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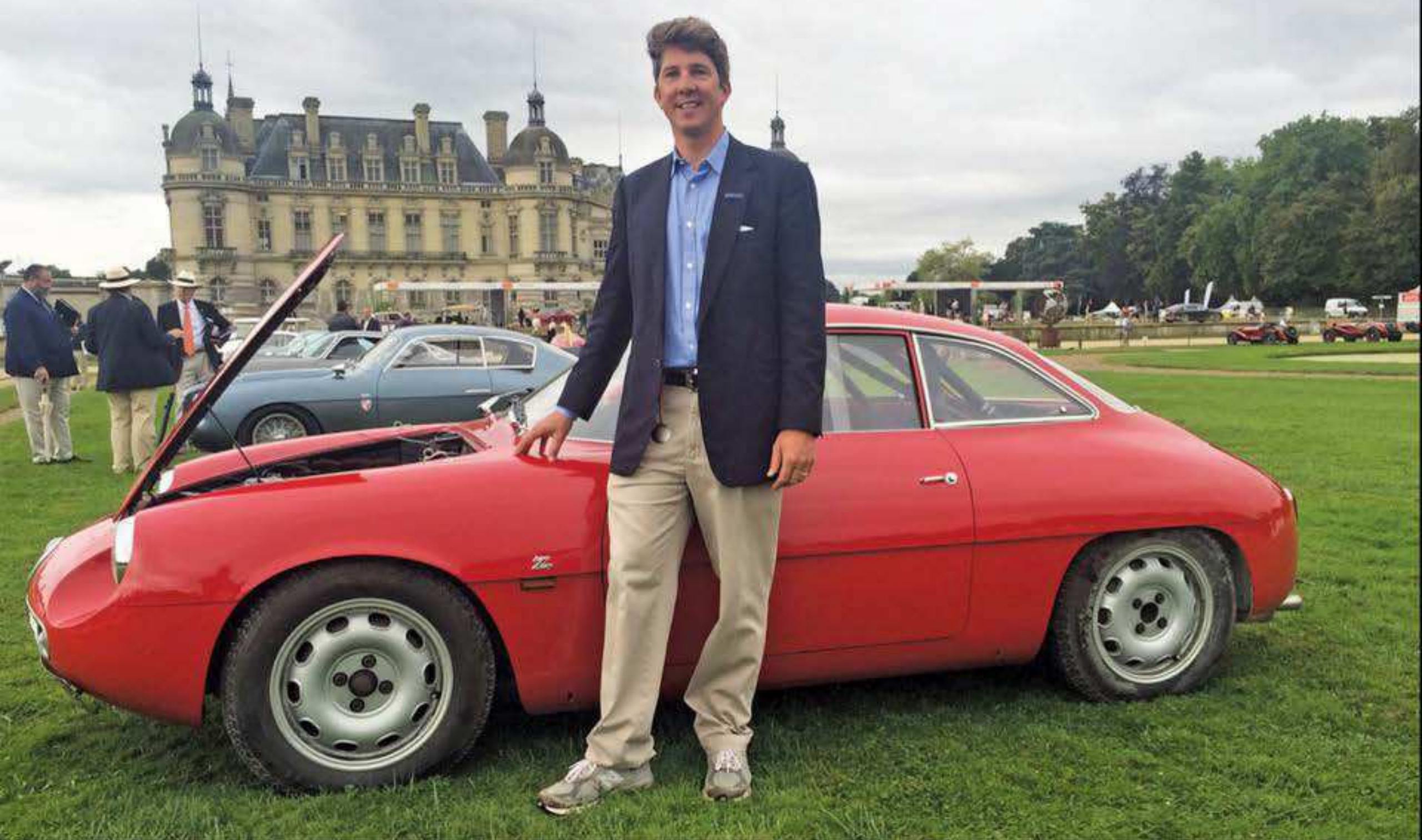


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The author amid the quiet elegance — and amazing elbow room — of Chantilly

From Pebble to Paris

The American excess of Pebble Beach and European elegance of Chantilly offered brilliantly different displays of the world's most impressive cars

by Philip Richter

Pebble Beach and Chantilly: two car shows at the pinnacle of the collector world, showcasing the most elite automobiles in unrivaled settings of refined beauty. And there the similarities end.

As a first-time visitor to both, I was awed, overwhelmed, inspired, exhausted, exhilarated and surprised by how different two top-class car shows could be.

Pebble Beach, the de facto high-water mark of the A-level global concours circuit, is a weeklong, quintessentially American experience of fitting 100 pounds in a 10-pound bag. The Monterey Peninsula teems with car enthusiasts hurrying from one venue to the next, in close quarters, under the California sun, overlooking the vast ocean and cliffs.

In contrast, Chantilly is a much shorter, calmer affair that embodies old European elegance — a leisurely string of one-at-a-time events, set in the French countryside, amid centuries-old stone walls, cobblestone streets, and the axial gardens of the magnificent namesake chateau.

After 60 years of exceptional history, Pebble Beach has earned its place of world renown. But Chantilly, the new kid on the block after only three years in existence, is enjoying a meteoric rise on the concours circuit — and for good reason. With the chateau's opulent, gracious, tranquil setting, it's hard to imagine a better place to look at beautiful cars.

Monterey madness

On any given day, life in Monterey, Pebble Beach, and Carmel is pure California fantasyland: a seaside resort destination with legendary golf courses and idyllic homes. During Monterey Car Week these tony enclaves become the ultimate land of car-enthusiasts' make believe.

Driving into Carmel, I saw a Porsche 959 waiting to make a right turn at a light; a vintage Maserati Ghibli sitting between a Prius and a brand new Rolls-Royce Ghost; and a BMW Z8 parked in a downtown parking deck next to an ordinary Buick. Just another day in car-culture paradise.

If you want to enjoy the show at Pebble Beach, don't leave home without your Sports Car Market Insider's Guide to Monterey in hand and the Waze app installed on your smart phone. This is not your typical one-stop car show. Instead, it's a staggering array of simultaneous activities scattered across the Peninsula, and separated by traffic that rivals Midtown Manhattan during a papal visit.



On the other side of the Atlantic, maneuvering around the cars at Pebble Beach requires much more strategy and patience

Too much to see

To give you a sense of things: A Porsche-only event, a concert, Legends of the Autobahn, multiple auction previews, RetroAuto, several seminars, and the highly coveted \$600-per-ticket Quail were all happening on the same day. Mecum, RM Sotheby's, Gooding, Bonhams, Russo and Steele, and Rick Cole all held concurrent auctions. At the end of my first day at Pebble, I'd accumulated six rubber and paper event-pass wristbands.

The upside of all the traffic, of course, is that every other car is something special, so you don't get bored while you're inching along. And despite the vastness and near-mayhem, there is still somehow a sense of intimacy. I ran into several friends, encountered multiple celebrities at close range, and witnessed Publisher Martin getting mobbed by fans of his TV show and gamely posing for photos. (Many quizzed him on what their car was worth.) Everyone who comes here shares a passion; the excitement in the air is palpable.

The feature event — the Sunday show at Pebble Beach — is something to behold. The show takes place on the ocean-view golf course, and every inch of the fairway comes at a premium. The most sought-after cars in the world are packed together in narrow rows with crowds of people swarming around them. This year, there were over a dozen Delahayes and Ford GT40s, a full selection of Duesenbergs, and an abundance of rare Zagato coachwork. Every car at Pebble could be Best in Show at any high end-car show in the world.

French calm

The Chateau de Chantilly (pronounced shahn-tee-ye), just half an hour outside Paris, sits majestically surrounded by mirror-smooth water, the confluence of the Oise and Seine Rivers. With its ornately gilded interior, esteemed collection of French paintings, and accompanying castle-like horse stables (legend says the Prince of Condé believed he'd be reincarnated as a horse and commissioned a stable befitting his royal stature), the chateau is about as genteel a setting as you'd find anywhere.

The opening Friday night cocktail reception and Bonhams' dinner took place on the castle lawn. The wine list included some of the finest Bordeaux names and vintages, and the dinner of foie gras and tender whitefish put this American's idea of banquet dining to shame.

Saturday morning, several of the show cars gathered for a driving tour through the countryside. We watched them leave — the twin supercharged Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 made an unforgettable sound — and then met them for the tour's end at an ancient abbey, where a decadent lunch was served. I'd never seen so many extraordinary antique cars running and driving. Most were of European descent, and seeing them fly down country roads, past those old stone walls and fields of French cows, had a way of transporting us onlookers to a bygone era.

That afternoon, there was an amazing thing: leisure time. Followed, naturally, by a black-tie gala dinner in the stables, reached via red carpet through the cobblestone

courtyard. Opera singers performed between courses, each of which was prepared by a different Michelin chef.

New friends and honorary duties

On the day of the show, I had the unexpected honor of standing in for a car owner to represent her 1961 Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Zagato on the field. I'd met the owner, Carol Spagg, and her friend, Karin, just after they'd driven the car all the way from England to Chantilly. Carol was showing her car and also judging another class, so she couldn't be with the Alfa during the field inspection. She and Karin decided to ask if I'd stand in, and I jumped at the chance. The car is a major piece of Alfa history; it was race prepared when new and later restored by the legendary Alfa tuner Conrero — one of his last projects before he died.

For the Sunday show, the cars are arrayed on the chateau's expansive gardens, with fountains and little groups of benches and, across the water, horses grazing in a meadow. There's so much space between cars that you can actually sometimes get photos that don't include gawking people. And the show-goers dress so elegantly that they only add to the atmosphere. Chantilly is a total aesthetic experience in classic French style.

The only potential distraction on show day is the vast array of car clubs that each have their own designated parking area near the chateau. But there was plenty of time to see all that, and plenty of delicious food to buy from street-style vendors while strolling the grounds and admiring one world-class car after another.

Transatlantic enthusiasm

From the non-stop, American-excess intensity of Pebble Beach to the leisurely European elegance of Chantilly, both shows are brilliant, not-to-be-missed displays of the world's most impressive cars. And a theme in conversation emerged in both places: people lamenting cars they shouldn't have sold. Even expert collectors didn't predict the parabolic rise in collector car values. But these shows — at their Sunday best — give us a chance to simply appreciate the cars themselves, surrounded by like-minded enthusiasts. ♦