



THIS WELL-PRESERVED 1938 BUGATTI TYPE 57C ATALANTE APPEARED AT PEBBLE BEACH IN 2007. JOHN W. STRAUS, GRANDSON OF THE FOUNDER OF MACY'S DEPARTMENT STORE, PARKED THIS BUGATTI IN A NEW YORK BARN IN 1962, AND THERE IT STAYED UNTIL IT WAS PURCHASED BY DENNIS NICOTRA IN 2006.

Preservation

By Leigh and Leslie Keno

Antiques and vintage cars have been our main passions our whole lives.

In the 1960s and '70s, when we were growing up, our parents ran an antiques shop, and our father collected and restored vintage cars—mostly American and British models. So, just as we learned to love tables with old painted surfaces and burlwood bowls with ancient wear patterns, we were increasingly fascinated by old cars with all of their idiosyncrasies.

Today antiques, art, and cars are our life. And our mission in life, it seems, is preservation.

As appraisers on the PBS series *Antiques Roadshow* we often tell owners of pieces with original surfaces to leave them alone. Sadly, in some instances, we have had to tell owners that their restoration efforts have greatly decreased the value of a piece: “The \$50,000 highboy that you own would have been worth \$150,000 if you hadn't had it refinished.”

In the world of antique furniture and art, value is directly proportionate to original condition. Finish, high quality, and exquisite detail are characteristics collectors seek in a 1760s

Philadelphia Queen Anne walnut armchair as well as in a 1930s Bugatti Touring car. But once parts are replaced or an item is reupholstered or refinished, the essence and character of the object is diminished.

To completely restore a piece of furniture or a car—essentially making it look like new—takes away all of the evidence of its history of use. The wear marks, stains, and dings on the legs and arms of that armchair, earned over 250 years of human contact, have a special beauty. Similarly, the chipped paint on the nose of a 917 Porsche—paint chipped by pebbles as the car flew down the Mulhannet straight—adds to its historical significance.

In some cases, restoration calls the authenticity of an object into question or makes authentication difficult or even impossible. Leigh learned this lesson the hard way. He found and purchased the equivalent of a “barnfind” in the clock world—a rare banjo clock made by the great clock maker Aaron Willard. It was untouched and original in all respects, but the works were dirty and were not functioning. Clocks, like cars, have working parts that must be maintained. So Leigh sent the clock to a man recommended to him as a reputable clock maker to do just what was needed to get its movement in proper working order before selling it to a private collector.



THE 1980 FERRARI 512 BB LM (CHASSIS 29511) OWNED BY THE KENO BROTHERS CAN TAKE TO THE TRACK WITHOUT FEAR OF DAMAGING ITS ORIGINAL BODY PANELS, MOST OF WHICH ARE PRESERVED IN STORAGE. THIS IS THE ONLY FERRARI 512 BB LM TO HAVE RACED AND FINISHED AT THE 24 HOURS OF DAYTONA. IT FINISHED 16TH OVERALL.

Unbeknownst to Leigh, the clock maker meticulously polished and buffed every part, removing every hint of dirt, abrasion and age—even recutting some worn clock teeth. To make matters worse, this restorer engraved his name and date on the clock’s back plate! A decade later, when that private collection went to auction, Leigh received a phone call from Christie’s asking why there were new works in what was supposed to be an original clock. Leigh assured Christie’s that the works were original to the clock when he sold it, but there was no hint of age to back him up at that point. Once the evidence of the history of use of an object is lost, it can never be replaced, and the object will never be the same.

Of course, automobiles face a number of obstacles that make their preservation difficult. Unlike art and furniture and even those antiques with the most intricate moving parts, a car’s ongoing use causes it to be exposed to the elements. Water is probably enemy number one, both inside and outside of a car; moisture leads to mold and rust and can slowly cause virtually everything on a car to deteriorate. It also must be noted that even with the most careful of drivers at the wheel, cars do get damaged in accidents.

The first step in preserving any automobile involves determining exactly what you have. And regrettably, the vast majority of older cars are unoriginal in some respect; most have been repaired or restored in some way. Some have been painted and repainted, some have new parts, and some have been partially or wholly reconfigured or rebodied. Some of these changes will have been made in the period, some to repair damage from an accident, and some simply to update or



refresh a car. You need to determine what is truly original to your car. Only then can you determine how best to preserve or restore it.

The second step in preserving a car involves determining what you hope to do with it. Do you simply want to exhibit it, or do you intend to use it as a car, driving it on tours and rallies, competing in concours d’*elegance*, or perhaps even racing it? Each of these activities might lead you to make different decisions and take different actions to preserve—or at least conserve—an original automobile.

There is a very delicate balance to be maintained when you want to not only preserve but race an original car! The car must be mechanically safe for the driver, yet you don’t want to compromise the car’s authenticity. We race a 1980 Ferrari 512 BB LM and we have had to make some tough decisions in this regard. Ultimately we have chosen to preserve all of the car’s external surfaces, keeping most of the original body panels (complete with sponsor stickers) in storage, while maintaining the car’s mechanicals in order to race it. Butch Dennison of Dennison International (who restored Jon and Mary Shirley’s beautiful Alfa Romeo, which was named Best of Show at Pebble Beach this past year) takes care of our car, and he grapples with these issues every day. In order to preserve the irreplaceable original engines of another client’s 1962 Ferrari GTO and Maserati 300S, Butch is making replica engines so the cars can still be raced while their original engines remain safe in the shop. There is definitely a place for the use of replica parts in helping to preserve old cars, particularly those that are being vintage raced, but it is



PEBBLE BEACH PRESERVATION CLASS JUDGES MILES MORRIS, LEIGH KENO AND PETER HAGEMAN EXAMINE THE 1911 COLE SERIES III MODEL L OF JOHN MOZART IN 2006.

important to keep careful records, including photographic evidence, of such replicas, and to keep all original parts with a car—even those that are damaged beyond possible future use.

We recommend that owners maintain an archive of not only old parts, but also documents and other ephemera—manuals, badges, trophies, race programs, tool kits, period photographs, accessories, and original parts—relating to a car. Such an archive can add both considerable historical interest and value.

At this point, a finite number of vintage cars remain in excellent to pristine original condition, yet these cars are in constant danger of being restored and their authenticity compromised forever. From the very start of the auto industry, car buyers desired the latest and the greatest. Eventually collectors learned to appreciate and desire older cars—but they generally still wanted them to look like new. Even today many car collectors continue to feel that every old car should be restored to look like it did when it first left the factory. Accordingly, many fine examples of original cars are restored unnecessarily.

Fortunately, the vintage car market is finally moving in the same direction as the market for antiques and fine art, where a premium is placed on authenticity. As has been often said, “a car can be restored many times, but it can only be original once.”

The Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance has played a big role in pushing for this change. The FIVA Trophy was first awarded to the best preservation car on the field at Pebble Beach in 1999. The 2001 Concours included the first class devoted

solely to prewar preservation cars. And in 2007 a postwar preservation class was added. These preservation classes were created not only to showcase wonderful original automobiles, but to spur collectors to preserve rather than restore

their cars. As car and preservation buffs, we are honored to be among the judges for these important classes.

Of course, the only way that some collectors are going to get the message is when they realize that the barnfind vintage touring car they purchased at auction for \$2 million and spent \$400,000 to restore to like-new condition then sells at auction for just \$1.5 million. Money talks. And cars in original condition, especially rare cars, are now regularly bringing more than comparable cars that have been restored. In most cases, the rarer the car, the bigger the gap between the value of an original versus a restored example.

In August 2008, in the midst of Pebble Beach Auto Week, an elegant 1939 Talbot-Lago T150C SS sold at Bonhams & Butterfields for over \$4.8 million. Rarity and racy lines certainly played a factor in the price; the automobile is one of just two such cars to exist from Marcel Pourtout’s shop—and this car is the only one that remains in completely original condition. The chrome, the paint, and the interior are all original, and the provenance is impeccable. We viewed the car at the auction preview and sat carefully in it, and it had a special aura; it was as if we were transported back in time. If the buyer decides to completely restore rather than preserve the car, then the soul of this Talbot-Lago—and, we believe, half its value—will be gone.

We still have some work to do in changing at least one writer’s attitude towards preservation: In covering the sale of this car, *Los Angeles Times* writer Dan Neil first praised the car’s originality, then said, “One reason the Talbot is such a find is that it can be a double winner at Pebble Beach—first in the unrestored original class and then, with a few thousand hours of meticulous restoration, as a contender for the Concours ‘Best in Show’ title.” Wow!

We certainly hope not.

We trust that some day, quite soon, the Pebble Beach Concours will award that title directly to a preservation car.