

Built by Hand - A Celebration Craft of Building Then



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With a theme of "Built by Hand," the 2016 Art Center Car Classic sought to feature the unique and specially crafted - the vision of the designer, the skill of the builder, and the historical significance of the limited (or only) example produced.

Stewart Reed, chair of the Transportation Design Department, curates the invited cars each year to support the theme. He likely had more candidates than space would permit for the October 23rd event.

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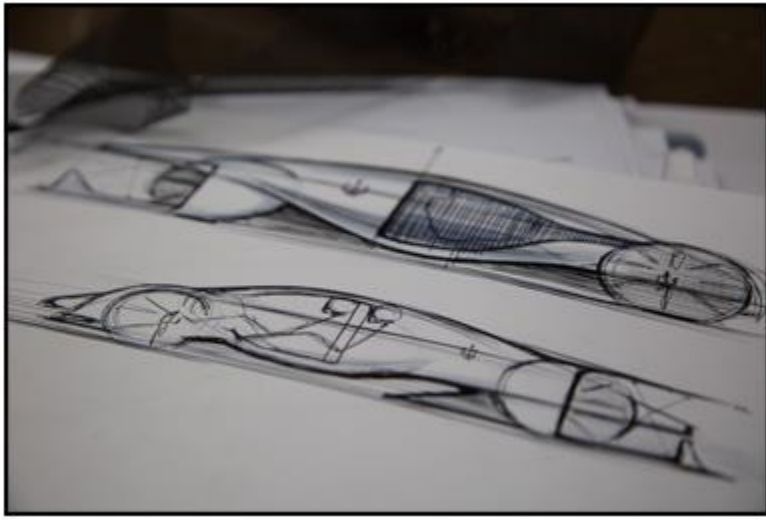


The grounds of the Art Center played host to everything from early Porsches and Alfa Romeos to one-off designs from Voisin to production supercars from Italy to current concept cars from Lexus and Acura to a home-built (but very high quality) replica of a 1959 Ferrari Testa Rossa in bare aluminum. Mattel even brought a full-scale version of a Star Wars Hot Wheels car.

As with every Car Classic at Art Center, the event really has three parts. First (and most obvious) are the cars on display outside. Second is the venue itself – walking through the halls and

seeing student work that is both finished and in-process and many of the tools of the trade. Third is the opportunity to hear from auto designers (many of whom are Art Center alumni).

In Reed's introductory remarks, he was careful to acknowledge that the Art Center retains and emphasizes the importance of skills of drawing and sculpting – even in an age of increasing use of technology and computers. A walk through the hallways and classrooms at Art Center confirms Reed's comments.



Drawings done by hand lay alongside clay models that are being massaged, adding and removing material to achieve just the right lines and curves. Across the hallway from the graduate design studio, a three-axis drilling machine carved through a block of high density foam to release a new shape from within.

In a rare treat, dozens of scale models were on display from the Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild – a design competition for teenagers in operation from 1930 to 1968. Many future designers got their start with success in the competition, including a teenage Stewart Reed who had two submissions on display. Undoubtedly, other Art Center alumni were represented as well. The model display was impressive on its own merits, but it gave rise to the priceless experience of listening to friends talk about a particular model and realizing that one of them was the original designer several decades prior.



Among others, alumni designers currently working at Acura and Tesla offered observations to the crowd from the main stage on the future of car design and the state of the car hobby. The panel talked about the importance and desirability of good design regardless of how autonomous the vehicle may be or whether the car is shared with others. They also talked about the need to be able to communicate effectively with colleagues in other disciplines. Autonomy continues to be the looming threat or opportunity of the transportation world depending on your view and perspectives vary.

As spectators milled among the cars, Ed Justice, Jr. (head of Justice Brothers – an automotive lubricants, oils and additives company and family with deep roots in motorsports) and Dave Kunz (automotive specialist for ABC local television) did brief interviews with people who brought the cars. Interviews included owners told stories of cars long sought-after, cars with unique history, and cars (and motorcycles and a VW bus with a Porsche engine) tailored to meet a specific vision. Interviews also included Art Center alumni from Acura and Lexus who brought modern examples of concept, near-production and production cars. All the stories easily supported the “Built by Hand” theme.

So what about the cars?

If you’re reading this, you’re likely minded in the way of the Mercedes. The black 1955 300SL gullwing kept an eye on proceedings with both of its doors swung open to the sky, giving a great view of the beautiful gray interior, wood Nardi wheel, tailored luggage on the deck behind the seats and in front of the rear window. The speedometer showed just over 17,000 clicks.



Across the field, a 1936 290 Cabriolet A sat alongside a 1958 four door 180D. The three-pointed star on the nose was shared, but over twenty years of history separates them and they are each distinctive in their own way.

A smaller brother to the bigger and better known 500 and 540K models, the 290 Cabriolet was built in a factory in Mannheim, Germany that did not survive the bombing during the war. Not only did few 290 models survive, but the original build sheets and records were destroyed as well. This particular 290 Cabriolet was

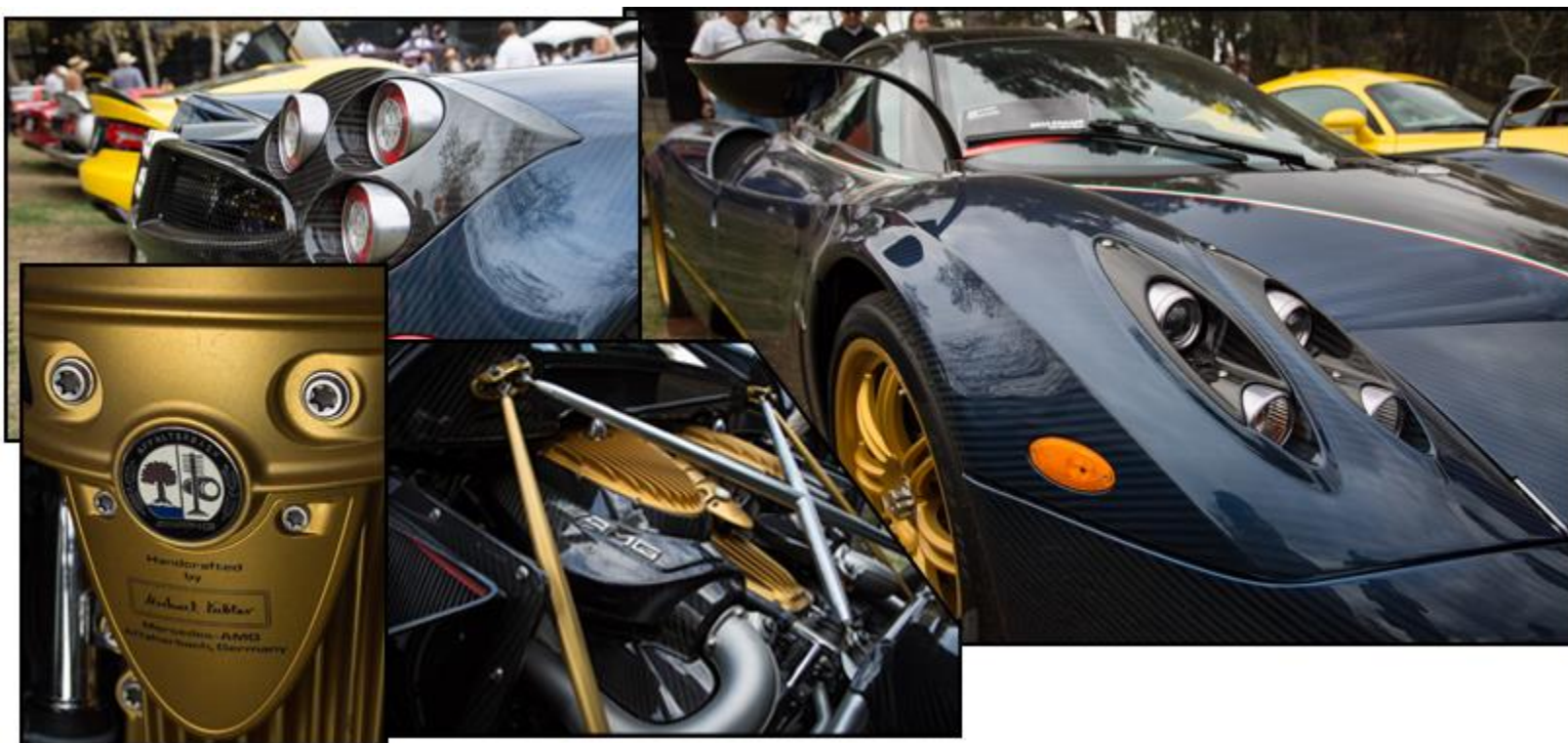


apparently not sold to its first owner until 1948 which suggests the car was hidden away somehow. Now only on its fourth owner (two German and two American) who purchased the car in 2015, the green two-tone paintwork is a marvelous complement to the curves sweeping along the sides. The front hood hides a straight 6-cylinder engine making a mere 68 horsepower.



The 190D sedan was likewise not a performance vehicle. The in-line four-cylinder engine produces only 55 horsepower and its 0-60 times are left unsaid. The deep blue-green color (with wheel cover accents) matched nicely with a pristine gray and black interior with chrome trim.

Those interested in something more exotic with a Mercedes connection could look to the row of sports cars and the deep blue Pagani Huayra powered by an AMG sourced engine. The owner generously opened all of the doors and the rear hatch to give spectators a look at the detailed design and the gold AMG powerplant situated ahead of the massive rear wheels. Exotic? Yes. Built by hand? Yes – all the way down to the AMG engine with builder Michael Kübler’s signature.





There were many more examples of interesting works of art at the Car Classic. The event is an annual affair held every October, so mark your calendar for 2017. The student gallery rotates exhibits through the year, so there are always student projects on display. A visit to Art Center is always a rare opportunity to see the full design process from student sketch and clay model all the way to the finished product of a concept or production car – all Built by Hand.

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