks for the overall winner, the Ferrari 250 GT TdF. It was the seventh time in a row that an Italian car won the event.

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**TOP** Legend on four wheels: a stunning Ferrari 250 GTO in its Targa Florio dress was not part of the competition as it was brought to Villa d'Este by presenter Simon Kidston.

**MIDDLE LEFT** Beaming faces in the Fiat 508 CS 'Ballila Aerodinamica' after winning the award for the best restoration.

**MIDDLE RIGHT** Parade in the Lancia Dilmabda Serie 1: the team around car owner Filippo Sole (left), including Arturo Merzario (middle), celebrates the victory in the Coppa d'Oro.

**BOTTOM** Minimalist: the Alpine M64 was brought to Lake Como from the USA by Mitch McCullough.

At the end of this intense professional exchange, we once again came to a decision that everyone agreed with. The winning car was Brian Ross' 1956 Ferrari 250 GT Tour de France. The TdF is a real racing car that at the same time is equipped with an elegant, aerodynamic body which became a design icon of the 1950s. These days one thinks of cycling when the Tour de France is mentioned, but in post-war Europe the 'Tour de France automobile', held on public roads, was one of the biggest and most popular endurance races for sports and racing cars. When a lightweight Ferrari 250 coup   won the race in 1956, the series of Pininfarina-designed GT cars were naturally christened the Tour de France.

It's a great honour to be part of such a highly professional jury. Each member has a wealth of professional expertise, which varies with their respective fields and backgrounds, so our jury meetings are full of exciting discussions. The exchange of expertise and emotional experience between collectors and experts is the reason that we love events like the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este – and why we're already looking forward to our next visit to Lake Como.   

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