

11TH ANNUAL KEELS & WHEELS CONCOURS

Round Doors and Mahogany Hulls

By **Dennis Adler**

Photographs by the author and **Jeff Broadus**



There are times when you can arrive at only one conclusion, when you are forced to accept that automobile stylists in the 1930s knew they were creating more than a piece of sheet metal pounded into a car body. That they had to step back from a rendering, or a styling buck, or from the finished car, and know they had created something timeless. Or did they? The late Tom Hibbard, partner with Dutch Darrin in their daunting 1920's adventures as American stylists in Paris, once said, "We never expected the cars we designed to last more than 10 years." A decade for a Hibbard et Darrin body, how about seven or eight, and not too long before a century? Tom would be even more amazed than he was 25 years ago when he made that remark.

Above left: Mahogany and water blends well as the still marina current left a mirror smooth gloss. Spectators could indulge their interests in both fine sports cars and sporting boats, as the Ferrari class and a portion of the Chris Crafts being judged shared common ground.

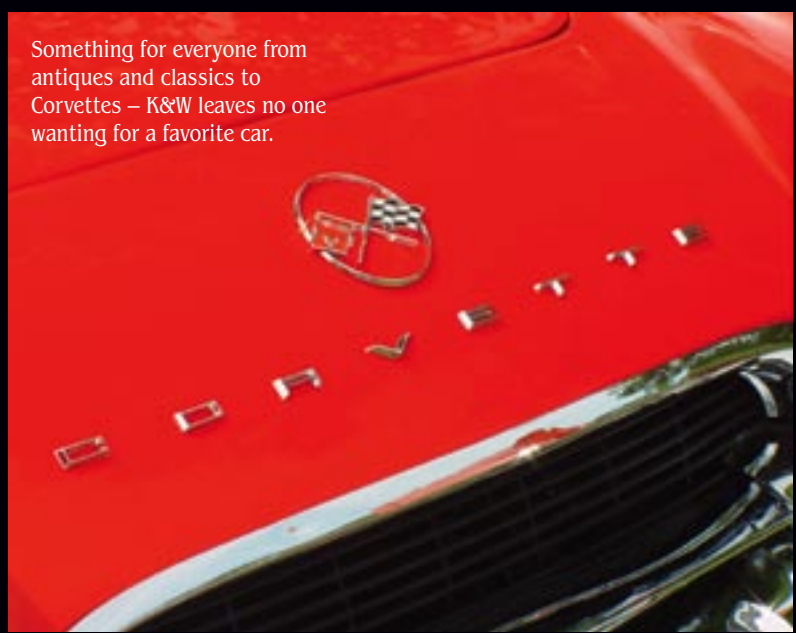


John Sinders of Houston delighted early Ferrari aficionados with this striking 1951 Ferrari 212 Export (*competizione*) version of the elegant Vignale body style.

Below & below left: John Kruse and Rod Egan's Worldwide Group auction added just enough diversion and excitement to the weekend event with 117 cars and wooden boats auctioned off on Saturday.



Something for everyone from antiques and classics to Corvettes – K&W leaves no one wanting for a favorite car.



The car that gathers the most people around it usually wins People's Choice. In this case the Petersen Museum's exotic Round Door Rolls was the judge's choice.



Below: Word's can fail when trying to describe the coachwork built by Carrossier Jonckheere in 1934 to re-body this 1925 Rolls-Royce Phantom I. The sweeping bodylines and dorsal fin certainly outdo any other period designer's attempts to build an aerodynamic coupe outside of Jean Bugatti and his Atlantic. The round doors have semi-circular windows that wind open from the center down. The interior is lavish but simple in its layout. The gearbox is to the driver's right.



Beauty wins over value at times and this was one of those times. The most perfect 1933 Pierce-Arrow Model 836 Club Sedan anyone had ever seen simply overruled the Packard and Duesenberg models in contention for Best of Show American. Owner Ron Blissit's grandfather (in photo) was a Pierce-Arrow dealer.



Something you won't see everyday at a Concours, or anywhere for that matter, a Hispano-Suiza shooting brake (station wagon to us colonists). The 1931 model made the trip all the way to Houston from Peter Mullin's superb French car collection in Los Angeles. No surprise to anyone, the car took home the top award in the Woodie Class at K&W.



When the Petersen Automotive Museum's 1925 Rolls-Royce Phantom I Jonckheere Aerodynamic Coupé (actually re-bodied in 1934 by the famous Belgian coachbuilder), rolled onto the field at the Lakewood Yacht Club in Seabrook, Texas, the judges (yours truly included) knew that unless someone showed up soon with a Bugatti Atlantic, the selections for Best of Show had just been narrowed dramatically. This was a car (car is inadequate, perhaps work of art) that just took all of your conceptions about what a motorcar should be and tossed them out the window, and a round window at that! The car is known as the "Round Door Rolls" an alias it has earned over the years for its distinctive spherical doors and split semi-circular windows.

Not exactly a stranger to automotive historians, the car has been seen in photos dating back to the 1940s, when it was painted gold (six pounds of gold powder with 17 coats of clear lacquer), and again a little over a decade ago when it had been repainted an unflattering off white. Now with its glossy black suit of paint the lines penned by Jonckheere over 70 years ago truly come to life, highlighting every haunting curve of the body. Long story short, no one showed up with an Atlantic, or anything European that could rival the Round Door Rolls, that drove off with the Best of Show award on Sunday. But, not to worry, Keels & Wheels is a multi-award show and the Europeans can only be judged against each other, leaving an equally important Best of Show American award to be decided.

This award was not a lock for any one car because the selection of American Classics at Keels & Wheels was worthy of any Concours in the country. There were handsome Packards, a brace of Duesenbergs (any of which, on any given day, could have taken top honors), but there in the shade of a towering old tree on the Yacht Club's parkway grounds sat the most perfect Pierce-Arrow sedan anyone had ever seen. How often does a sedan bump off town cars, cabriolets, and convertible coupes to take Best of Show? You won't have to use too many fingers to answer that one, but you can add Ron Blissit's 1933 Model 836 Club Sedan to the tally. The striking

two-tone Pierce-Arrow simply overwhelmed the loftier marques with its coachwork lines, interior styling, and flawless restoration. There may have been better cars in its class, in terms of value, but none better.

The two-day show (Saturday for display and judging, Sunday for display and awards presentation) is nicely wrapped around the Lakewood Yacht Club's picturesque marina, which is host to the first half of this Concours'

appellative, the keels. Here you find docks lined with 1920's and 1930's-era wooden boats and whether Chris Craft, Riva, or Hacker Craft, their mahogany hulls glisten in the water. The harmony shared by classic cars and wooden boats is as old as the automobile itself, and to see the great cars and boats of a bygone era together at one show is worth far more than the price of admission.

Keels & Wheels has set its own benchmark, and in partner with the

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Above: A contender for Best of Show European was this sporty 1938 Talbot-Lago T23 Teardrop Coupe from the John O'Quinn collection in Houston.

Left: Another serious contender for Best of Show American was this regal 1920 Model J Duesenberg Murphy Clear Vision Sedan from the O'Quinn Classy Classic Cars collection in Houston, that won Best in Class American Pre-War Closed.

Worldwide Group auction company, has managed to build an event that, though prone to attract mainly locals, is fast becoming national in its scope and reputation. With Lakewood Yacht Club as its home, and more than its fair share of top ranked

car collectors and collections within less than a days drive, it is well worth making the trek to Seabrook in May. And, as the Petersen Museum has learned two years in a row, it can be worth making the trip from as far away as Los Angeles. 

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