

DASHING



Salvatore Ferragamo and Michael Quinn pilot a Jaguar C-Type through the Italian countryside during the 2013 Mille Miglia.

## TOUR DE FORCE

**THE RAKE** joins David Gandy, Jodie Kidd and our friends at Jaguar as the quintessential British car marque celebrates its 80th birthday by taking a stellar driving team to the 2015 edition of the Mille Miglia in Italy.

by **nick scott**

For those who get a rush from the smell of an oily rag, the appeal of the Mille Miglia — the annual, 1,000-mile, open-road heritage car rally that scales the length and breadth of Italy — lies mostly in the cars: a collection just shy of 400 automotive gems, effectively crowd-curated by the most informed heritage car buffs on the planet. We're talking Jaguars, Alfa Romeos, Mercedes, BMWs, Ferraris, Bentleys, Bugattis and Aston Martins, none built after 1957, cherry-picked from the world's finest private, corporate and national collections.



Piero Taruffi crosses the finishing line in first place, ahead of Wolfgang Von Trips, in 1948.

For others, the life-enriching beauty of the event lies in the majesty of the surrounds in which it takes place: not just the sublime Italian countryside, through which contestants snake for a thousand miles over four days, but the conurbations, many sprinkled liberally with crumbling antiquity, through which the route passes. On day one, participants set off from Brescia, a saturnalia of heritage monuments nestling at the foot of the Alps, just outside Lake Garda and Lake Iseo, and make for Verona — an elegantly dilapidated city that claims to have more Roman ruins than any Italian city bar Rome — before pressing on with the 160-mile journey to the fashionable Adriatic coast party resort of Rimini.

The route also takes in the gentle, lush contours of the north-eastern side of the Apennine Mountains, via the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Monte Titano — the top of which is the highest point in the country — and on to central Italy's Macerata, with its vast 1820s open-air neoclassical arena. The vineyards and olive groves become noticeably more abundant as the route winds down through *il meridione d'Italia*, via the hillside-clinging towns of Teramo and Rieti before reaching the southernmost point of the race: Rome, where contestants warm their faces in the mild Mediterranean climate and their souls in the classical antiquity and Renaissance and Baroque magnificence before turning around and heading back north. It's a route that indulges both the civic-splendour lover and the pastoral aesthete.

For motorsport history buffs, Mille Miglia is all about the event's heritage. Brescia itself was hosting Goodwood-style events on its ring roads as early as 1899 (these later evolved into the week-long 'Settimane Automobilistiche Bresciane', which attracted automotive moguls such as Gianni Agnelli, Vincenzo Lancia and Vincenzo Florio. The Mille Miglia itself was originally a road race (it's now strictly referred to as a 'regularity trial', meaning you're supposed to arrive at checkpoints with precision timing). Held in any conflict-free year in the decades after 1927, it was dominated largely by Alfa Romeo in the pre-war years and Ferrari in the post-war era. Miffed at the Italian domination, in 1955 Mercedes sauntered up to the line boasting four straight-eight-cylinder 300 SLRs and a glittering team of drivers, including Juan Manuel Fangio and Stirling Moss.

That year — 60 years ago (the occasion was marked with misty-eyed respect at this year's event) — a 25-year-old Stirling Moss, accompanied by 34-year-old motorsport journalist Denis Jenkinson, set out from Brescia early in the morning in a Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR sports car on its debut race and returned just 10 hours, 7 minutes and 48 seconds, three minor crashes, two tyre changes and zero repairs later. To this day it is the most iconic single-day's drive in motor racing history.

Now things had got so much tastier on the speed front, it was only a matter of time before death would barge its way into the mix, along with all the glamour and glory: the event was outlawed in 1957 after swashbuckling Spanish jockey, driver, playboy and nobleman Alfonso de Portago got a puncture in his Ferrari 335S in the village of Guidizzolo and leapt into a ditch, killing himself, his co-driver and a group of spectators, taking the event's death toll to 56 people in 24 races over 30 years. The resuscitated version of the race, Mille Miglia Storica, began in 1977. Essentially an annual re-enactment, it has attracted contestants including Prince Michael of Kent, Jay Leno and Jeremy Irons, and cars including a Jaguar XKSS owned by Steve McQueen and a Ferrari 166 MM owned by Agnelli in the early 1950s.



Clockwise from top left: David Gandy and Jodie Kidd tinker with the engine; in a Jaguar XK120 Roadster; and behind the wheel.



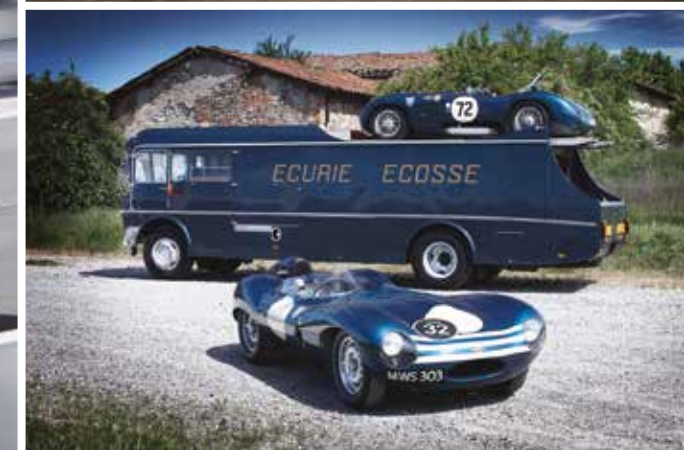
In this year's event, David — well known in Italy since the first Dolce & Gabbana Light Blue campaign — was invited by Jaguar to do the circuit in a 1953 XK120 Roadster accompanied by the presenter of Channel 5's *Classic Cars Show*, Jodie Kidd. The car was part of a line-up that also included three C-types, three D-types, another XK120 and an XK140. The Jaguar driver line-up also included British musician Elliot Gleave (whose stage name is Example); classic car expert Simon Kidston; five-time Le Mans 24hr winner Derek Bell; Royal Automobile Club motoring committee chairman Ben Cussons; and Jaguar's Design Director, Ian Callum.

It was a formidable team, and it needed to be: as David points out, although the rally takes place over days rather than hours now, it remains anything but a stroll in the park. "It can be very scary," he laughs. "You're in a pre-1957 car, without A.V.S. or any safety features; you're negotiating cliff faces with 400-foot drops; you've got lorries flying down the hills. You have to have a lot of trust in your co-driver. They are the ones who have to decide, in a right-hand drive car, when it's appropriate to overtake — you put your whole life in their hands. There are hills in Tuscany where the driver cannot see a thing. You trust your co-driver to have calculated what might or might not be coming, the traffic in front of you. Our maverick driving could be very scary to many people — however, we both have our racing licences and a very similar driving style."

Despite the relatively leisurely nature of today's Mille, it does hark back to an era when motorsport drivers were gentleman mechanics. Of course, we're not talking Fangio, stranded in the Andes, drunk on altitude sickness, fixing a pierced radiator with lead-made molten using a candle (this actually happened, at the 6,000-mile Gran Premio Internacional del Norte in 1940), but David believes the event fosters a profound relationship between cars and drivers. "I'm not going to tell you for an instant that if that car had broken down I'd have had a clue how to fix it," he says, "but I definitely get to know the heritage cars I drive better



Clockwise from top left: Elliot Gleave (a.k.a. English rapper Example) and his father, Michael, in a Jaguar XK140; a Jaguar C-Type at full throttle; a second C-Type driven by Mike Cross and Mikey Harvey; the 1951 Ecurie Ecosse XK120 Roadster was a star performer in the 2014 Mille Miglia; a C-Type piloted by Chris Harris and Alex Buncombe; and another Jaguar C-Type in racing livery.





Clockwise from top left: Jodie Kidd and David Blakeley took the top spot for Jaguar entries in last year's Mille Miglia; an XK120 on the start line in 2011; Sir Chris Hoy and Andy Wallace in their black XK120; David Gandy and Yasmin Le Bon line up in another XK120.

as time goes on. You almost have to recalibrate your brain back into driving again. There are four gears and a steering wheel and that's it — no driver aid systems, no disc brakes, no A.B.S., there's nothing on the car. So you have to get back to assessing your entry speeds properly so you're not braking too hard and upsetting the balance of the car; you have to use everything that the car has. You have to read the road, read other drivers — we're very lazy with our driving now, because we have computers to do it for us."

In fact, for David, the fact that today's Mille Miglia is so much less perilous doesn't mean that participants don't get a proper taste of the normalisation of danger that would have been prevalent in the days when it was a race. "You think back to racing drivers back in the day — the fifties and sixties, people

knowing that in all likelihood you might not be coming back. You get a little insight into that madness. It becomes normal during those four days."

Gandy is in a strong position to comment on whether or not the modern-day Mille Miglia is accurately labelled an endurance event. "For three solid days recently I was sleep-deprived, had stones embedded in my skin, was cold, soaked, hungry, lost my voice, and at one point was hung virtually upside down," he wrote in his column in the June 2013 edition of *Vogue* magazine, having recently completed that year's Mille Miglia alongside co-driver Yasmin Le Bon. (He went on to write, "The unique, pure eccentricity of this [event] cannot be described or expressed through film or words" — so the mishap didn't impair his enjoyment.)

would frequently lose close friends," he says. "But even knowing that today, you get in a car and get the red mist — you don't remember much after that. You don't think of the dangers. The adrenalin, the rush — you can see why [drivers of yesteryear] did it. It was like running towards your Spitfire to go and fight the Luftwaffe,



Top: The chef James Martin, television presenter Charley Boorman, and David Gandy all entered as Jaguar drivers this year.

Below: A formidable line-up of Jaguar racing classics.

It seems, though, that this year's Mille was a far more sedate and mishap-free affair — aside from the fact that David's and Jodie's Amazonian figures struggled to fit into the XK120. (During *The Rake's* visit to the 'scrutineering' session — a gargantuan undertaking in which every car entering the rally is assessed for eligibility, safety, and so on — engineering teams were rearranging its interior to suit their heights.) "We had a relatively slow car compared to the D-Types and C-Types," Gandy says, "yet we tended to arrive at each evening checkpoint early and be on our second bottle of Gavi di Gavi by the time everyone else came in."

Moss once said that "Italians are crazy about cars, and their enthusiasm infects you". Gandy agrees with that, acknowledging that the crowd's camaraderie helps drivers stay motivated along the way — a factor enhanced by the relative lawlessness of the Mille. "The police don't quite encourage [reckless driving], but they definitely dismiss it, and the crowds always want you to go faster," he says, laughing. "Even when you arrive somewhere at one, two in the morning, the crowds are there in droves — that's when you see the true motoring passion of Italy. Drive like you can at Mille Miglia anywhere else in the world and you'll get locked up. In Italy, you hear the sirens, think to yourself, 'I might have gone a bit too far this time', but they then give you a thumbs-up and escort you through the traffic."

Admitting to being something of a maverick behind the wheel — "I'm kind of unhinged, my driving, and if anything Jodie's probably a little bit worse" — David illustrates his approach to Mille Miglia not being a race with an anecdote from the final day. "In the morning we were going through this



beautiful yellow field lined with flowers, a Porsche Spyder in front of us," he recalls. "There's no way in a million years that we should have been competing with these guys, but for some reason I got the red mist and said to Jodie, 'I'm not turning up at the checkpoint behind anything German'. I don't know what got into me ..."

After the early arrivals and moments of hot-headed impulse, David and Jodie came in second among the Jaguar pairings, and, impressively, came close to the top 25 percent of all contestants. "I know we got 148th place," he says, "but we couldn't work out how or why — how the scoring system works is beyond me." But as the Mille Miglia organisers (along with the world's 350 million Buddhists) would point out, this event is the ultimate case of journey over destination: of taking part rather than winning. "It's amazing," Gandy says. "You do 1,000 miles over four days, and yet, at the end of it, even though you're exhausted and quite brain-dead, if someone asked me, 'Do you want to do it again?', I would start the engine, turn around and go for it." ■