THE EIGHTH EDITION

CARS / BIKES / PEOPLE / CULTURE

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INFLUX/08

EIGHT / A POWERFUL NUMBER

INTRODUCTION

The fact that Influx/08 coincides with Adrian Flux's fortieth anniversary augurs well. We're sure the mystics would hear music dancing between these digits.

As midpoint graphically between the square and the circle, the figure eight's unbroken, intertwining paths represent eternity, the ceaseless sweep through the dimensions. Numbers have their own significance. But let's not get too mystical.

Influx Magazine has seen many manifestations, using multiple formats and platforms since its launch in 2006. And that's the way it should be. We always wanted the 'zine to morph, mutate and transform as the multilayered levels of the culture evolved around it. Since the beginning of the journey and across eight years we've seen amazing new launches, false dawns and doom-mongering soothsaying. Car and bike culture has had a long look at itself in the light of economic and environmental realities and is as a consequence more dynamic than ever. Meanwhile we've had a ton of fun playing with cars, bikes and the people who place them at the centre of their lives. So in this eighth year we wanted to celebrate with something special.

The idea at the heart of this edition is simple. We commission a number of our favourite artists and writers (people we have worked with before as well as some talented new faces) to tease out a specific aspect of the culture of cars and bikes. We make a large-format piece of print to showcase the work. We show the work in a gallery. We celebrate.

The saying goes that four wheels move the body, two wheels move the soul. 4x2=8

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JENSON V8
Shoreditch, November 2012
Muscular and odd. Villain chic with Chevy motivation.

AMC Rambler
Hackney, July 2012
Odd, cute, mid-century Americana.

Rover SD1
Timsbury Bottom, October 2012
Period typical. Mid-eighties Leyland horror.

Porsche 911
Bath, March 2013
A high point in usable hype Phat steez in spades.

Mugen Accord
Shoreditch, November 2012
Tech angles. Mac-like appeal. Thin-gauge steel.

Mini twins
Ilford, February 2013
Iconic and forlorn. Waiting for love in their fading stardom.

BMW 2002
Bethnal Green, April 2012
Pretty, simple, box-like. Classically austere.

Ferrari Testarossa
Wiltshire, May 2012
Sleek in nero-crema. Louvred love from Miami Vice.

INFLUX STREET SPOTS

FOR THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS, INFLUX HAS WALKED THE EARTH CAPTURING AUTOMOTIVE GEMS OF THE DAY-TO-DAY. THERE'S BEAUTY, SOMETIMES, IN THE BANAL.

Cars and motorcycles are the most visible design elements in our cities. They not only facilitate the flow of the economic lifeblood around the world – whether you care for them or not they are the most tangible motif of our times. Look at old photos of the place where you live. The first thing you'll notice is the absence of cars, or the presence of old designs, metal bent in a way you've forgotten about, styles that have long disappeared in the annals of engineering history and that tug at you with a pang of nostalgia. Car design moves quicker than that of architecture and town planning, and only the really truly successful, iconic examples stick around on our street corners for very long. This is why, when you come across a rare or interesting car on the street, it's like an unexpected encounter with a time capsule or meeting an emissary from an exotic world. The way these incredible pieces of industry make their home in their habitats fascinates us. **Street Spots** documents juxtapositions, chance symmetries – the gorgeous fall of light or a piece of graphic perfection. Cars litter our streets with their impossible, irreducible necessity. It's the ebb and flow of history and culture as crystallised in automotive design that **Street Spots** seeks to capture; and we're amazed time and time again by the way a new surprise awaits on every street corner.

INFLUX / WORDS, PICTURES, INSPIRATION

CARS, BIKES, PEOPLE, CULTURE
LIVE UPDATES, DAILIES, MONTHLIES

○ INFLUX.CO.UK ○

YOUNG GUN

FROM THE SANTA POD TO MONACO – INFLUX PHOTOGRAPHER LIVES THE MOTORSPORT DREAM

The lights are red. The throttle is set, the clutch poised for popping. You're strapped into a machine with the power of a thousand or so ponies and there's a team behind that machine that has spent thousands of man-hours getting you to this point on the starting line. The noise of internal combustion is still deafening in your wracked ears and every bit of you is focussed on the quarter mile and the gantry up there at the top end. There is energy waiting to explode. There are synapses set to fire. In the corner of your peripheral vision you're likely to see an unassuming, fair-haired kid toting a very big lens. The lights flicker to green, Dom Romney shoots.

As one of the key members of a new generation of motorsport photographers fully loaded with the tech and talent to get to grips with digital, Dom has spent his formative few years documenting the vibrancy, power and emotion of the more mentalist extremes of motorsport. "I grew up in a drag-racing family in Lincolnshire," he tells me. "For as long as I can remember my weekends were spent making the long trek to Santa Pod and Shakespeare County Raceway, loading up the van and unloading it again. Both mum and dad were total petrolheads." To Dom the smell of ethanol and the ridiculous decibel levels of the drag strip are as familiar as the whiff of home cooking and the crackle of a log fire.

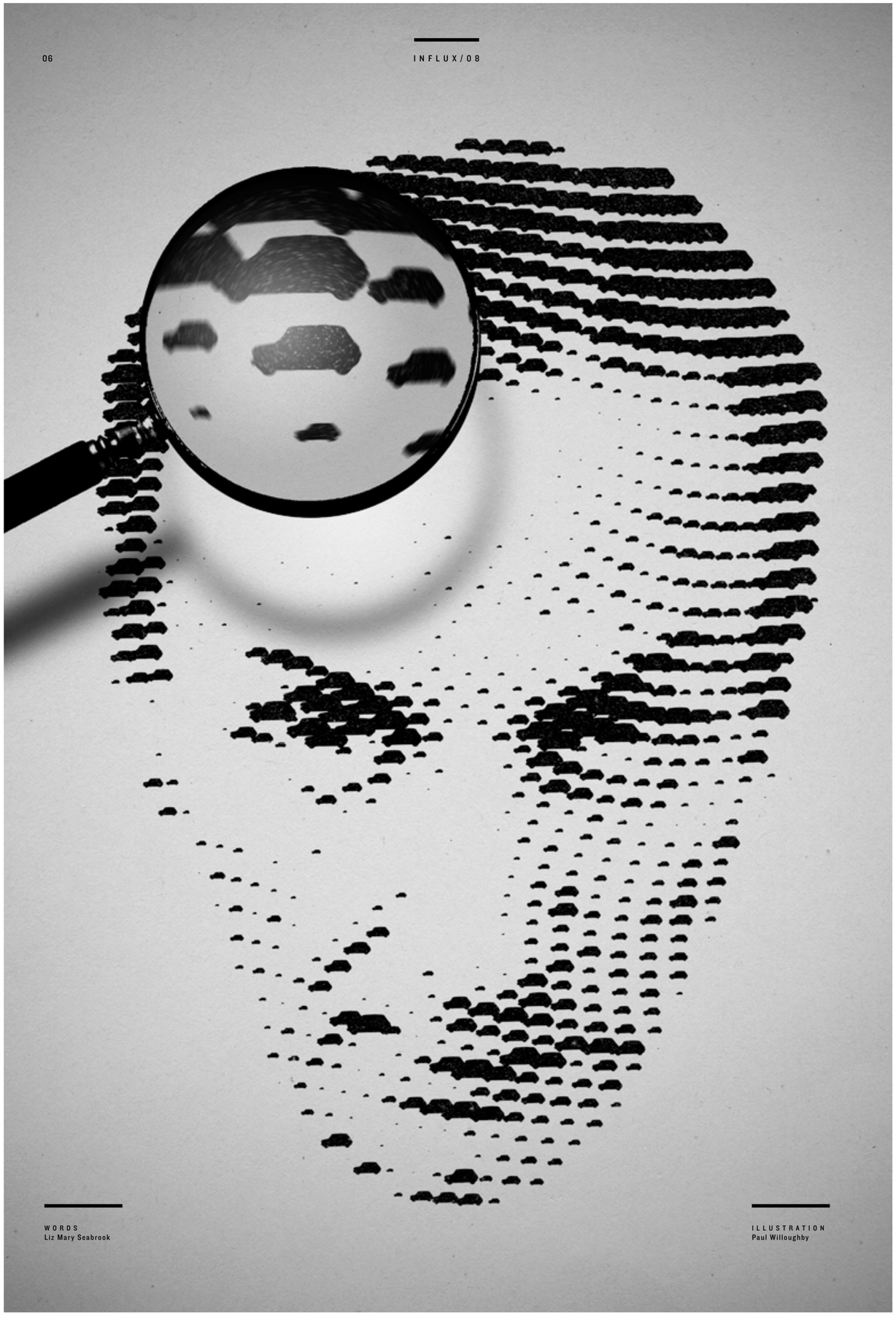
Wanting to get involved, but being barely knee high to a grasshopper, photography was the easiest way in to the power and glory of drag racing. He learnt his trade quickly, and under the most extreme pressure, up close and personal with cars that can hit 300mph in around four seconds. Soon he was shooting for the trade press and made a brief sojourn as a news photographer. Quickly winning awards for his stunning technical acumen, including MSA's young photographer of the year, this early success led Dom to score the dream gig of a lifetime. Dom is now, at the tender age of 22, the youngest fully accredited Formula 1 photographer on the circuit – and expects to attend all 2013 F1 events. "It's a great gig, a great way to see the world." And how.

"I'm looking to do more Formula I stuff, but I'll never turn my back on drag racing. It's where it all started for me."

"To Dom the smell of ethanol and the ridiculous decibel levels of the drag strip are as familiar as the whiff of home cooking and the crackle of a log fire."

WORDS
Michael Fordham

PHOTOGRAPHY
Dom Romney



WORDS
Liz Mary Seabrook

ILLUSTRATION
Paul Willoughby

MASS APPEAL

THE MINI SHOWED US HOW (NOT)TO PAINT BY NUMBERS...

Alec Issigonis, who would create the most iconic piece of fully realized automotive design of the 1960s, was born in the Greek port of Smyrna in 1906. He was the descendent of at least two generations of passionate engineers, but there were countless reasons why he should not have succeeded in his chosen trade.

This was not a man who cared too much about the whys and wherefores of statistics or market research. To him public demand was bunk, and mathematics the enemy of the truly creative individual. As if to underline his distaste for numbers he failed the maths module of his course at Battersea Polytechnic three times. Who says that design is a numbers game?

But Issigonis compensated for this arithmetical inadequacy with a determined vision that carried him through the troublesome details of engineering. "I thought we had to do something better than the bubble cars", he said just before his death in 1988, "I thought we should make a very small car for the housewife that was economical to run with lots of shopping space inside which didn't need a big boot." It was a seemingly modest ambition – but its realisation changed the way the public all over the world saw small cars forever.

After finally completing his training at Battersea Poly – under the tutelage of his watchful mother – the 19-year-old began to pick up work with various design consultancies in London and the Midlands whilst setting to work on building a racing car. We're not sure whether the project ever saw the light of day, but it's fair to say that it sparked in him a desire to build innovative motors that would never fade. In the thirties he went on to work for Morris on a number of mainstream industry projects, and during the war years he penned a motorised wheelbarrow for the War Department. He was also, of course, the main architect of the iconic Morris Minor.

The project that would become Issigonis's *magnum opus* started with the unassuming moniker 'Austin Design Office Project 15'. The project was infused with innovation from the get-go. The Mini's suspension designer Alex Moulton recalled driving to meet Issigonis in one of the aforementioned Heinkel Bubble Cars (which could achieve 60 miles to the gallon but whose entire aspect was ugly, awkward, and, frankly, German). Apparently Issigonis sniffed disapprovingly at the contraption and told him that he was going to do the job properly, "with four seats, four wheels and four cylinders."

The great man was good to his word, and it took the sort of true innovation that would secure his legendary status to achieve this. The engine was switched sideways to save space. Drive was focused on the front wheels to remove the weighty and space hungry transmission tunnel. The gearbox was placed just below the engine in a single unitary design. External welds expressed as part of the exterior design simplified welding techniques and cut mass production costs – not to mention prefiguring deconstructed 'post modern' design, where services and technical elements are exposed to the exterior.

Truly great design is often a result of severely straitened or restricted circumstances. Witness the amazing innovations that arose during the war years. This can't be said of the circumstances that produced the Mini, but it was the embattled atmosphere that Issigonis encouraged that truly pushed his design team to extraordinary lengths. One of the team recalled later that "we were there simply to do things his way". And that way proved, it had to be said, more or less entirely correct.

There were flaws, though, in the original design. The early undertrays leaked water terribly due to the bypassing of relatively costly engineering conventions. But ultimately it was this very focussed, almost dictatorial decision-making process that produced a truly talismanic vehicle that opened the door to car ownership for legions of folk previously excluded from automotive culture.

The Mini was an unprecedented success. It was perfect for Joe Public with its price tag – a snatch at £497 – and celebrities loved it for its radical new design. The Mini came to be associated instantly with a new generation of car owners. This baby boom generation was younger, more fashion conscious and more socially mobile than any that had preceded it. The Mini, in other words, chimed perfectly with the times. Sixties fashion supremo Mary Quant summed up the Mini's quotidian appeal. "It was my first car and I was very proud of it. It was black with black leather seats – a handbag on wheels. Flirty, fun and exciting, it went exactly with the miniskirt."

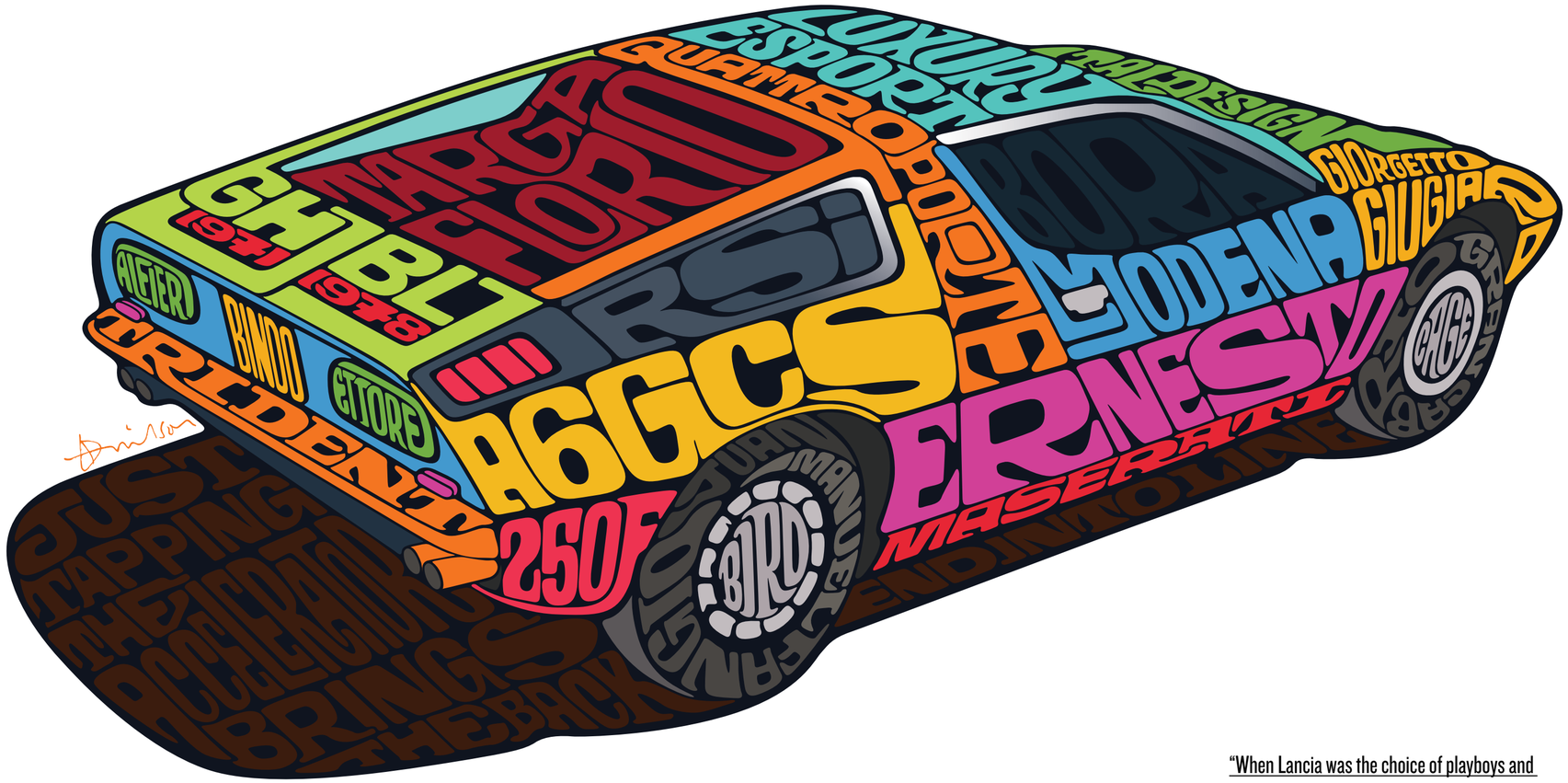
So was Issigonis's vision a case of the right man being in the right place in the right time – or a sublime piece of celestial inspiration that can perhaps never happen again? Perhaps we should leave the last word to Sir Alec himself:

"the public don't know what they want - it's my job to tell them."

"It was the embattled atmosphere that Issigonis encouraged that truly pushed his design team to extraordinary lengths. One of the team recalled later that 'we were there simply to do things his way'. And that way proved, it had to be said, more or less entirely correct."

TRIDENT TALES

MUSINGS ON THE NOBLE MASERATI BRAND



"When Lancia was the choice of playboys and glamorous actors, Maserati stood apart as the marque of sultans and kings"

The flames rage, dancing from white to yellow to furious crimson. In the blink of an eye a ball of heat engulfs the red Ferrari, reaching from below to grasp the open two-seater in blazing fingers. Scarletti leaps free and is instantly wrapped in the coat of a quick-thinking mechanic. Smoke spills across the straight as cars pour headlong into the white shroud. At that same moment, on the far side of the 14-mile Nürburgring circuit, a squat, white car drops into the banked curve of the Karussell, compressing as it arcs through the slingshot. Stirling Moss feathers the throttle as the Maserati momentarily unweights on the exit, before it squats and bites, the fierce, three-litre engine propelling the Tipo 61 '*Birdcage*' onto the tarmac and into the long, right-hand, uphill curve.

Here is an era when lives and races balance on a knife-edge, and the oil-stained tarmac produces some of our most enigmatic stars and iconic designs – an era when Maserati stands as a titan. 1960 sees Moss claim his second Nürburgring win for the trident crest by a clear four minutes. His first had been in the dazzling 300S – a sleek, modern design with Art Deco influences that spoke of movement, even when standing still. With flowing curves, fluid lines and polished alloy side-vents it was a 'proto E-Type' in looks and Ferrari-beating in speed. Moss's Birdcage may lack the sophisticated lines and classic good looks of its predecessor, but it is no less dominant. At rest it sits like a big cat waiting to pounce. But in the hands of Moss it is untouchable.

Maserati, as a marque, has lived a life steeped in glory and infused with the kind of intrigue and betrayal that rivals that of any Hollywood grandee or royal court. It is a story of humble origins, noble aspirations and villainous capitalists; of Italian industrial strife and fiscal disaster infused with Gallic flair. There are plot twists tied to the overthrow of a South American dictator, a freefall from grace and ultimately, like the best dramas, glowing redemption. At its towering heights, during that golden era of the 1950s when Lancia was the choice of playboys and glamorous actors, Maserati stood apart as the marque of sultans and kings. The legendary *A6G* bloodline of spiders and berlinettas scored landmark track wins. This series of light alloy-bodied cars were designed for gentleman racers and clothed by the finest *carrozzeria* in the land. They were the supermodels of their time.

It would be easy to get lost in the drama of it all were it not for the cars themselves. Here is a marque born out of a primordial passion for motor racing and one that has evolved through its many metamorphoses. You'll not find a trace of the Darwinian gradualism so aptly expressed in the genetic code of the Porsche family tree. This is a tale of the punctuated change – sudden jumps that have seen species transformed. The exquisite, race-refined *A6G* begat the brutish *5000GT* so beloved of the Shah of Persia. The crisp, clean *Khamsin* lead to the cheap and frail *Biturbo*, before finally rising from the ashes as the *3200*, delivered under current owners Fiat. Through it all, the Maserati name remained entwined with the DNA of the founding brothers – Alfieri, Bindo, Ernesto and Ettore, and their drive to build and to race beautiful cars.

In Italy the winds are heralds of great change, revered for their power and ferocity. It's fitting then that Maserati harnessed their monikers for many of their offspring; the subtle *Mistral*, the glorious *Ghibli*, the futuristic *Khamsin* and hooligan *Shamal*. The *Bora* roars out of the mountains, a devastating airstream that sends temperatures plunging, frosting the landscape with ice and driving seas into a fury. Maserati's *Bora* was a radical departure from the front engined *Ghibli*. It blew in a new era of car design; mid-engined, flat lines in the new folded-envelope style of the *Carabo*, *Manta* and *Iguana*. This was a brief yet heady period as design ran rampant and boundaries dissolved, a tiny window before the chill winds of the 1973 oil crisis gave everyone the flu. As a first offering from new owners Citroën, the *Bora* was pure Italian supercar, sprinkled with French technology. It screamed futuristic promise, whilst whispering of the ghost in the machine.

That Maserati survives at all stands not only as a testament to Italian determination, but also the momentum and drive that the flagship *5000GT* generated. Maserati stamped its foot to the floor with this super-exclusive, 5-litre, 170mph sports car and sheer torque dragged the company out of the fifties, and propelled it through the depths of the eighties, into the light again. Here is a marque powered by the latent energy of history.

More exclusive than Ferrari, less obvious than Lamborghini, more daring than Porsche, its name alone still carries the ability to stir the soul.

WORDS
Chris Nelson

ILLUSTRATION
Oscar Wilson

MECHANICITY

WE LOVE GERMAN CARS IN A DIFFERENT WAY TO WHICH WE LOVE OUR ALFAS. BUT WE LOVE THEM ALL THE SAME.

WORDS
Ben Oliver

ILLUSTRATION
Matt Taylor

Remember how the original Mercedes-Benz A-class famously fell over in the 'elk test'? Or how all the original Audi TTs had to be dragged back to the factory in Ingolstadt to cure their high-speed handling 'idiosyncrasies'? Or Daimler's disastrous take-over of Chrysler, and BMW's doomed affair with Rover? Once in a while, you need to remind yourself that the German carmakers can cock it up as badly as anyone else. Because most of the time, their cars are predictably, crushingly, annoyingly brilliant.

They've been at it for longer than anyone else, of course, starting with Karl Benz's Patent Motorwagen (there's a name that should be revived) of 1885, the world's first horseless carriage. And they learnt faster. By the thirties Mercedes was producing the fabulous SSK roadster – a supercar long before the term had been invented. Auto Union, meanwhile, was building the 560bhp Type C race car. With a sixteen-cylinder engine and a top speed of 236mph in streamliner trim it was so advanced that the Russians stole at least one from occupied eastern Germany at the end of the war a decade later to see what they could learn from its engineering.

During the Second World War BMW made one of the first jet engines and Ford made a fifth of the *Wehrmacht's* trucks. Volkswagen made the V1 rocket, but it was a 29-year-old British Army Major named Ivan Hirst who restarted production at its shattered Wolfsburg plant after the war. His superiors told him he was insane. Henry Ford II declined the offer to take it over and the French government demanded that the lines be moved to France as reparations but the move was blocked by the French auto unions. Volkswagen went on to make 22 million Beetles and become Europe's biggest carmaker. Oops.

The cars that Germany has made in the modern era have seldom inspired the affection that we have for the Mini or a 2CV, or the lust we have for an Alfa or a Maserati. Instead we admire German cars. We climb into a new Porsche 911 and know that the glorious heft and precision of its controls will feel exactly the same after 40 years and 200,000 miles. A Porsche has a mechanicity that other cars try to bury beneath a veneer of refinement. A good Porsche might be harder and less compromising than cars from the other German marques, but they all have one thing in common, one unifying principle that defines a good German car and has made the German car industry so riotously successful. They are mechanical devices first, and luxury goods second.

So we admire them, and despite the high prices – because German engineering and labour don't come cheap – we buy them. The BMW 3-series was once an expensive discretionary purchase but it now outsells the Ford Mondeo. The 3-series, like the 5-series, is so dominant that it defines its market sector; we just call it the 3-series class, and efforts of other carmakers are just known as 3-series rivals. And the M3? Well, you know the story.

When I was a road tester on a British car magazine we were constantly criticized for bias towards BMW, but we were just being objective. Almost every car they brought out went to the top of its class. The best example is the E39 5-series, built between 1995 and 2004, which was so effortlessly superior to its rivals that even its brilliant replacement was a slight disappointment. It is probably, pound for pound, the best German car of all time.

And not content with perfecting the premium saloons and estates in which they specialize, the Germans have reinvented other industries' most famous brands. Mini, Rolls-Royce, Range Rover, Bentley, Skoda, Lamborghini and Bugatti have all been brilliantly reimagined under German ownership.

"The E39 5-series was so effortlessly superior to its rivals that even its brilliant replacement was a slight disappointment. Pound for pound it is the best German car that has ever been built."

Before the current financial unpleasantness the premium German carmaker's sales charts were in near-vertical ascent and were constantly extending their ranges, inventing whole new market niches. The recession won't slow them down much; fat cash reserves mean they'll suffer less than their less profitable rivals, and can afford to keep working on the new green tech we'll all demand when we start buying cars again.

Look at BMW's Vision concept car, which it unveiled at Frankfurt Motor Show a couple of years ago. It's a diesel-electric hybrid; it has 351bhp and 590lb of torque, it can do 60mph in 4.8sec and has a top speed limited to 155mph, but will average 75.1mpg and 99 g/km, and if you plug it in for two and a half hours you can run it purely electrically for 31 miles. Not cheap to develop, but all of this tech will be in BMW's production cars within five years.

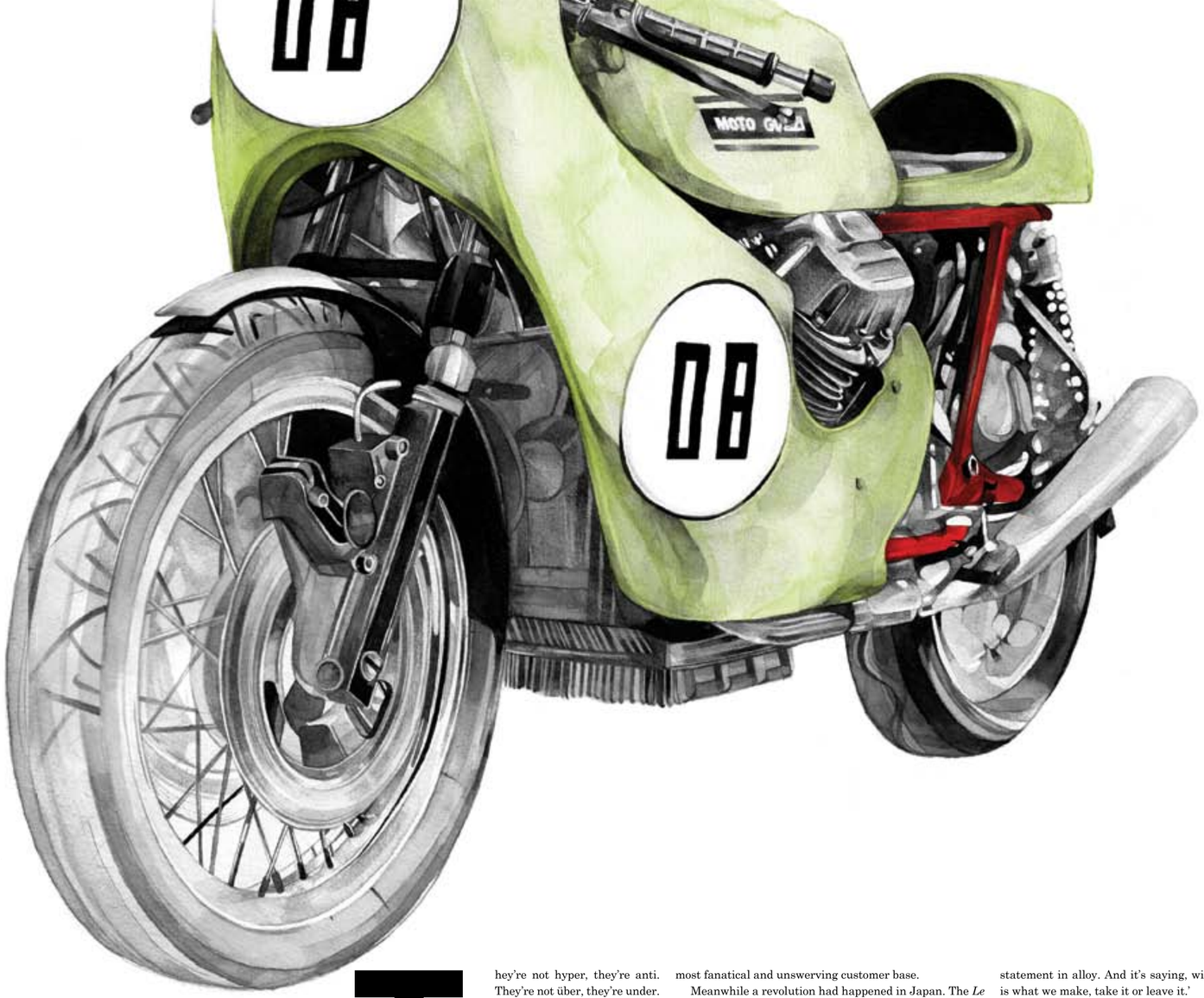
We might be waiting a while before they screw up again.

THE BEAUTIFUL SYMMETRY

WHAT LIES BEHIND MOTO GUZZI'S MUCH-LOVED LONGEVITY?

WORDS
Gary Inman

ILLUSTRATION
Kate Copeland



They're not hyper, they're anti. They're not über, they're under. Motorcycles born under the Eagle of *Mandello del Lario* are quirky, Italian V-twins. Ooh, nice, like a Ducati? Well… No.

It's true, both Ducati and Moto Guzzi have been marching to a different drum to the rest of motorcycling for over 40 years. The Bologna crew, however, parlayed their non-conformity from the preserve of the air-cooled pervert into the domain of six-figure-earning dentist. Guzzi, meanwhile, crawled from their well-respected niche into an obscure and dank crevice where they hunkered down, it seemed from the outside at least, to wither and die. Only recently has a torch been shone into their blinking eyes.

Guzzi are former Grand Prix world champions and awe-inspiring risk-takers. They built a 500cc, V8 Grand Prix racing motorcycle, after all, with a mould-green dustbin fairing. Guzzi were still making serious sports bikes when they released the *850 Le Mans II* in 1978. They were close enough to the cutting edge to have to wear safety goggles. So pleased were their research and development department with the manufacture of this true and enduring icon, they took a well-earned vacation. And forgot to return.

A decade or so later the motorcycles built on the banks of Lake Como had become an anomaly, surviving due to their most fanatical and unswerving customer base.

Meanwhile a revolution had happened in Japan. The *Le Mans* had grown to 1000cc, but blood-curdling superbikes like the Yamaha *FZR1000* now roamed the earth. Guzzi had turned up to a gunfight with a potato-masher. Even brand new Guzzis looked quaint and this was a time when the world didn't give a flying fig for heritage.

Eight-valve heads and obscure class wins at Daytona bought the Italians enough credence to be allowed to pitch their vision, but like film directors who'd gone too long without a hit, they were humoured more out of politeness than any serious respect.

Both Ducati and Moto Guzzi used to make all manner of machines: scooters, single-cylinder road bikes and tiddly trail bikes – but then chose to concentrate on one engine configuration. In Guzzi's case this was the across-the-frame V-twin. Guzzi's transverse V has two cylinders, angled at 90-degrees, like a Ducati, but instead of being inline with the wheels, Guzzi rotated their V so the cylinders are raised like Joshua's arms to heaven. It's as if a BMW boxer engine had decided to surrender.

The first of what is now regarded as Guzzi's trademark engine configuration appeared in the mid-sixties. The mini-renaissance they're enjoying would lead this observer to believe they'll stick with this configuration till the last drop of black gold has been wrung out of Mother Earth.

The engine architecture is almost brutalist in its design. The engine, with its flywheel right behind the front wheel and gearbox leading to a shaft drive, looks like it could haul a 7.5 tonne truck. Its sump, meanwhile, is as deep as the Mariana Trench. The current range's 1200cc motor is a statement in alloy. And it's saying, without apology, 'This is what we make, take it or leave it.'

Until very recently it had been over 30 years since a Guzzi had been anything but an after-thought in any sales arena you'd care to mention. They were still capable of building surprises, like the track-only *MGS-01* of 2002, but for the last decade, the burgeoning premium European market was squeezing so hard, Guzzi's pips squeaked on an hourly basis. Their former fellow fall guys Ducati were kicking sand in their face, and had been joined by a reborn Triumph, Aprilia, KTM, a reconstituted BMW Motorrad and half-a-dozen other Euro-chancers to stop Moto Guzzi getting more than its head above water. Guzzi is part of the Piaggio group, with Vespa and Aprilia, and while it gives a level of security, it also means they are the group's heritage and touring wing and are unable to stray into more modern design (a shame for any fans of the Terblanche concepts from a few years back).

But the tide is turning. Stick around long enough and people eventually notice. A few builders around the world had created Guzzi café racers, using old 850s and 1000s, well before alloy tanks and clip-ons came into vogue. Hipsters looking for authenticity eventually scanned through Tumblr feeds long enough to find recurring images of Guzzi specials. Now beanie-wearing creatives all over the globe are calling Guzzi's entry level *V7 Stone* (matt black, £6630, 95mph, 50bhp) and gaudier *V7 Racer* ,'rad'; positively stoked if their homeboy buys one. The recently reborn *California* tourer is receiving high critical praise, too. And I couldn't be happier for Guzzi. They deserve a resurgence, if only for the obstinacy.

It's a quality to admire in a motorcycle manufacturer

DREAMMAKER

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE POP-ARTIST OF SOCAL KUSTOM KULTURE

"Barris's ascent was like Tiepolo emerging from the studios of Venice, except that Barris emerged from the auto-body shops of Los Angeles"

A couple of years ago I flew into Los Angeles to report a story on southern California's unique, vibrant, influential car culture. Nearly half a century earlier a slightly more talented writer did the same thing. Tom Wolfe, who would go on to write *The Right Stuff* and *Bonfire of the Vanities,* was 32 years old and on his first assignment for *Esquire*. His brief was pretty much the same as mine: go out there, meet the guys building these extraordinary-looking hot rods and ask why 'kustom-kar kulture', as they like to spell it, took off in southern California and had such an impact on the wider culture, and whether the lumbering Detroit carmakers could learn from it.

It was a big deal for Wolfe. He panicked and got a terrible case of writer's block and just typed all his notes out in a long memo to his editor, Byron Dobell, who'd arranged for someone else to write the story. But once Wolfe relaxed, the easy, impressionistic style in which he wrote the notes made great reading. So Dobell just knocked the 'Dear Byron' off the top of the memo and ran the whole thing in the magazine. The story, 'The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby', is seen as one of the first examples of 'The New Journalism', even if Wolfe was panicking rather than consciously innovating as he wrote it, and it's one of the best things ever written about cars. I have a copy of the original 1963 *Esquire* on my desk as I write this, but you can buy the story in the Wolfe anthology of the same name, and there are a few other car- related classics in there too.

I wasn't trying to copy, outdo or update Wolfe's piece. There's no point. What he saw in '63, I saw last year: the great hot rod builders, like the great artists in their studios, building cars of the most perfect stance and proportion for those who could afford them (not cheap), but staying outside the automotive mainstream, with the big carmakers paying attention and doing what they can to capture some of that automotive mojo, but never quite getting it.

Counter cultures don't usually last fifty years, but this one has lasted even longer, and goes back to the end of the Second World War when GIs came home with a need for speed that the old Model A Fords they'd left behind couldn't satisfy. That energy mixed with the nascent LA art scene and the weather that encourages summer-night cruising certainly helped to create kustom kulture. It influenced so much: not just car design, but journalism – not just Wolfe's story, but half of America's big mainstream and modded car mags grew out of *Hot Rod* magazine – and music – Brian Wilson and Little Deuce Coupe – and film. George Lucas's first big flick, *American Graffiti*, is pretty much the perfect summation of that whole scene. Shot on a tight budget, it was riotously profitable. Lucas blew the proceeds on a film called *Star Wars*. You may have heard of it.

And astonishingly, the people haven't changed either. George Barris has been at the chromed hub of Cali's kustom kulture since before the GIs came home. He invented the name. Already, by the time Wolfe met him for his *Esquire* piece, he was "the biggest name in customizing", and a "solid little guy, five feet seven, 37 years old, and he looks just like Picasso". Wolfe liked the great artist analogy: Barris's ascent, he said, was like "Tiepolo emerging from the studios of Venice, except that Barris emerged from the auto-body shops of Los Angeles".

He was right to make the comparison. While the work of the other great hot rod builders, like Alex Xydias and Pete Chapouris of the famous SoCal Speedshop focused on pure, perfect automotive form, Barris and Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth pushed on into art, their cars as much free-form sculpture as transport. Roth died in 2001 but the still-productive Barris's vast canon of work now includes everything from subtle customisations for the Hollywood glitterati of the fifties to the *Batmobile* of the sixties and countless other movie cars. Detroit was paying attention, and still is. "I was amazed," Barris told Wolfe about his first trip to Detroit's design studios. "They could tell me about cars I built in 1945. And all this time we thought they frowned on us."

Artists like Barris and Roth could never work for corporate behemoths, so instead the global car industry came to them. The biggest change since Wolfe's story is that virtually every major carmaker now has a design studio in southern California, hoping that their overeducated young stylists will catch whatever it is that makes SoCal cars so great. There will probably never be another Barris type figure, anyhow, to inspire them.

Meanwhile Barris, at 86 looking like the well-aged pop star he is, keeps at it. To paraphrase William Shakespeare (if you haven't heard of him, think of him as the George Barris of literature):

"Age cannot wither him, nor kustom stale his infinite variety"...

WORDS
Ben Oliver

ILLUSTRATION
Anna Dunn

MEDITATION

SAM CHRISTMAS SHOWS HOW MOTORBIKES CAN MEAN SO MUCH

There's something meditative about fettling a motorcycle. Even if you're just pretending. You pass your eyes across the shanks of steel, the bolts, pipes, tubes; the clusters of cables, the plugs, filters and spigots. You can spend hours, days, weeks poking a spanner at the things without ever getting anywhere or really changing anything. But, nevertheless, it feels as if you are being creative, productive, somehow *worthy*.

Look long enough at a machine and something will begin to emerge in your mind. You'll begin to understand the beauty of the suck, the squeeze, the bang and the blow. It helps of course, if it's an older bike, in which the simplicity of internal combustion and two wheels makes ever so much sense. Mechanical codes are easier and more rewarding to decipher than those that are electronic. And once you've taken the time to know intimately the workings of a machine that, when tuned and working on song, gives you so much pleasure, it's understandable that a visceral relationship emerges.

It's this intimacy of man and machine that Sam Christmas set out to document in his recent project. *Natural Habitats* offers a look inside the UK's growing custom motorcycle scene. From complete amateur enthusiasts building bikes in their bedrooms to some of the best professional custom bike builders in the country, this series of pictures introduces many of the characters that form the scene, alongside their unique motorcycles and the spaces in which they work on them.

"Mechanical codes are easier and more rewarding to decipher than those that are electronic."

WORDS
Zachary Drake

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sam Christmas

A loving tribute to the working class hero from the banks of the Thames

An A12 Symphony

In 1986 a friend of mine purchased an outrageous Capri RS 3100. It changed my life. I lived a few streets back from the A12 in metropolitan Essex. In the wee small hours you could hear the beast racing from traffic light to roundabout and back again. Getting into that Capri was to commune with something essentially of its time. It was the carriage of a true Prince of Dagenham. The Capri, in all its guises, weaved a magic in the English imagination. And 40 years on from its release, that magic lives.

When is a Capri not a Capri?

All chrome, rake, fin and fake Americana, the Consul Capri was an understated, glamorous, if short-lived, precursor to the full-bloods that arrived in '69. My memory of these beauties remains a leather-glove-wearing sales rep who scandalised the bottom of our street for running away with his secretary to Majorca, abandoning his family forever. Doomed to be eclipsed by the toned-down Mk1 versions of Ford's mass market star the Cortina, it was slow, heavy and a little over-styled for its audience. That otiose rakishness, however, hinted at the future.

The True Beginning

Launched in January 1969 and marketed as "*the car you always promised yourself*", the Ford Capri MKI was unashamedly aimed at an emerging, style-conscious generation with a few quid in its pocket. From the outset the Capri was about choice, with a range boasting 26 derivatives. There was a broad sweep of engines and outputs – from the 1.3, 1.6 and 2.0-litre four-cylinder units to the 3-litre V6 at the top of the tree. For punters serious about their driving there was the Cologne-built RS2600 and the short-lived Halewood-built RS3100. Optional trim packages throughout the range allowed a degree of personal customisation that broke new ground in the industry.

MK II: Glam Rock and Fastbacks

A global oil crisis failed to slow the Capri's progress and by the mid-seventies the Capri had won a hardy and loyal following. Launching in '74 the Capri Mk II added a hatchback, a stubbier bonnet and other innovations such as reclining seats. An even broader range of spec was introduced too — as well as the cult hit the JPS limited edition, which referred to the successful Ford Cosworth-powered Lotus JPS F1 team. And, what's more, Ford harnessead the sales acumen of Jackie Stewart (and his wife), to promote its new baby. My mate Roy owned one in a stunning purple, with signage rendered in white pinlines. It came with a black vinyl roof and Roy was the dogs' whatsits, reeking of Kouros on a Friday night.

MK III: Thatcher's Children

Despite a winter of industrial discontent and a bonfire of the British economy's vanities, in 1978 the Capri MkIII arrived, with those familiar double front headlamps, hooded smokily by the bonnet. There was a new range of special editions, too, such as the brightly colour-coded Calypso and the Laser, the period-perfect edition with futurist accents. In 1981 Ford's Special Vehicle Engineering department opened at Dunton, a few miles along the A12 from Dagenham. Later that year the SVE team unveiled their first project, the 160bhp Capri 2.8 injection. This really was the Capri for Thatcher's generation. It was even more overtly aspirational and evocative, with its contemporary signage and design details, of the decade when greed was good.

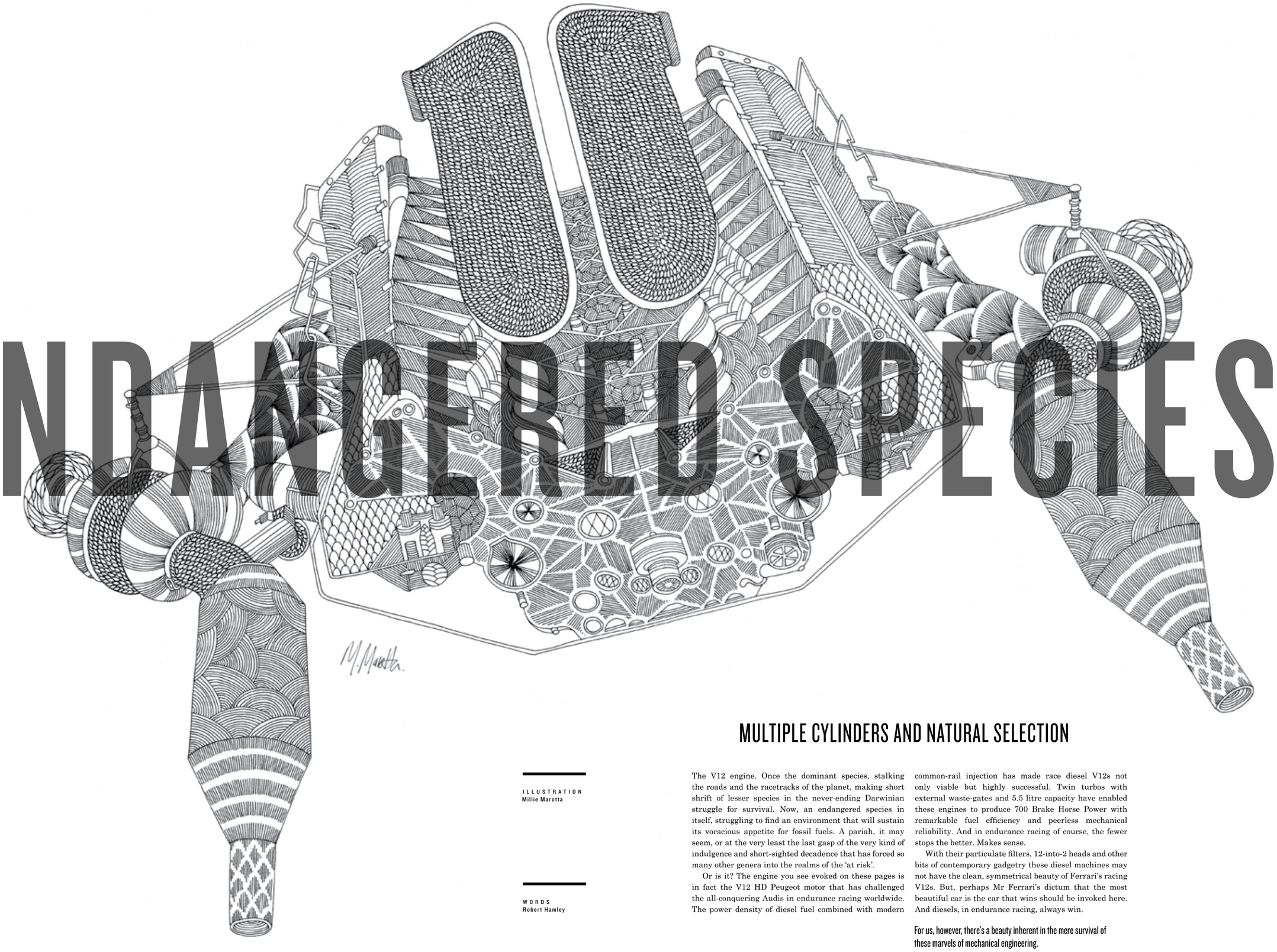
The Professionals

The worryingly detailed fan site mark-1.co.uk has tracked down all the significant cars to feature in *The Professionals*. It records the brief dalliance with British Leyland vehicles, before the unreliability of both the cars and the company got them the boot. It's the silver and bronze, quad-headlamp MkIIIs that CI5 agents Bodie and Doyle are most associated with, and which sealed the Capri's reputation as the working class bloke's transport of choice. The image the Capri ended up with was a world away from the one Ford probably hoped for when it named its new coupe after a *dolce vita* Italian seaside resort. Bodie and Doyle epitomised an era when men were men, women were birds, bathing was optional and moisturiser unheard of. They thought nothing of spending all afternoon in the boozer before roaring off to the next cheaply staged action scene in a Capri. The cars got plenty of camera time and spent much of it sideways,

WORDS
Keith Curwood

ILLUSTRATION
Eve Lloyd Knight

"Bodie and Doyle sealed the Capri's reputation as the working class bloke's transport of choice.."



ENDANGERED SPECIES?

ILLUSTRATION
Millie Marotta

WORDS
Robert Hamley

MULTIPLE CYLINDERS AND NATURAL SELECTION

The V12 engine. Once the dominant species, stalking the roads and the racetracks of the planet, making short shrift of lesser species in the never-ending Darwinian struggle for survival. Now, an endangered species in itself, struggling to find an environment that will sustain its voracious appetite for fossil fuels. A pariah, it may seem, or at the very least the last gasp of the very kind of indulgence and short-sighted decadence that has forced so many other genera into the realms of the 'at risk'.

Or is it? The engine you see evoked on these pages is in fact the V12 HD Peugeot motor that has challenged the all-conquering Audis in endurance racing worldwide. The power density of diesel fuel combined with modern common-rail injection has made race diesel V12s not only viable but highly successful. Twin turbos with external waste-gates and 5.5 litre capacity have enabled these engines to produce 700 Brake Horse Power with remarkable fuel efficiency and peerless mechanical reliability. And in endurance racing of course, the fewer stops the better. Makes sense.

With their particulate filters, 12-into-2 heads and other bits of contemporary gadgetry these diesel machines may not have the clean, symmetrical beauty of Ferrari's racing V12s. But, perhaps Mr Ferrari's dictum that the most beautiful car is the car that wins should be invoked here. And diesels, in endurance racing, always win.

For us, however, there's a beauty inherent in the mere survival of these marvels of mechanical engineering.

SOICHIRO HONDA: JAPAN'S EDISON

WORDS
Ben Oliver

ILLUSTRATION
Joe Wilson

THE MAN WHO CREATED THE HONDA COMPANY NEVER ACCEPTED THE STATUS QUO, AND PUSHED FORWARD WITH THE POWER OF DREAMS...

Dictatorship has fallen out of fashion recently. But there's no doubt that it's the best way to build great cars, and from great cars build a successful car business. We're talking an enlightened, benevolent despotism here, but let's be in no doubt: you need one guy at the top, with an utterly clear, focussed picture of what he wants to create, intolerant of the blurring and compromise and greyness that big organisations inflict on even the best ideas. What great car was ever created by a bureaucracy? Not one.

And how many are inextricably linked with the man who made them, and had the authority to execute his ideas without interference? Ford and his Model T. Ettore Bugatti, and everything he ever made. Porsche and the Beetle. Alec Issigonis and the Mini. Gordon Murray and the McLaren F1. Ferdinand Piech and the entire Volkswagen empire, which will probably soon be the largest carmaker in the world. And Soichiro Honda, and the Honda Super Cub. Eh?

Honda's founder might not be as closely associated with one car as the other titans of the automotive industry. But his scooter is the best-selling vehicle of all time with over 60 million produced. It has easily outsold the most popular car, the Toyota Corolla, of which around 40 million have been made, but which has been constantly reinvented. The world's obsession with cars means we've neglected Soichiro's influence, but he put more of the world on wheels – and for less – than any of the great carmakers.

Just as importantly, the company he created is still shot through with his restless engineering creativity. Today Honda makes everything from that Super Cub to private jets, a direct reflection of the wide-ranging obsessions of its founder. Honda wasn't just an engineer, but a painter, potter and pilot too. He got it from his Dad, Gihei, a blacksmith who moonlighted in amateur dentistry, and his Mum, a weaver who had plainly missed her vocation as an engineer and modified her loom for better performance.

Young Soichiro spent so much time in his father's forge that he was nicknamed 'the black-nosed weasel' (it sounds like less of an insult in Japanese). He famously ran after the first car he ever saw, and, as it roared away from him, fell to his knees to sniff a spot of oil it had dropped. Aged 11, he 'borrowed' some of the house-keeping money and his father's bicycle and rode 20 miles to see a display by an American pilot in an early aircraft, and, when the money he'd pinched proved insufficient to buy a ticket, he climbed a tree to get a better view.

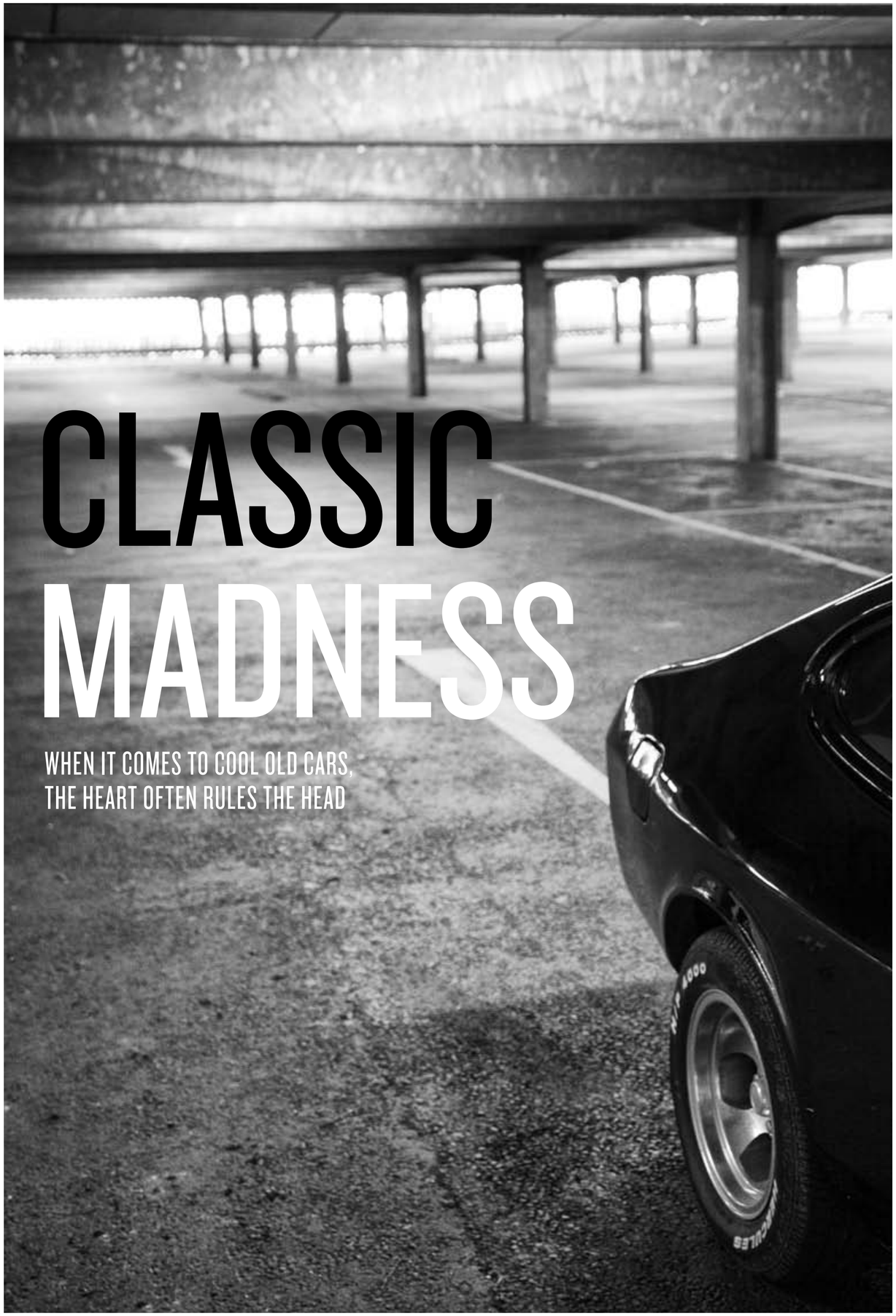
Maybe the world should have known then. An apprenticeship at an early Tokyo car dealership followed; Soichiro ended up as the 'riding mechanic' on the owner's aircraft-engined racing car, for which he would machine parts from scratch. Working for someone else didn't suit him for long, and at 21 he left to start his own dealership. But he was more interested in invention than business; first came a new design of a spoked wheel, the proceeds of which bought him a Harley Davidson and a speedboat.

Then he decided he was going to improve the design of piston rings, so he enrolled in night school to learn metallurgy. As they expelled him for not taking a note or sitting an exam, he was using the knowledge he had absorbed to found a business he would shortly sell to Toyota. And then, as Japan entered the war, it was aircraft propellers; Honda's new production process cut the manufacturing time from a week to fifteen minutes. All this by the age of 33, remember. Soon they were calling him the Edison of Japan.

He started the Honda Motor Company in 1948, and you probably know the rest. It began with anaemic motorised bicycles; the Super Cub is called Super because it was significantly more powerful than the weedy efforts it superseded from 1958. Honda took on a partner, Takeo Fujisawa, to handle business, which he claimed to be no good at, despite a series of successful start-ups. But it was Fujisawa who steered the young Honda Motor Company through a series of financial crises and into the relative stability that funded Soichiro's continued 'dreaming'.
It was motorsport next; Honda won its first TT in 1961 after just three attempts and its first Grand Prix in its second season in 1965.

Soichiro might have professed to be uninterested in business, but he won't have been unaware of the impact these victories had on the way the world viewed Honda. They instantly set it apart from Toyota, and made those of us who want our cars and bikes to be something more than affordable and reliable – but affordable and reliable too – want a Honda. Whether you're a fully paid up Hondamentalist or a wizened sceptic of all the values he represented, you have to acknowledge the man's vision.

Soichiro Honda died in 1992. His ideas didn't.



CLASSIC MADNESS

WHEN IT COMES TO COOL OLD CARS, THE HEART OFTEN RULES THE HEAD

"Nostalgia is a big part of it, regardless of how far back you look or how old you are. It's all the same emotion, of harking back to better days, regardless of whether they were actually better or not."

"Oh please take me for a spin around the block, Steve," squealed Liisa, our friend and host for the evening. Steve had arrived at Liisa and Mark's house in his classic '64 Sunbeam Alpine convertible which was only fired up on extremely sunny days; so not very often. Which was fortunate, as I had seen the sweat and tears that usually accompanied the whole starting procedure.

I had arrived in my far-from-classic Audi A3. I like my car a lot. It goes very well, rarely has any problems, has air-con and fuel injection and starts first time, every time. Steve's Sunbeam, on the other hand, always had problems, the air-con was the roof, off, and it never started first time – sometimes not at all. But he loves it, probably more than I love my Audi.

What is this madness that makes normally sane people become irrational about a car simply because it's old? Maybe it has nothing to do with its age, but how it looks. Maybe, like the one-eyed, three-legged dog in an animal rescue centre, you simply have to take it home and dedicate your life to it, nursing it along for other reasons, rational or otherwise. Perhaps owning a classic is a charitable act, keeping old dogs alive. I asked Steve later when we were all sat round the table. "I'd always wanted one, ever since I was a kid," he told us. And that's an answer many classic owners will offer, be it about a historic classic, classic or modern classic.

And therein lies the big question: what makes a classic a classic? For road tax purposes, anything registered before 1973 is tax exempt and regarded as a classic. (That's the year I was born. Why can't I be tax exempt?) According to HM Revenue and Customs, anything over 15 years old is regarded as a classic, meaning the cars I grew up with, like the Opel Manta, the Sierra XR4i, Renault 5 Turbo, are all classics too.

But be very careful to whom you say that. Peter Skinner of the Karmann Ghia Owners Club has his own reasons for loving old dogs: "I'm an engineer and like engineering solutions. For me the Karmann Ghia, like the Beetle it's based upon, is a wonderful tour de force of engineering."

Now this makes sense to me. The Beetle was indeed ahead of its time in terms of functional engineering solutions. "I'm interested in how the designers arrived at these engineering solutions," Skinner continues. "The Beetle was a clever, utilitarian solution." But then the classic madness appears: "But I do also own a Citroën DS which, in comparison, is a dog's breakfast underneath; a heap of crap that won't start either. But I love them for it." Oh dear, and it was going so well...

Graham Searle, who runs the Jaguar Enthusiast Club, has owned over 60 Jags, and there's nothing his doctor can do for him either. His reasoning for the one-eyed, three-legged dog ownership stands up a little more simply because, well, they're Jags. "Jaguars were automatically called a classic when they were made," he says. "But what really defines a classic is far from tangible. There are official definitions of 'classic' but everyone has their own meaning. For me it was those childhood memories, the strongest memories, of a neighbour's MkII Jag.

"Nostalgia is a big part of it, regardless of how far back you look or how old you are. It's all the same emotion, of harking back to better days, regardless of whether they were actually better or not. Classics are different. Modern cars all look alike. They're boring. I remember when snooker in the UK was in its heyday and there was the boring but brilliant Steve Davis, with seemingly little charm or personality. And at the other end of the spectrum was the obnoxious, arrogant, unreliable Hurricane Higgins. But it was the one who had the character, or rather the character flaws, that was the most interesting."

Steve Garret, owner of a mint 1980 Escort XR3i, always to be found polishing it in his drive down the road from my house, also talks about the nostalgia: "I grew up watching the bloke across the road polishing his XR3i and dreaming of one day owning one. I didn't realise it'd take over 25 years before I would." And his car is nearly 30 years old now, so it must a classic, right? "Of course it is," he says, "regardless of anyone else's definition, this is my classic right here, because I have the same feelings of nostalgia for it as Old Charlie and his Austin Healey. It's no different. And just look at it..."

Car manufacturers from Ford to Ferrari are still trying to reassemble the DNA in the right order to create the same emotions this car did when it was launched. And they're struggling – even the boys at Maranello. In fact the more intense the nostalgia the harder it is to recreate.

That evening, at Mark and Liisa's, came to a close and Steve offered to drop me home, as I had been drinking. Foolishly he'd parked the Sunbeam nose first on a slope, where he needed to back-up. It was about 11.30pm, in a densely populated residential estate. The cacophony of noise as he repeatedly attempted to start the car and keep it from bogging down and stalling as he attempted a reverse hill start, was embarrassing, to say the least.

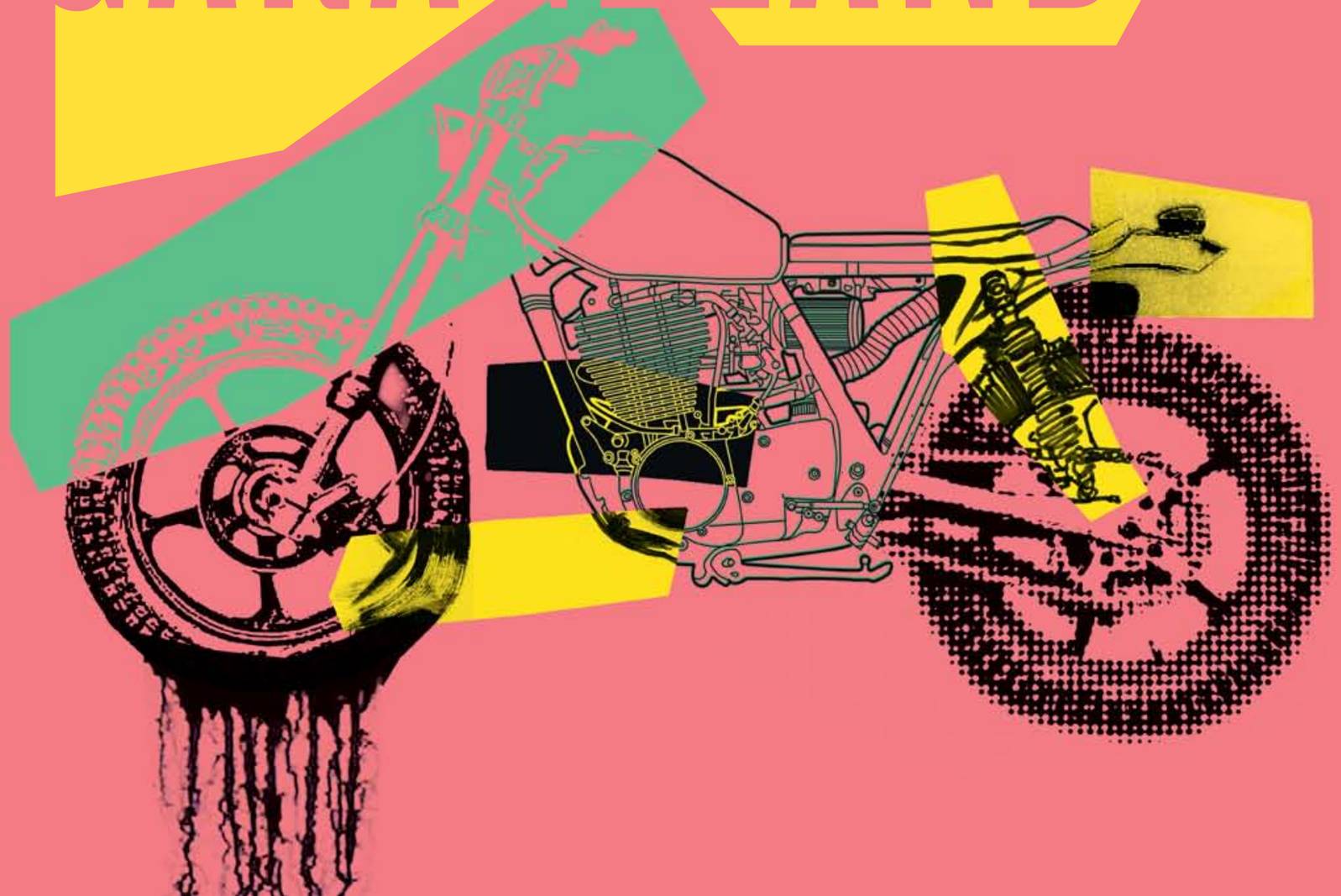
After ten minutes, now illuminated by the numerous windows around us, each filled with a curious and weary face, he managed to back out of the space. Another five minutes of bicep pumping 20 point turns, and we popped and banged away with a wave, amidst a chorus of cheers. And not angry cheers, but amused and probably pitying cheers. Five minutes later I watched him roar away. I found myself muttering, "I'd love one of those."

I immediately went inside and repeatedly slammed my head in a cupboard door until the madness had gone.

WORDS
Rich Beach

PHOTOGRAPHY
John Issac

WE COME FRUM GARAGELAND



INFUX LOOKS AT THE HANDS-ON, LEATHERS-OFF SCENE RIPPLING AROUND THE BIKING GLOBE

"This isn't a cult whose basis is performance oneupmanship. Creativity and originality is what pushes the boundaries and attracts the four-figure Facebook 'likes'"

WORDS
Gary Inman

ILLUSTRATION
Mickey Boy G

Three chords. Crap equipment. Not much talent. Lots of enthusiasm. Young men and women have been in garage bands since skiffle was The Next Big Thing, but it was only during the wave of 1977 punk that the garage bands broke big.

Top-selling punks may not have had the same skills as the Stones or Fleetwood Mac, but they offered an alternative that was lapped up. A similar revolution is happening in motorcycle customisation.

In the same way as the original punk rockers often said they were rebelling against the overblown excesses of ten-minute guitar solos and prog rock, the new generation of custom builders are the antithesis of American Chopper's fat-tyred monstrosities, and showrooms full of traction-controlled superbikes. And, though the movement started before the global meltdown, its growth has mirrored the fall in sales of big ticket bikes.

The new-wave customs are neither chopper nor café racer, but they borrow cues from all genres. They tend to start with unloved, cheap Japanese bikes – though the burgeoning scene is sending prices of air-cooled, spine-framed Japanese stuff roofward. Anything from the 1970s onwards is fair game. Singles, twins, fours; two-stroke or four; Jap, Brit, German, Italian; animal, vegetable or mineral. This isn't a cult whose basis is performance oneupmanship. Creativity and originality is what pushes the boundaries and attracts the four-figure Facebook 'likes'.

One reason this style of custom is becoming so popular is due to the fact they're relatively easy and cheap projects to complete by someone, anyone, with a few spanners. You don't even need a garage to be in this garage band. Inspired hopefuls see bikes being fawned over on the net and, like a thousand oiks of previous generations watching *Top of the Pops* in the late 70s, think 'I could do that.'

Wheels, brakes and suspension can be changed, but aren't always. Rake, trail and wheelbase all tend to remain the same. No one is building one-off frames or investing in forced induction or race tuning. Replace the tank, seat and bars with stuff picked up cheap online or at the auto jumble. Paint is simple or nonexistent. Steel or alloy tanks stripped bare and lacquered or left to 'weather' are popular. Next, junk standard airboxes and exhausts and fit filters and new silencers. If you're more adept, make a new sub-frame for the stripped-down back end. Fit new tyres – chunky is best – and a tiddly taillight. Voila! But, like a punk band, however much you sneer and spit, if you haven't got the chops you are going to fail. For the garage-built bike scene, if the stance of bike is off-kilter, it'll still look like an unloved bike with a rusty petrol tank and knobblies, however hard you try. There are plenty of those around.

The godfathers of the scene are the Wrenchmonkees. Based in a cellar in the outskirts of Copenhagen, they modified a trio of big, four-cylinder Kawasakis back in 2008, before moving onto twins and singles. It's no coincidence that two of the original trio of Wrenchmonkees were professional photographers.

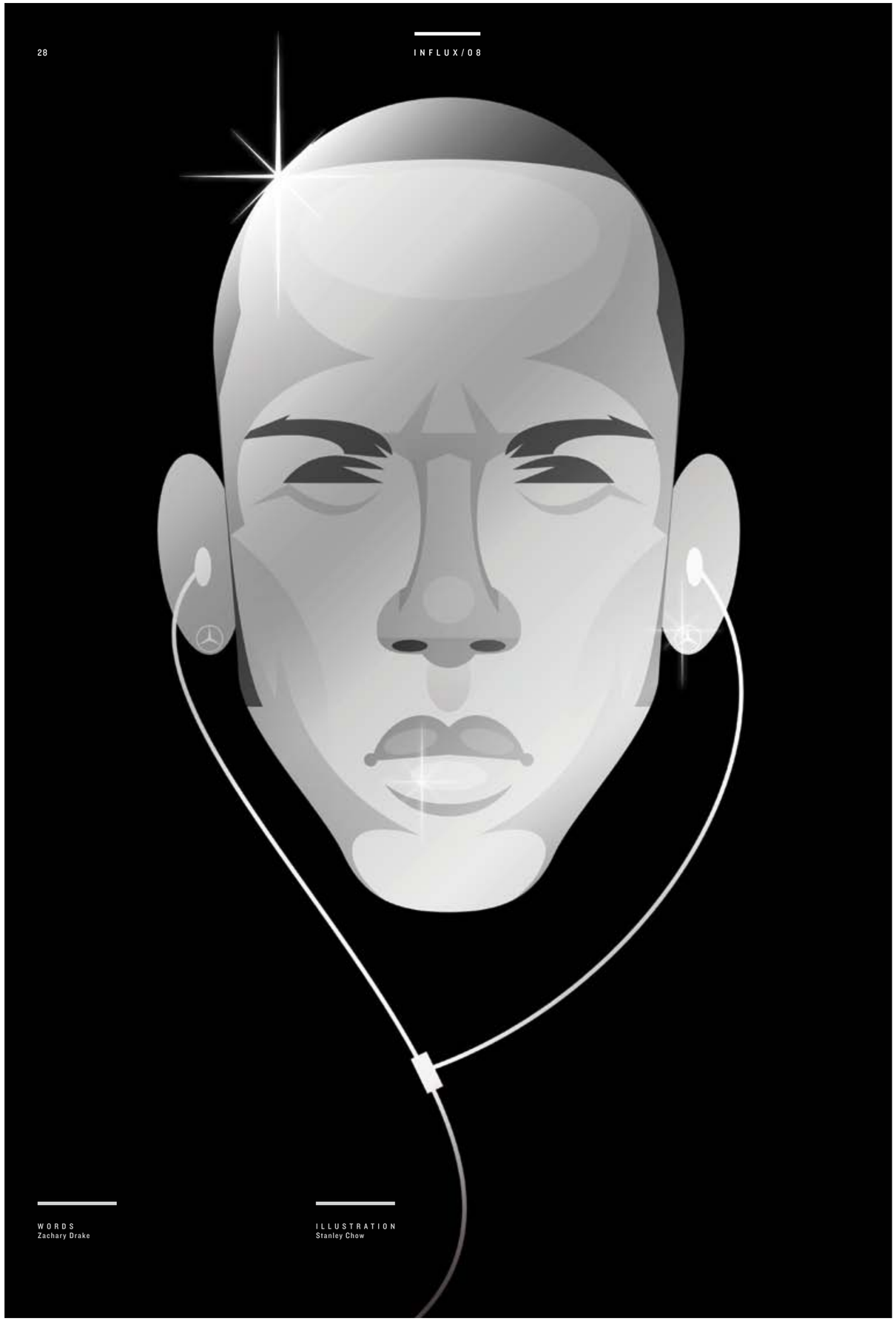
They shot and disseminated their tough street bikes in a fresh, urban style. The Monkees themselves – Per, Nicolas and Anders – didn't look like stereotypical motorcyclists from any pigeonhole, either. They wore a gene-defying mixture of mountaineering Gore-Tex, full-face lids, dark jeans and skateboard shoes, and rode in cities, not the unrealistically empty racetracks of mainstream bike ads.

A new generation of motorcyclists saw them on a new generation of website – blogs that would cherry-pick inspirational images from all over the web and mash these images of bikes up with architecture, art, cars, tattooed femmes and historic style icons. The Wrenchmonkees didn't look out of place.

Coincidentally, Deus puffed spores of goodness from their sweet-smelling Sydney HQ. Though not garage-built, their big-dollar Yamaha SR500-based builds were close to faultless and had a cleanliness only a truly well-built road bike can achieve. They've influenced a thousand builders from Beijing to Bristol, some who copy on the cheap, others who have moved the game on.

People who wouldn't dream of wearing full leathers and riding a superbike or pulling on a cut-off denim and riding a chopper didn't need the old certainties of the superannuated bike scene. They realised there was a bike scene waiting for them.

THEY JUST HAD TO MAKE IT FOR THEMSELVES.



WORDS
Zachary Drake

ILLUSTRATION
Stanley Chow

SILVER STREAK

BLOOD OATHS BETRAYED AND SCORES TO SETTLE?

Think about Lewis Hamilton. Just for a moment. In the rarified inner sanctum of the motorsport establishment the rants in the *Mail on Sunday* seem a little pinko and limp-wristed. It is a place populated with men in Gucci loafers in motorhomes that cost twice as much as the Stevenage council house in which he was raised. Yes, he's from Stevenage. Yes, he grew up in a council estate. But you know that. You know also that he's the progeny of the sort of family that doesn't frequent the high-net-worth set. His raw talent was nurtured by a man, the son of a Grenadian immigrant family, who juggled redundancy, three jobs and self-employment to provide the context for his prodigy and his other, less-advantaged children. You know the story.

When he was eight you saw him impressing *Blue Peter* presenters with his preternatural control of radio-controlled cars. You watched while he rose through the ranks, made the sticky summit ahead of the other young guns in karts, the monstrously gleaming eyes of their pushy parents drilling through his precociousness. You've seen him handle the glare of the media's lens with icy aplomb, giving just the right amount of a hint that something lay beyond, something behind both the shades and the shuttered eyes and that strangely neutral repose. Even when he has let his aggression escape, when he's tried one too many audacious overtakes, when he's defensively weaved, jinked that wheel a little too hard and let something spill to the TV crews outside the paddock, he's managed to reel it in. But there's something you might not have noticed. Something of the requisite fire that took this nowhere kid to the top end of the grid and to the World F1 championship hasn't been extinguished. Not even the vacuum-sealed, carbon-fibred sheen of McLaren's media-training regime has been able to hide a simple fact: Lewis really is a little bit badass. And that's why we love him.

Whether or not there is a genuinely dark heart beating somewhere in the erstwhile McLaren golden boy has been one of the dividing axes in the world of F1 ever since he appeared on the scene. There may or may not be a barely veiled racist attitude at the heart of this almost ubiquitous suspicion. Perhaps the wariness is a typically British sense of class propriety at work. Either way, the fact that the Woking-based company has teased Hamilton's talent out of its seedbed and augmented that rawness with a very effective veneer of professional cool, has seemed to make everything about Hamilton just about all right. But the fact that the team, who last year nosed ahead of *Scuderia Ferrari* at the head of Grand Prix wins, and who celebrate, ironically, their 50th year in business this season, has had to say goodbye to all that potential only fans the flames of the debate once more. It's as if the favoured son has betrayed a blood oath. It's a game changer.

Many have, predictably, questioned Hamilton's motives in his move to Mercedes. There has been talk of image-rights deals being prioritised over the presence of a race winning car, the demonic puppetry of talent wrangler Simon Fuller behind the scenes. There have been murmurings of internecine shifts and fratricidal attacks at Woking itself (and at time of writing the defection of Paddy Lowe, McLaren's technical director, has just been announced). But in reality, Hamilton's move to the Silver Arrow is exactly the sort of dramatic change of direction we might have expected for a driver so deft at aggressive jostling for position.

"He is clearly a very talented driver but Formula One is about so much more. There are a lot of highly talented drivers who don't have the rest of it, but I think he has got the rest of it as well." Ross Brawn sketched out to the BBC exactly why he wanted Lewis Hamilton at the heart of his emerging Mercedes set-up. "He is interested in everything about the car. He is interested in the fact the stickers might not be put properly on the bodywork. He has got a very good eye for detail. I think he is going to be a very involved member of the team, which is what we wanted."

But there is, of course, more than the PR-led reasons for wanting Hamilton as your pilot, apart from that irreducible talent and that attention for detail noted by Brawn. There are very notable parallels and precedents in the history of top-level motorsport to what has happened here. In 1937 the dominant Mercedes works team (effectively sponsored, of course, by the Nazi regime) controversially signed British gentleman driver Richard Seaman, causing a step-change in British motorsport. Sixteen years later Stirling Moss drove a Mercedes to victory at Aintree, thereby becoming the first British driver to win a British Grand Prix. The fact that it was in a Mercedes only added to the frisson. There is energy in controversy, useful kinesis in putting noses out of joint.

Look at the new Lewis Hamilton. Those ear studs might not be made of the three-pointed star, but there's a harder edge to him these days. He's a little less groomed, a little less kempt. The smile still blossoms easily in the interviews. But there's a burlier, edgier aspect to the way he presents himself. It may be simple maturity or a new sense of purpose.

Or it may be a new, steely determination to show the bastards.

"Not even the vacuum-sealed, carbon-fibred sheen of the McLaren media-training regime has been able to hide a simple fact: Lewis really is a little bit badass."

ADRIAN FLUX / THE FIFTH DECADE

There is a lot of nonsense spoken about passionate family businesses out there. People selling everything from locally produced cabbages to hand-wrought armchairs; from the rare-breed sausages on your plate to the organic, hand-reared milk in your tea: locally sourced, hand-made, personal service is a marketing buzzword that has veered over into cliché. So the idea that an insurance broker can hug these contemporary values may seem, at first sight, to be far-fetched. But the thing with Adrian Flux is that they have been doing exactly this for forty years. And as the UK's largest specialist motor insurance broker approaches the threshold of its fifth decade the people who populate the company are as passionate as ever about the cars, the bikes and the people it covers. You know what they say – middle age is not what it was.

Adrian Flux began its journey in 1973, when the burgeoning craze for kit cars and the boom in the market for vehicles for disabled motorists left a gap in the market. Mr Flux was one of the earliest specialist arrangers of cover for this new, difficult-to-categorise group of people. Word of mouth of the company's ability to find the right sort of insurance for the right sort of customer spread quickly. The sort of folk who got into the kit car craze being probably the most passionately petrol-headed people out there, it wasn't long before the wider world of cool, classic, creative and customised vehicles was drawn into the company's remit. Fast forward to 2013 and the company now employs over 600 staff at its HQ near King's Lynn and Adrian Flux caters for almost every type of vehicle imaginable - from supercars to classics, modified vehicles, four wheel drives and everything in between.

The real difference between this company and the wealth of others who will offer you cover is the people at the heart of the operation. Rather than just take as gospel what the computer churns out, Flux's specialist underwriters will use their experience and a vast range of specially-negotiated schemes to find a policy that suits an incredibly broad range of customers' needs at a price they can afford. Pick up the phone to Flux and you'll speak to a fully rounded human being – one who knows the huge variety of possibilities available to you inside and out and will go the extra mile to get it right, just for you.

At the heart of this energy is the fact that the Flux family has been fervently engaged in the world of classic, performance and customised cars ever since the company's birth – and the way of seeing cars as being much more than simply ways and means of getting from A to B has filtered down from the senior management to call centre staff and at every level between.

Specialist schemes run by Adrian Flux include discounted rates for Fords, BMWs, Porsches, Audis, Beetles and Minis, plus many more, with special rates for young drivers, drivers with convictions and people in the entertainment industry. There are, in fact, very few niche areas where Flux cannot offer cover, whether you drive the latest Bugatti or a heavily customised hatchback.

In the current market, where the average car insurance premium is rising fast, it's more vital than ever that motorists shop around for the best deal - and in many cases this means looking beyond the comparison websites. Picking up the phone and speaking to a specialist broker can potentially save you hundreds of pounds, with underwriters trained to assess risks on an individual basis.

Join the Adrian Flux family. We've cared about your car from the very beginning.

THE INFLUX TIMELINE

/ 01

Our first issue was an exotic collection of tall tales and killer images; dispatches from the global reach of car culture including stories of used-car dealers in Dakar, Popemobiles, fake GT40s and Ferrari F50s. There is reportage, also, on road racing in South Africa and the mentalist van culture of Japan's *Bōzuzōku*.

/ 02

That 'difficult second edition' included stories on ill-conceived concepts and show cars like the Fisker *Tramonto* and Nissan's *Terranaut*. We looked at an Arizona road trip, kids in drag and self-build caravans. Artist and filmmaker Sam Taylor-Wood, meanwhile showed us her Maserati.

/ 03

For this extensively redesigned issue we had the tough task of touring Europe's classic road circuits in a Ferrari F430 *Spider*. We paid homage to the Citroën brand, took a look back to the madness of Group B rally and met a shaka of surfers and their wagons.

/04

In this issue we took the theme of futurism and went to meet the stunning and epoch-making Pininfarina *Modulo*. We looked back at the life of Ayrton Senna, met the passionate members of the National Association for Bikers with a Disability and the F1 WAGs of the 1960s.

/ 05

In Jaguar's anniversary year we spent rare time with the original Jaguar XJ13 and its legendary test engineer Norman Dewis. We covered the class-structural sweep of English Iron and reminisced about Brit biker hero Barry Sheene. To round off a flag-waving issue we spent some time at Bentley's Pyms Lane plant.

/ 06

We gathered classic supercars together and worried that these would be the last of the breed, we met San Francisco biker club the East Bay Rats, prostrated ourselves to the design genius that is Giorgetto Giugiaro and visited the stunning tech of the Paul Ricard circuit.

/ 07

In a move to the bijou but cute minizine format we discovered the eight principles of a classic car, visited the Le Mans classic and hung out with bike photographer Scott Pommier and legend of automotive advertising Art Fitzpatrick. This people-focussed edition also includes knight of the road Stirling Moss, TT legend, Joey Dunlop, and Malcolm, the Mini fancier of Somerset.

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