

AUTO E MOTO D'EPOCA PADOVA 2020

By Marc Sonnery

Auto e Moto d'Epoca, or AME, in Padova is Italy's version of Retromobile in Paris or Techno Classica in Germany: a huge indoor show for classic car enthusiasts with memorabilia, books, parts, cars and everything in between.

While Paris is more sophisticated and the German show even bigger (with too much of everything), AME is known as the very best place to find that rare brochure or near impossible part. It is also a massive classic car market in itself.

The sheer fact that it could take place was quite extraordinary. While COVID-19 caused many event cancellations across Europe the organisers stuck to their guns, created strict protocols, organised the show in such a way to have very wide aisles, avoiding lines everywhere from ticket booths to sandwich bars. Visitors were very disciplined, masks coming off only when seated for a coffee or meal.

Padova, a beautiful historic University town well worth visiting for its famous sights such as Prato della Valle, is located in the Veneto province only 43 km (27 miles) from Venice and its Marco Polo International Airport. Modena is less than two hours drive to the southwest, so you can combine a lot into a compact trip.

On Thursday morning I walked 500 meters from my hotel through the morning fog to the feria (fair) site. Opening day is usually less crowded as it is reserved for exhibitors, media and those willing to pay a premium; but it was clear attendance would be significantly down as many, weary of crowds, stayed home.

The show is laid out mostly indoors in eleven enormous halls divided (mostly) by theme. Halls 7 and 8 by the entrance were dedicated to parts, memorabilia, books and models with each vendor featuring sprawling tables covered with their wares.

Many of them are mom and pop operations with no email so these shows are the chance to meet them and see what they have.

There are all kinds of stands, some specializing in Lancia parts while others do headlights, rear lights and indicators from any and all marques. Another had lots of valve covers, be it for a 246 Dino or a Siata.

The next vendor could not be more different specializing in period enamel badges and pins, some of them incredible jewels for their intricacy.

There are three types of model cars; older ones, pre- or post-war, in tin or ceramic, which have their charm in the sense that the shapes are never perfectly accurate. Rarity is also a satisfying factor with some pieces being near impossible to find.

Then there are the run-of-the-mill mass-production models you find in gas stations and finally the high quality recent production models in 1/43 or 1/18 scale.

In this realm even the most obscure one-off Ferrari will have been reproduced and some become obsessed with gathering a complete set of 500 Superfasts or Daytona Group 4s, for example.



There are also professional organisations such as GTO Engineering who came all the way from England to display their bespoke parts.

Reproduction or remanufacturing is currently developing significantly, thanks to 3D printing which is useful for many purposes but not applicable to highly stressed components or traditional machining, stamping or casting.

I met Luca Amadei of Modena Motori, who can reproduce any part at will. Of course the entire Modenese province, thanks to motorsport and the region's latent engineering skill, has always been a cradle for a plethora of specialized machine shops reproducing very specific types of parts, catering to the restoration workshops in the region and racing teams.

So if you need a new engine block for your 375 MM after putting a con rod through the Lampredi motor in the Mille Miglia, or whether you want a gearbox casing for a 275, or a water pump for your 250 GTE, they have it or can manufacture it. They also repair damaged or porous heads.

There is an elite group of vendors specializing in rare Ferrari, Maserati, etc., memorabilia with everything from brochures, to owners manuals, to rare old photos and autographs. Most of them were there but the popular Luca Fornetti owner of Shopping Formula 1 across from the factory in Maranello gave it a miss this year due to the circumstances.

The two biggest car bookshops in Italy were well represented with huge stands: Gilena Motor Books of Brescia and Giorgio Nada Editore of the Milan shop and publisher. Of course Nada himself passed from COVID on May 6th and his sons are now continuing his oeuvre.

Then there are the automotive movie theme poster merchants such as one selling an original copy of "Il Temerario" with Kirk Douglas, known in English as "The Racers". In that movie Douglas races a Burano in the Mille Miglia. In fact it was 212 Export Touring Barchetta S/N 0102 E underneath with a different body made for the film.

Crossing from halls 7 and 8 to another building I emerged in the outer area where dealer awnings share space with private vendors displaying one or two cars next to food stands.

Bring cash for your coffee, food and wine breaks, as credit cards are not popular except in the permanent indoor cafes. Cash on another scale, for car purchases, would also be popular with quite a few of the sellers even if not actually legal.

Italy has long had a parallel economy and even though the government is trying all it can to fight it, it is so ingrained they have their work cut out.

This is why when inspecting cars in Italy asking to see a car's service history very often results in blank stares and uncomfortable moments with private sellers. They typically paid the garage cash for a discount... so there is no paper trail.

When inspecting a Lancia in Sicily for my publisher the lady who represented the car for her aging father thought I was a scammer when I asked for the maintenance records by email and became quite alarmed about it. It took a lot of explaining, with the help of a dealer friend from the other end of Italy on the phone, to reassure her. Buying cars in Italy has its charms and challenges but certainly expect it to be a very different experience than in the US.

I then ran into my first of many Ferraris on offer. A Mondial Quattrovalvole coupe, red with tan, 1984, 74,670 km, very tidy at €35,000. There are buy it today prices as well as pie in the sky numbers but a lot more of the former so it is a good finger on the market.

Essentially private individuals tend to offer cars at the real price because they need to sell whereas dealers might price them with more of a negotiation cushion. Not all prices are indicated and some vendors are coy unless you are an actual buyer.

Entering the next hall, chock-a-block with cars, the sheer variety strikes you right away. This is not an Italian car show only, and while many specialists have small Fiats, specialize in Lancias or Alfa Romeos, others focus on Mercedes, Porsche, Jaguar and Aston Martin. Another vendor had rows of small two-cylinder Citroëns in amazing condition.

There was a discreet tribute to ex-Pininfarina designer Aldo Brovarone who passed away on October 12 at age 94. He was known for having designed the very first rear mid-engine Ferrari road car, the Dino show car with its row of headlights sold by Artcurial in Paris in recent years; a seminal design if ever there was one from which so many Maranello models evolved.

The car chosen to pay respect to his legacy was one that was not exported to the US which was a pity

because the Lancia Gamma coupe (1976-1984) stops you in your tracks as it has the same type of timeless elegant straight lines as a 400. He had also designed the 250 LM, 500 Superfast and 365 GTC/4 among many others.

Some of the small Italian cars are so cute they seem to have cheekily escaped from a cartoon and never fail to draw a smile. While most are familiar with the Fiat 500 there are countless others on tiny wheels, virtual Autostrada right-lane hedgehogs.

There was a hilarious Piaggio Ape three-wheeler (remember Inspector Clouseau parking one in a swimming pool in "The Pink Panther"?) all dolled up in baby blue ready to be hoisted onto a mega yacht in Portofino harbour as an alternative to the ubiquitous Fiat 500 Giardinetta with wicker seats.

A specialist in early Lamborghini tractors is something you won't see outside of Italy but they are highly collectible, like early Porsche tractors or Maserati motorcycles. Ferruccio Lamborghini made his fortune with specialized vineyard tractors called Vigneron (winemaker, in French) with a lot of very clever patents. That allowed him to buy his own Ferraris such as a 250 GTE.

This led to his infamous -be it real or urban legend- complaint to Enzo Ferrari about the clutch and Ferrari responding that he knew how to drive a tractor but not his cars, angering the wrong man into building his own sportscars.

Rally cars are big in Padova and an entire Lancia Martini display could be seen with a team service van next to ex-factory cars such as the pretty 037 Group B Evo II and the bulky Delta S4 Group B, identical to the one that saw the tragic demise of star driver Henri Toivonen in 1986 and the Group B class as a whole, banned as a consequence for being too fast and dangerous.

The variety of Italian exotica is staggering, from Maserati Khamsin to Lamborghini Urraco or Alfa Romeo Montreal. There were a good number of German and Austrian dealers displaying their inventory, as the EU allows free movement of not only people but also goods until they are sold.

A brand new F8 Tributo was on offer, by a local dealer, a bit surprising in a classic car event.



An impeccable 512 TR in rare Giallo Modena shone like a thousand suns, had black interior, 37,600 km, and was available at €145,000. A 2003 360 Modena with 23,000 km as was a white Mondial Cabriolet, no prices indicated. There were several 550 and 575 Maranellos available as well as a Mondial coupe.

Several 308 GTBs and 328 GTBs were on offer, the

GTS versions being less popular in Europe.

What you will usually not see outside of Italy is the Italian market specials. These are two-liter versions called 208 GT4 and 208 GTB and one was on offer: a 208 GT4 in orange, in good, if not perfect condition, the vendor asking €45,000.



Then there was the third version little-known outside of the home market: the 208 GTB Turbo. It can be recognized by the additional wide narrow air vent on the hood as well as NACA ducts in the lower body ahead of the rear wheels like on a BB 512.

An online auction was planned for later in the month (28th to 30th) by Finarte who normally holds a traditional auction during AME. Some of the cars were shown such as a cute 1950 750cc Giau Taraschi resembling a 166 Spyder Corsa. A gorgeous Maserati A6 1500 GT Pininfarina was also presented by them. No Ferraris at all. The only V12 was, of all things not what you expect to find in Italy, a 1936 Packard!

The auction did include one of the superbly engineered Dallara Stradale supercars. The brilliant Giampaolo Dallara, better known for having masterminded the Lamborghini Miura and for his racing car factory near Parma, started his career at Ferrari sharing an office with another youngster: Mauro Forghieri.

This year the special exhibit theme was "The ordinary becomes extraordinary" about how Italian post-war genius transformed common cars into unique ones. Cue more Etceterinis such as a Zanussi 1100 Sport, a Cisitalia-lookalike 1949 Fiat Spider Sport, a one-off extracted from the Nicolis museum. A genuine Cisitalia D46 claimed to be the actual one in a famous incident in which Tazio Nuvolari steered for a lap without the steering wheel when it came off in his hand.

The 1948 Tarf Bisiluro created by Piero Taruffi was there, it is uniquely shaped as two cigar-like pods, one for 350cc motorcycle motor and one for driver, linked together by beams like a catamaran, made for top speed records; in fact it conquered no less than 22 world records.

Taruffi who won the 1952 Swiss GP for Ferrari at Bremgarten is best remembered for winning the final Mille Miglia in 1957. He did it in a factory 315S after which he honoured the promise made to his wife to stop racing if he succeeded.

A stand which saw brisk business was EZ Electric Power Steering, a very popular upgrade which makes so many classics far more liveable. Just ask any Daytona owner who had it fitted. The system installs unintrusively, i.e. nothing needs to be damaged.

Some vendors should be poets: one Fiat Multipla in robins egg blue and white was proclaimed to have received a "Stratospheric restoration".

Speaking of Stratos there was one such Lancia with a Dino engine; these are now very hard to find and costly due to their popularity and the number that were destroyed due to the short chassis requiring very instant responses at the wheel to catch it. Having driven one to and from the Cavallino Classic years ago, I can confirm that it turns as soon as you think about it.

A vintage car radio specialist showed well over 100 different rebuilt models in a neat bespoke display and offered every imaginable component as well as repair services.

The oldest car in the show was the 1897 Chizzolini, which looked like a twin wicker-seat wheelchair. It was made in Brescia using a 21 lcc French De Dion-Bouton engine and propelled its pilota and passenger at a terrifying 12 KPH.



Then it was time for the press launch conference of Adolfo Orsi's excellent annual *Classic Car Auction Yearbook*, with seats well apart and many very insightful statistics.

He and representatives from Bonhams and RM Sotheby's noted the market was down in the past year in great part because owners chose to keep their powder dry and not offer their cars even though there is a high demand for top drawer cars.

Orsi pointed out how the Gooding auction in early September in London was the bird in the coal mine and thankfully that went well with several world record prices.

The Bonhams rep, Gregor Wenner, stated that the current market fall is not due to COVID but readjustment after the 2015 speculative peak.

All of them agreed that confinement had gotten people to really think about what it is they love and want to enjoy in life, a positive effect for classics and a good way to conclude this report.

The reality of the situation lurked outside and as if on cue Sunday evening the show closed as Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced new restrictions with immediate effect.

It truly is a miracle that the show could happen at all. Those who worked so hard should be congratulated. To plan your Italian foray when the world goes back to normal more information at: <https://autoemotodepoca.com/en-GB/>