



AT THE INTERSECTION OF FASHION AND FUNCTIONALITY ...

Feeling a bit ambivalent about cars? Richard Webb attended the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este to revive the passion.

Humans tend to align themselves with polarised positions: we're either evening or morning persons; we're either rugby or football fans. Many of us are like this about cars – we are either entranced by them or see them as white goods – mere sources of mobility.

Even if you just have a passing interest in cars, I challenge you not be moved by the incredibly beautiful pieces of machinery displayed around the gardens of the best hotel on the shores of the most beautiful lake in Italy.

Often spoken in reverent tones along with the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este event is probably the most coveted display of automotive luxury and heritage in the world.

Automotive beauty pageants have been popular since the 1920s as the great and beautiful gather with proud owners and fans to celebrate motorised transport filled to the brim with drama, passion and history.

'Hollywood on the Lake' was the theme for this year's Concorso, which took place in the beguiling manicured gardens of the Villa d'Este luxury hotel at Lake Como, Northern Italy. In an enduring partnership with BMW Group Classic, the world's most extraordinary historic cars and motorcycles were assembled once again for an unmatched automotive beauty contest covering all cinematographic eras – from silent movies to the era of modern blockbusters.

This year 56 cars and 34 bikes were entered - from Bentley, Ferrari and Porsche, to historic marques from the past like the exotic Isotta Fraschini and newcomers like Genesis. Prizes were based on provenance, rarity, authenticity... and of course beauty. >



A low and powerful interplay of a long bonnet and flowing roofline, with a striking upward sweep of the trailing edge. A large kidney grille, slim twin headlights and large air intakes pick up the classic BMW template with a fresh interpretation.

The interior focuses on the essential - the task of driving. Once behind the wheel, the driver is wrapped in the tightly enclosed ambience typical of sports cars. The surfaces and lines all gravitate forwards and underscore the dynamic driving experience. The grouping of functions into control clusters, e.g. in the centre stack, the centre console and the doors, gives the interior a clear graphic structure.



Although this is predominantly a classic event, BMW normally launches a concept car and concept bike at Villa d'Este, given BMW Group organises the event. Along with the historic and iconic 507, 3.0 CSL and the Roadster M1 present, I was also able to get a glimpse past the history and into the heart of the future.

M8 Gran Coupe concept

The main star of the show was the M8 Gran Coupe concept. It at first appears similar in form to the current generation 6 Series Gran Coupe, but it also displays new form-building techniques and design ideas. The Concept 8 Series, presented in its distinctive Salève Vert shade, reveals much of what is to come. Immediately recognisable as a BMW, this beautiful four-door coupe offers a look ahead to the actual car that goes on sale next year. Punctuated by a long bonnet, powerful haunches, sleek roofline and elevated boot spoiler we can expect a spectacular 0 to 100km/h time of around 3 seconds.

This, the revived 8 Series, will consist of a traditional coupe, a four-door sedan and convertible variants. I understand the production M8 Gran Coupe will take the 4.4-litre biturbo V8 engine which is good for about 447 kilowatts. It will boast an eight-speed automatic gearbox and an xDrive AWD system like the one in the current M5 sedan.

The winds of change

Fuelled by the pursuit of better solutions to technical challenges, design innovations may seem to have played a less significant role on motorcycles than they have on cars.

But Edgar Heinrich, design director of BMW Motorrad, is shaking this view up. I spoke to him at Lake Como where he told me that the Concept 9Cento bike was based on an existing chassis and engine. 'The design process was completed in just four months. It acknowledges the need for touring bike practicality but also ups the desirability factor of a touring bike.' Touring bikes are normally known more for their long-distance practicality rather than their flamboyant style, but the 9Cento blends the 'wow' factor with everyday practicality.

The impact of fashion at the Concorso is obvious – not just with the achingly beautiful displays. Elegantly dressed crowds sip champagne in the sunshine as the cars are slowly paraded past, and the frocks, hats and high-heel shoes are worn not to complement the cars, but to compete head-on with them. The Concorso d'Eleganza celebrates beauty in both, the man-made and natural kind, and it could make a car lover out of anyone.



A smart all-rounder for the road, the BMW Motorrad Concept 9cento (pronounced 'nove cento') combines emotion and performance with an adventurous spirit. Edgar Heinrich, Head of Design BMW Motorrad reckons he has created a bike that "combines the appropriate power with reliable sports touring properties."

It's an interpretation of a modern all-rounder for the new mid-range segment. "Functional properties such as touring capability, storage space and wind/weather protection are relevant to most motorcyclists but they're rarely included in the design of a concept vehicle," explains Heinrich.