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Dinos steal show in Stuttgart

FOR MUCH OF the weekend it seemed like most of the 66,000-odd visitors to this year's Retro Classics show in Stuttgart were crowding to see one stand. On it was a display of all the cars to wear the Dino badge. That amounted to five versions of the Ferrari 206/246 GT range, both the later V8 Dino GT4s – 208 and 308 – and five of the Fiat Dino Coupé and Spider models, with both 2.0 and 2.4 engines. And to finish things off nicely, both road and race versions of

the Lancia Stratos, which used the Dino V6 engine.

The exhibition was put together by Götz Seidel along with Matthias Bartz, the lucky owner of four of the cars on display.



The Ferrari 206/246 GTs with V8 sibling

Hellenic Motor Museum

THE OPENING OF a new motor museum in March provides yet another good reason to visit Athens. Sited on the top three floors of the new Athenian Capitol shopping centre, the Hellenic Motor Museum has 110 cars on display rotated regularly from a collection numbering 294 vehicles. Exhibits range in age from an 1895 Hungarian fire engine to a Ferrari 308 GTS. There are cars of the stars too, including an ex-Paul Newman Mercedes 300 SL and a 1959 Chrysler Imperial once owned by Led Zeppelin front man Robert Plant.

The museum is open every day except for Mondays. Further information can be found at www.hellenicmotormuseum.gr



Simon Kidston

Time to wake up my sleeping beauties

SPRING IS IN THE AIR. It's the time of year when our minds turn to opening the garage doors and lifting off the dust sheet to see if what's underneath feels like waking from its winter slumber. As my garage is currently empty apart from garden furniture, assorted spiders (sadly neither red nor convertible) and enough unleaded fuel additive to last into the next century (a precautionary gift from Mrs K, circa 2000), my seasonal ritual is slightly different this year. It consists of peering into my bank account to discover whether there's enough wherewithal to satisfy the various people who have been tinkering with cars for me during their annual hibernation.

My old Porsche Carrera RS, which gets used far less than it deserves, has been given a new lease of life that should see it well into the next Kidston generation. I'd love my kids to have the same happy memories of it as I have.

It's funny which aspects of each car you look forward to the most. I can't wait to pull down the gullwing door of 'BUG 55', the sinister, black Mercedes-Benz 300 SL, and admire that superb chrome-laden Fifties dashboard when I drive it home from its annual pilgrimage to its fatherland. Nothing else comes close for cabin presence, except perhaps a Messerschmitt 109.

Then there's the Aston Martin V8 Vantage, where the first thing that strikes you is the wonderful smell of Connolly leather, followed by the whole car and most of its surroundings shaking as I turn the rather downmarket ignition key and the big V8 erupts into life. It's as Olde Worlde British as the Gullwing is Teutonic. Over the winter, the boffins at Aston Martin Works Service have been making various little tweaks as I've told them I'd like to find out how fast this two-tonne bruiser will really go flat out.

Now back and fettled after its Middle Eastern adventure, the Lamborghini Miura SV is like an old glove that just feels 'right' every time I slip down into the white leather bucket seat. Yes, it really is white: give a 21-year-old Italian heir *carte blanche* to choose his birthday present in 1973 and what do you expect? The view over the voluptuous front wings and the magical sound from that V12 just inches behind your head stay with you long after every drive – usually because your ears are still ringing. We're doing a tour of Tuscany to celebrate the model's 45th birthday in the autumn and I'm on a diet already.

Two of the cars I'm most looking forward to driving happen to be the oldest and the youngest. The 1936 Bugatti Atalante (not to be mistaken for the priceless Atlantic, but sublimely elegant nonetheless) takes me back to the tree-lined Route Napoleon down to the Côte d'Azur, the wind in my hair, a pillar box view out over the long bonnet and a delicious snick-snick from the gear change to match the tactility of the pencil-thin steering wheel.

Fast forward almost 60 years and I'm sitting in the centre seat of Britain's finest, with everything laid out perfectly around me, the coolest green-lit instruments in front and the most glorious V12 soundtrack behind. The only drawbacks with the McLaren F1 are finding a road where I dare put my right foot down, and going the same colour as the dashboard when I get the servicing bill. As that'll be next week, ask me next month whether I recommend the expectation or the experience...

Simon Kidston lives and works in a world filled with the finest classics. In between acting as a consultant to collectors and performing as the multi-lingual presenter at top European events, Geneva-based Simon (www.kidston.com) finds time to enjoy his own cars, including a Porsche 911 Carrera 2.7 RS and a Lamborghini Miura SV.