



# Auto Italia Italian Car Day

A renovated venue at Brooklands and record-breaking crowds made 2017 a special year

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**F**or the 32nd Italian Car Day at Brooklands, the postcode may have been the same but almost everything else improved to provide perhaps the best-ever event.

The Brooklands venue itself has evolved with a newly opened pavilion in which the Vickers 'Brooklands' Vimy replica holds pride of place. Construction work is ongoing, meaning that exhibits were compressed into a slightly tighter space than normal, but it will all be worth it once the old Finishing Straight is restored to its pre-war glory later this year.

The annual gathering of 1400-plus Italian vehicles owes its success to the dedication of the core community and a big thank you must go out to the regulars. The familiar zones for make and model clubs thrive on the enthusiasm of the participants who make their annual pilgrimage to Brooklands. Just one example: Robert Denton travelled by train and taxi from Dorset hoping to see suicide door Fiat 500s and Lancia Delta integrales; his

journey was definitely not in vain.

We had a number of exciting first-time exhibits in the Clubhouse Paddock. Brooklands regular and Abarth addict, Tim Milnes, presented his recently acquired Francis Lombardi B50 Gran Prix coupe (pic opposite page, top right). It's a 1970 example with steel body and aluminium-clad opening panels which was recently released from the Maranello Rosso Collection via UK Abarth specialist, Middle Barton Garage. Also new to Paddock viewers was a 1974 Frua Maserati Quattroporte brought by Andy Heywood along with a Bora, both from Stephen Dowling's collection. The Frua QP was a special commission for the Aga Khan who saw the original concept at the 1972 Geneva Motor Show. This behemoth of a car needed the full torque of Maserati's 4.9-litre Indy engine for swift progress and the stopping power of Citroën's LHM brakes. Celebrity vehicle presence was enhanced by the ex-John Lennon Iso Fidra S4 which he ordered from the 1967 Earls Court Motor Show.

Mick Wood's 1974 Group 4 Fiat Abarth 124 Rally was another first showing in the paddock. His car probably has one of the best competition records of any classic 124 Abarth, with two second places at WRC level (Monte Carlo and Portugal) with Hannu Mikkola/Jean Todt, as well as taking the 1975 Italian Rally Championship.

When it comes to 'obscure', *Auto Italia's* annual event always seems to pull something special out of the bag and this year it was the cute Ferves Ranger off-roader. Built from 1966 and based on Fiat 500 and 600 mechanical components, it seats four, has a folding windscreen and removable doors and found favour in period with Italian farmers and fire services.

As usual, the banking hosted Lancia and Fiat clubs. A couple of well-presented sporting 128 Fiats caught the eye amongst the Montecarlo, Betas, Uno Turbos, Puntos, Barchettas, Cinquecentos and even a pair of Lancia Y10s to tick off on your rarely-seen list. Standing out were Louise and Jason



► 1 luglio 2017



Kennedy's Lancias. Their 1965 Lancia Falvia Superjolly is delightful nine-seater 'Promiscuo Rapido' derivative, configured to carry campers and their equipment to their pitches by the Settobello Camping Club. The Kennedys also brought their '53 Aurelia B20GT racer which has form from the Modena Cento Ore - Index of Performance, which they won, without a support crew, in 2010 and 2014, the 2016 Le Mans Classic and a very creditable 11th place in the 2015 Goodwood Fordwater Trophy. Look out for more on Louise and Jason's broader Italian car collection in a future issue.

Vernon Hibberd's 1988 Panda 4x4 special looked very purposeful and fully prepared for its first off-road outing in the Brecon Beacons with the Panda Classic Owners Group. The suspension has been stiffened and raised for additional ground clearance. Vernon is a

specialist when it comes to shoehorning bigger motors into small Fiats so we can probably expect a power hike sometime soon.

Italian Car Day has long enjoyed the privilege of using the Mercedes-Benz World track to show modern and classic Italian cars as they are meant to be used. Star of the demo laps was Prince Bira's 1951 OSCA V12, resplendent in Siamese racing colours and Bira's white mouse personal logo. Driven by Simon Ayliss on behalf of its German owner, you can read more about this spectacular car on page 58 of this issue. We love the story that Bira allegedly took up racing at Brooklands to get the attention of the beautiful Canadian-born Kay Petre, who was then a star of the legendary track.

AMG fans won't have failed to notice just how well the 2017 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio circumvented their home track,

driven by Auto Italia Editor, Chris Rees. Phil Ward pedalled the second safety car, a Ferrari 488 GTB - someone has to keep those Lamborghinis and Maseratis under control when visiting the neighbours! The Lamborghini contingent, some blending in to the landscape with footballer-camo wraps, covered many of the crowd-pleasing models: Aventador, Huracán, Gallardo, Murciélago and Diablo. Sadly, Mike Kason's Abarth 1000TC was a DNS but he played to the grandstand when his baby Fiat eventually started right at the end of the session.

The London-based Classic Car Company was present, showcasing its concierge offerings for classic owners looking for a bespoke service. Now two-and-a-half years old and with more than half of his business focused on Italian cars, David Peters has developed a new collaboration with Stef





► 1 luglio 2017



Proietti, who provides Italian mechanical and body expertise.

Over in The Heights showground extension, the growth of the Abarth brand was clearly visible with Abarthisti leader, Bert Bryant, claiming over 200 examples on show. Abarth owner, Thomas Berry of Harlow, captured the spirit of Italian Car Day by saying the best part, for him, is catching up with people he hasn't seen since last year while enjoying and engaging in the whole Italian car ownership scene.

The Alfa Romeo zone showed early signs of being refreshed and renewed with the presence of the new Giulia. Next year, no doubt we'll see the first Stelvios, too. Roll on 2018! 🇮🇹

Nigel Allen and the Barkaways boys (above and right) go four up in the Ferrari GT4 Lusso. Lots of great action on test hill and circuit

