

The Mille Miglia



*“We came, we saw...
...we drooled!”*

The Mille Miglia survives in the popular imagination of younger car enthusiasts today, thanks to the revived event of that name that has been held since 1977, catering for either cars that were entered in the original Mille Miglia road race series, or cars of the same model and manufactured no later than 1957. The name meaning ‘1000 miles’ was given to an annual road race between Brescia in northern Italy and Rome held from 1927 until 1940, then resumed from 1947 to 1957 when two fatal accidents led to the series being discontinued.

Today the event is an extended regularity test over a figure-of-eight shaped course, taking in many scenic

stretches of road between the two cities. Despite a hefty entry fee of around €6500 per car, the event is very oversubscribed.

It was into this rarefied atmosphere that a group of us entered when we flew to Bergamo airport on Wednesday evening May 11th, as part of the 2011 RIAC Archive Mille Miglia Trip. After spending an agreeable morning at the Mille Miglia Museum, our coach deposited us right at the centre of things in Brescia where we were at liberty to wander the streets and squares of this ancient city to admire the splendid architecture and, if we noticed them, the 378 cars listed to participate.

The often narrow streets were lined with rows of the parked cars,

fitted with their rally numbers, their owners doing some last minute polishing and fussing. At times the crowds were such that, trying to photograph individual cars was impossible. As is the tradition in Brescia, there were no barriers separating the admiring crowds from the cars and you could examine the many preserved old works cars up close. It was like being let in to the paddock before some of the great motor races of the last century.

There were Bugatti Type 35 and 37 models aplenty, a few vintage Bentley 4½ litres and predictably Fiat was well represented from the Balilla 508 models of the 30’s to the little Topolino and 1100 saloons of the 40’s and 50’s, not to mention several of



1000 MIGLIA

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the exotic 8V models of the early 50's, often with Zagato bodywork.

There were no less than 23 Ferraris, so if you wanted to study the rare early models this was your chance. Lancias were much in evidence too, with Lambdas, several Aprilias and some 14 Aurelias present. No homage to the original race series could be without at least one OM, as this long defunct Italian manufacturer took first, second and third place in the very first race in 1927. This year six OM 665 models were entered. Plentiful too were Alfa Romeos, almost thirty, from the lithe 6C1500 and 1750 models of the 20's and the 2300 range from the 30's to a sprinkling of the 1900 Ti cars of the early 50's.

The German marques were present too as befits the success they had in the original Mille Miglia series. Some 16 BMW 328's could be counted. Two 1929 Mercedes SSK models appeared as well as two examples of the 710 SS, plus a veritable fleet of nineteen Gullwing 300 models, a 300SL roadster and five Ponton saloons. I saw a few VW Beetles and DKW's from the early 50's. For Porsche enthusiasts there was much to admire with thirty-one examples, mainly early 356 models but seven of the little 550's were listed as runners too.

Jaguar was the most prevalent British marque with 22 cars, including two Mk. VII saloons, three C-types, a D-type and seemingly endless lines of XK120 and 140 models including the famous NUB 120. Aston Martin's presence comprised some 20 cars, with eight of the 1933 Le Mans

models, an Ulster, along with several of the early DB series. There was a 1934 MG C-type Midget, also a K3 and a 1935 PB and four MGA's. Three AC Aces as well as an Ace-Bristol appeared.

Just under a quarter of the cars were pre-war.

In some of the squares, motor manufacturers had stands erected to display their current models, so it was possible to look at the latest Bentleys, VW and Audi models as well as the Bugatti Veyron. BMW of course had their stand too. Mercedes was more understated with just a replica of their 1886 three-wheeler and a prototype saloon that resembled the latest CLS.

In the late afternoon the cars were released in batches to go for a drive around the outskirts of Brescia. After about two hours the cars began to

arrive back in the city and then they set out from the Piazzale Arnaldo on the regularity tests driving to Rome and back.

All this walking about and then standing for hours at the Piazzale Arnaldo, watching the cars set off made for a long, but enjoyable day in splendid sunshine.

On Friday morning we travelled to the ancient moated city of Mantua where we visited the Tazio Nuvolari Museum. This proved to be more interesting than many of us imagined, with quite a bit of detail including pictures and memorabilia relating to Nuvolari's exploits when racing in Northern Ireland in the 30's.

Finally, thanks must go to Bob Montgomery for doing the research, devising and leading this truly memorable tour.

