

Motorsports Part 2

Racing Ahead Into the Roaring 20's

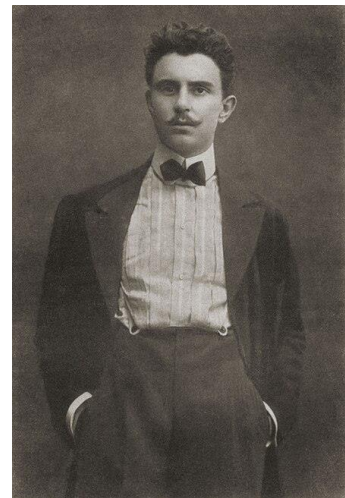
By Bob Vitrikas

During the first twenty years or so of motorsports competition, race cars grew bigger, heavier and unfortunately more dangerous. The years following World War I saw a reversal of that trend. Lighter, stronger, more powerful and more agile marked the development of race cars that continues to this day. Open road racing may have been banned in France in 1903 but that didn't stop others from racing ahead into the 'Roaring Twenties.' First off the starting line in 1906 was the Italian Targa Florio race around the island of Sicily. The Targa was followed by the French 24 Hours of Le Mans which began running in 1923. Le Mans was soon followed in 1927 by the Italian Mille Miglia. All three races were run on public roads and were a grueling test of drivers and their machines.

The Targa Florio

Let's start with the oldest and arguably the toughest road race of them all, the Targa Florio. Started by Sicilian native son and automotive enthusiast Vincenzo Florio, the word targa translates to "plate" or "plaque" thus the name translates roughly to "Florio's Plaque" or perhaps the Florio trophy plate. Vincenzo was the first to own an automobile on the island of Sicily. Being Italian, naturally he wanted to race his auto. Ask anyone who has driven in Italy and they'll tell you that Italians consider any road trip an occasion to race! Since he had the only car in Sicily, Vincenzo organized the first race between his De Dion Motor tricycle, a cyclist and a horseman. Unfortunately Vincenzo's De Dion engine overheated and the horse won the race. Things got better for Vincenzo and he went on to win a speed trial in Padua, Italy, raced in the first French Grand Prix and funded the first 'Coppa Florio' race in Brescia, Italy. Finally he was ready to organize a proper road race in his homeland Sicily. The first Targa Florio was a 92 mile one lap race and marked the first Italian open road race.

The Targa continued for 71 years and 61 races, lasting from 1906 until the final race in 1977. Six circuit configurations were used, with laps ranging from 45 to 670 miles in length! If you thought the legendary Nurburgring was a curvy monster with 180 curves, how about the Targa weighing in with as many as 2,000 turns per lap! As if that weren't enough, it was made even more challenging by the varying paved and unpaved road surfaces, treacherous mountain passes, wild and unpredictable climate changes, highway bandits (real ones with guns!), and packs of wolves. Yikes! Amazingly only 9 people have died over the 71 year history of this unbelievably dangerous road race. The Targa was a key part of the World Sportscar Championship which ran from 1953 to



Vincenzo Florio, Jr., the man behind the oldest road race, the Targa Florio

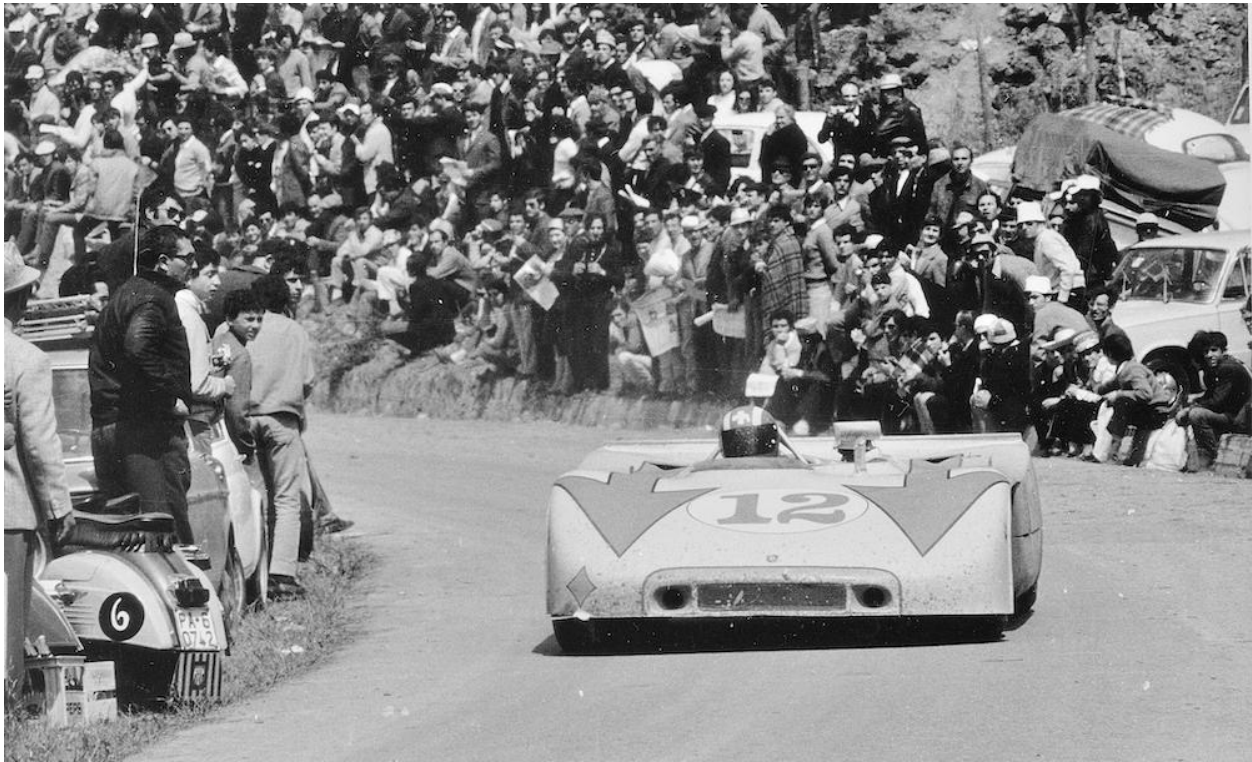


This photo from the 1930 Targa shows the large and enthusiastic crowds, crude unpaved road surface, and the nationalistic spirit of the day with Italian flags flying proudly. Also note the riding mechanic whose dangerous job was to warn the driver about competitors coming up from behind and keeping the machine running.

1992 which included the Targa Florio from 1955 to 1973. Sadly the Targa lost its international status due to several fatal accidents, failure to meet safety standards and lack of confidence in the organizers competence. Oh boy.... The top gun taking home the most race wins was Porsche with 11 wins, just edging out national heroes Alfa Romeo with 10 wins and Ferrari with 7 wins. Commemorating their wins in 1963 and 1964, Porsche named their 1965 removable hardtop offering the Targa and the rest is history.

This is a British car club newsletter so let's give the Brits their due. The first British driver to win the Targa was Cyril Snipe driving an Italian SCAT (Societa Ceirano Automobili Torino) racer in 1912. Cyril, reportedly a SCAT test driver, and his co-driver Pedrini, completed the 965 km (600 mi) course in 24 hrs 37 min, averaging a humbling 41.44 mph, the slowest ever Targa winning performance. Fast forward 43 years to 1955 for the next British driver win. That was none other than the unstoppable Sir Stirling Moss and co-pilot Peter Collins driving a Mercedes Benz 300 SLR averaging an impressive 96.29 mph. Moss had a great year in 1955 driving for Mercedes, winning the Targa and the Mille Miglia but I'm getting ahead of myself. In 1964 British driver Colin Davis won the Targa driving a Porsche 904 GTS and in 1968 "Quick Vic" Elford took the laurels with Italian team mate Umberto Maglioli driving, what else, a Porsche.

Maglioli had won the Targa twice before in 1953 and 1956. The last Brit to win the Targa was Brian Redman who co-drove a Porsche 908/3 to victory with Swiss racer Jo



Siffert in 1970. Alas history does not record a British car taking a win in the Targa.

The 24 Hours of Le Mans

It has been said that the 24 Hours of Le Mans is a British race that happens to be located in France. For sure every June a horde of Brits invade the continent and camp out at the Sarthe circuit to drink in (literally and figuratively!) the spectacle.

Originally established in 1923 to provide a test of production car performance and endurance over a 24 hour period, the early rules required a passenger seat, windscreen, lights and space for a suitcase. These requirements have endured for 100 years and are still in force today! Le Mans is informally considered part of the 'Triple Crown of Motorsport' along side the Indianapolis 500 (1911) and the Monaco Grand Prix (1929). Only one driver has won all three races, British legend Graham Hill who won Le Mans in 1972, the Indy 500 in 1966 and came first in the Monaco GP an incredible five times. Likewise the 'Triple Crown of Endurance Racing' is considered to be the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the 24 Hours of Daytona and the 12 Hours of Sebring.

Wearing his distinctive London Rowing Club helmet, Graham Hill becomes the first driver to win the 'Triple Crown of Endurance Racing' driving a French Matra in the rain at the 1972 Le Mans. Redman as Matra's third driver Jo Siffert drove the Porsche to victory in 1970. Courtesy Walker Archives.

Hill's co-driver Henri Pescarolo said of Hill's driving ability, "At his age (43), I didn't expect him to take any risks. However, I realized that this was no ordinary driver. As it



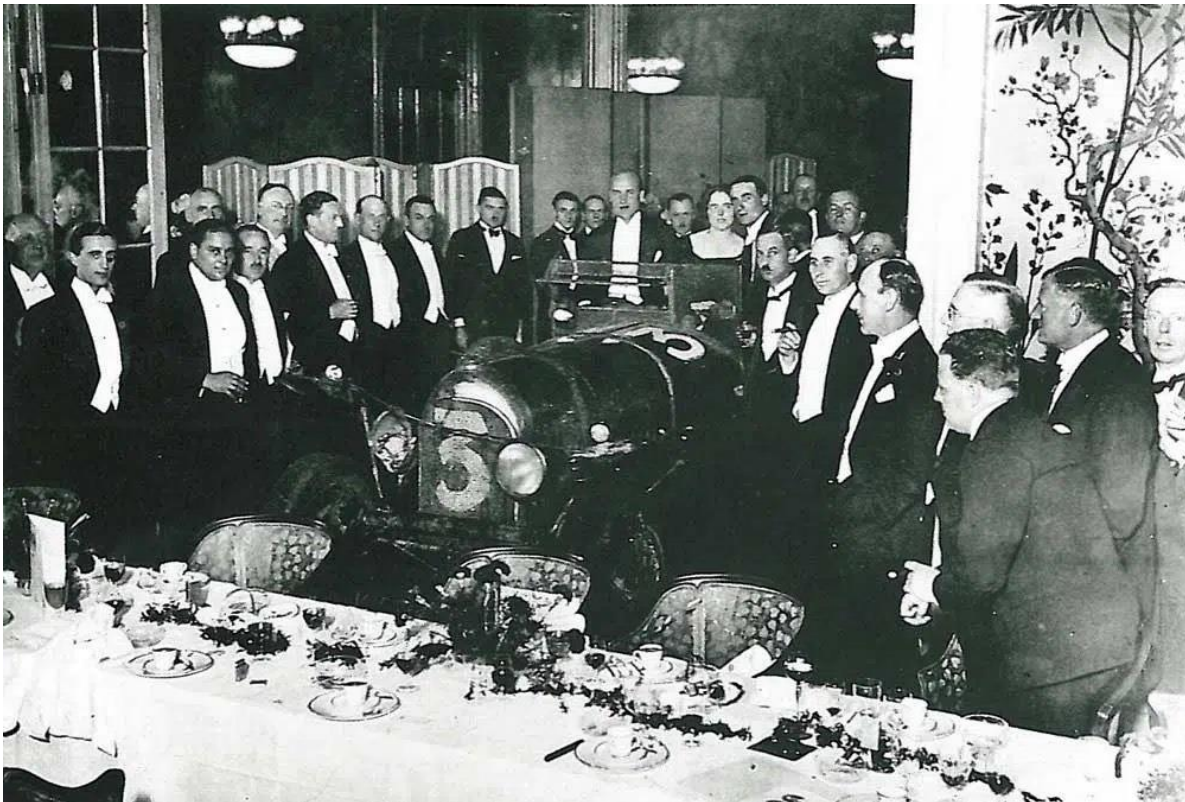
turned out, the way he drove in the night rain was decisive in the win." Wow!

Bentley took top honors at Le Mans in 1924, 1927, 1928, 1929 when they finished an incredible 1-2-3-4, and won again in 1930. Most recently Bentley took the laurels in 2003. Therein lies a story ... Bentley's victory in 1927 was hard won. All was going well until Frenchman Pierre Tabourin crashed his Theophile Schneider (remember them? No, neither do I.) at the White House corner. Not the one in Washington, the French one. Three of the Bentleys following Schneider crashed into Pierre's broken car. It was quite an epic pileup and a potential disaster for the Bentley team. SCH Davis, driving the number 3 Bentley somehow managed to extricate himself and his Bentley and staggered back to the pits for repairs which included replacing a buckled wheel, repairing the bent chassis and replacing the smashed headlamp with a lantern strapped to the car with a rope! Back onto the track the Bentley went with only slightly reduced velocity and finished an incredible 20 laps ahead of the second place finisher!



The pile up at White House corner. The car on the right is the #1 Bentley driven by Clement and Callingham. On the left is Bentley #2 driven by d'Erlanger and Duller. Duller jumped out before the impact! Bentley #3 was able to continue its race after sustaining moderate damage and was no longer at the accident scene.

The Bentley Boys reckoned a celebration was in order and never one to do things in half measure, a celebration dinner, hosted by the Brit magazine 'The Autocar' was arranged at London's posh Savoy Hotel. The Bentley drivers and crew were present and were joined at the table by ... Bentley number 3! Say what? Yup, that big ol' Bentley 3 liter, complete with battered bits and covered in 24 hours worth of dirt, grime and oil, was wheeled in thru the front revolving doors (temporarily removed) of the



Savoy and driven into the midst of the dinner party seated at a U-shape dining table. Quite a centerpiece eh? Notice the damaged headlamp to the left of the grill.

As a remembrance of this event, the famous bartender at the Savoy, Harry Craddock, concocted a 'Bentley' cocktail consisting of Calvados and Dubonnet. One of the highlights of Chris's and my trip to England in May 2023 was enjoying a 'Bentley' in the Savoy's American Bar. Ah the taste of the good life! Bentley repeated the dinner scenario at the Savoy on the occasion of their 2003 victory. Tradition, glorious tradition!

I would be remiss if I didn't mention Aston Martin winning the race in 1959 with Brit driver and journalist Roy Salvadori and a Texan chicken farmer in bib overalls named



Carroll Shelby.

The Group 44 Jaguar XJR 5 at the 1984 Le Mans. Drivers of the 44 car were British endurance racing legend Brian Redman and Americans Bob Tullius and Doc Bundy. The Group 44 entries wore the traditional Group 44 two tone green and white colors as a tribute to their long time sponsor Quaker State oil. Unfortunately both Jaguars were taken out of the race due to an incident and a broken gearbox.

Jaguar did their part winning the grueling endurance race seven times in 1951, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1988 and 1990. Of the many British drivers who won Le Mans driving a Jaguar, one of the most colorful was Duncan Hamilton who won the 1953 race paired with his long time driving partner Tony Rolt. Arguably the most amusing win came in 1953 under the most unlikely circumstances. Hamilton and Rolt were disqualified during practice for a minor infraction of the always challenging French rules. Their car had the same number as another car on the track at the same time. Understandably despondent, they retired to a local bar to drown their sorrows. Meanwhile Jaguar team manager Lofty England persuaded the race organizers to reinstate Hamilton and Rolt. By this time Hamilton and Rolt were quite drunk. England was quoted as saying, "Of course I would never let them race under the influence. I had enough trouble when they were sober!" During the race when Hamilton came into the pits the team would offer him a cup of coffee in hopes of sobering him up but Duncan refused complaining it made his arms twitch. As a substitute he was given a drink of brandy! The added alcohol might have been a good thing to dull his senses when he later stuffed a bird in his face while traveling at 130 mph. The impact broke his nose but Duncan continued on at full bore! Amazingly Hamilton and Rolt went on to win the race at a record

average pace of 100 mph! As a footnote, both Hamilton and Rolt denied they were



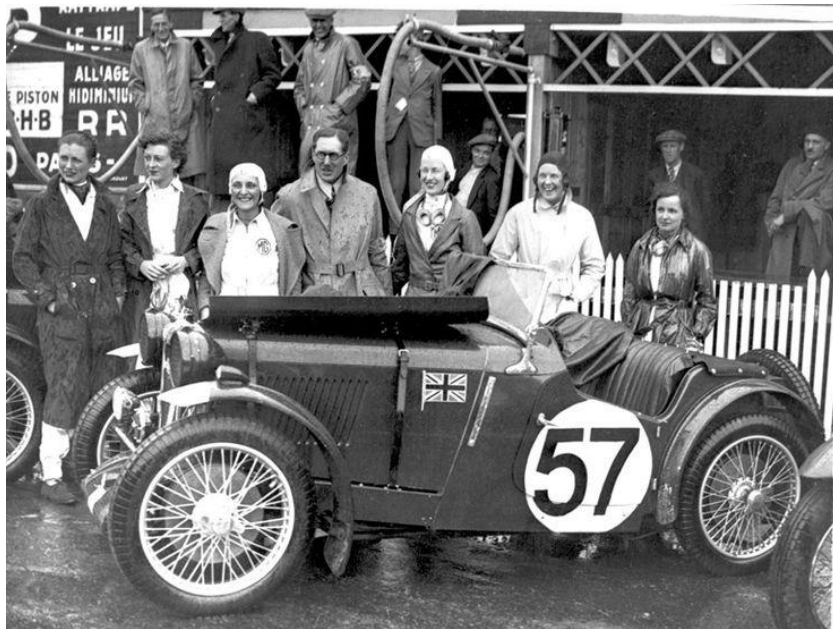
driving drunk. Hmm...

Jaguar returned to the Sarthe circuit in the 1980s and 1990s as the result of America driver Bob Tullius whose dream was to win the 24 Hours in his own car. Tullius' race team, Group 44, was a dominant force in sports car racing in the U.S. winning SCCA national championships in MGs, Triumphs and Jaguars. Group 44 was based in Winchester, Virginia and every year they hosted the MG Car Club Washington D.C. Centre at their spotlessly clean workshop. I recall staring in amazement at their Jaguar V12 engine resting after being tested on their dyno. I thought it was just about the most beautiful mechanical device I'd ever seen! That is until I saw their XJR 5 endurance racer and I was literally swept off my feet. I grabbed a chair and just sat staring at this green and white beauty, taking in the mechanical complexity of it all, wrapped in a gloriously beautiful body. Alas Bob Tullius was not to fulfill his dream of winning the 24 Hours but he was responsible to for getting Jaguar back in the game. Group 44's best finish was in 1985 when they finished 13th overall and first in the GTP category. It was the first time Jaguar had been classified as a finisher in 22 years. That promising finish was followed by a disappointing showing in 1986 and 1987 when all the Group 44 Jaguar entries dropped out due to minor mechanical failures. Such is racing. Jaguar

Tom Walkinshaw's Jaguar team won the 1988 Le Mans race despite this winning car being stuck in 4th gear for the last 40 minutes of the race. Drivers were Jan Lammers, Scotsman Johnny Dumfries and Briton Andy Wallace.

decided to change teams in 1988. It was British driver and team owner Tom Walkinshaw who took Jaguar to victory in 1988. The team finished first, fourth and sixteenth. They won again in 1990 with their great big honkin' 7 liter V12s pumping out 650 hp pushing the sleek purple and white Silk Cut Jag to over 240 mph on the Mulsanne straight. Yeah baby!

Jaguar is the fourth most successful Le Mans winner (7 victories) behind Porsche (19), Audi (13) and Ferrari (9). British drivers have won Le Mans more than any other nationality, 32 drivers to date! Some have won more than once. Starting with Ferrari in 1970, Derek Bell has competed an amazing 25 times and won five times. Starting with Frank Clement driving a Bentley in 1924, British drivers have taken the checkered flag



45 times at Le Mans. It must be something in the beer...

Many other British marques contested Le Mans, among them was little MG who debuted at the 24 hour race in 1930 when two MG M-type Midgets were entered. To be sure the MG factory did their best to prepare the cars starting with an 847 cc engine beefed to a heady 27 hp giving it a top speed of 70 mph. Ahem. There were just 17 race entries in 1930 and only 9 finished with Bentley leading the pack, first and second. Alas the plucky MGs did not finish the race due to engine problems, but that would change in 1935 when a team of three MG P-type Midgets piloted by six women drivers nicknamed the "Dancing Daughters," finished the grueling race intact in 24th, 25th, and 26th place in stark contrast to 29 other entries that didn't finish the race. The only repair

Eyston's six "Dancing Daughters in the Le Mans pit. George is standing in the midst of the all female race team. Despite the rain, or because of it, they made quite a splash for MG!

needed was to replace a taillight bulb! MG would return to Le Mans many times including the ill-fated 1955 race which saw the MGA's debut.

Unfortunately British driver Sir Stirling Moss never won Le Mans (nor the Formula 1 Driver Championship). He was cruising to what appeared to be a certain victory in a Mercedes 300 SLR in the 1955 race, when the Mercedes team was withdrawn out of respect for the 82 deaths caused by Pierre Levegh's Mercedes fatal crash into the grandstands opposite the pits. More on Sir Stirling's driving career is next up in the Mille Miglia saga.

The Mille Miglia

Third up in the batting order is the Italian endurance race known as the Mille Miglia. Held on public roads from 1927 until the final tragic race in 1957, the Mille Miglia was run 24 times over a thousand miles of Italian highways and byways from Brescia in the north to Rome and back, crossing over the Apennine Mountains.

Smaller, slower cars were released onto the circuit first. This simplified organization as course Marshalls didn't have to be on duty so long and minimized road closures. Beginning in 1949, car numbers corresponded to their starting times, e.g. Stirling Moss' number 722 Mercedes 300 SLR left the ramp at Brescia at 7:22 AM whilst the first car off started the previous day at 9:00 PM. Moss and his navigator journalist Denis Jenkinson covered the 992 miles in just 10 hours, 7 minutes and 48 seconds for an incredible average speed of 97.96 mph, a record that was never broken. To help them maintain their blistering pace, they pre-ran the course six times (that's 6,000 miles folks!) and Jenkinson a.k.a. "Jenks" took course notes on an 18 foot long scroll of paper that he fed through a box with rollers that allowed him to relay important notes to Moss via a system of 15 hand signals. Moss and Jenks were the only British team to win the Mille Miglia and no British car has ever won.



Stirling Moss and Denis Jenkinson enroute to their historic victory in the 1955 Mille Miglia.

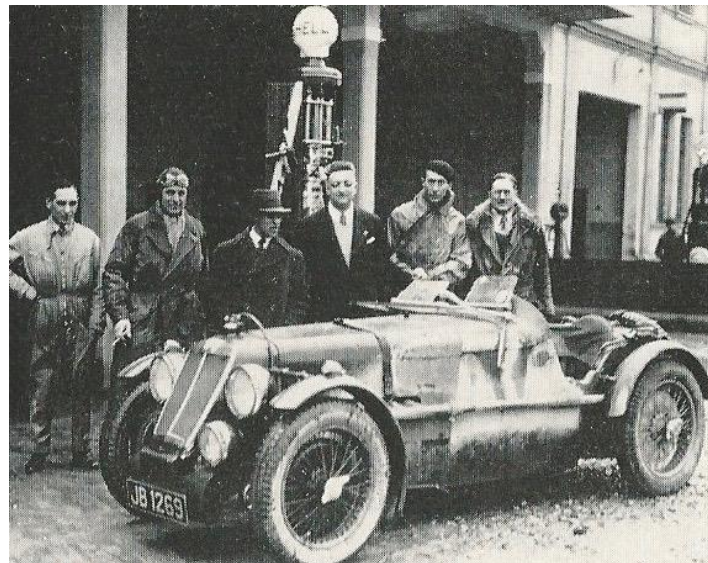
Not surprising, Italian cars lead the list of winners with 21 wins; 11 by Alfa Romeo, 8 by Ferrari, one by Lancia, and one by a firm known as OM or Officine Meccaniche which

won the first race. The other three races were won by German cars, Mercedes twice and BMW once.

Over the course of its 30 year history, 56 people died including 24 drivers/co-drivers and 32 spectators. Between 1948 and 1957 35 people died, an average of four per race. Clearly something had to be done to stop the carnage and after 12 people were killed; 11 when a Ferrari crashed near the finish and a TR3 driver who crashed in Florence in heavy rain. Six MGAs competed in the last Mille Miglia. The best placed finisher was the Fitzwilliam Racing Team number 357 driven by Robin Carnegie who finished 31st overall and 4th in class. This Glacier Blue beauty ran in the ill fated 1957 race.



Prior MG entries had better success. In 1933 a team of MG K3 Magnettes famously finished first and second in class, 21st and 22nd overall with MG record breaker and future President of the MG Car Club, George Eyston and Count Johnny Lurani driving the winning #39 car. If you want to learn more about this historic MG victory, check out Dennis Simanaitis' entertaining article here: <https://simanaitissays.com/2016/09/24/the->



m-g-k-3-magnette-and-the-mille-miglia

This MG K3, a little the worse for wear, was used as a recce car in the 1933 race. Standing behind from left to right are Eugenio Siena, Lord Earl Howe, Tazio Nuvolari, Enzo Ferrari, Count Johnny Lurani and Capt. George Eyston, a veritable who's who of racing personalities.

Twenty years after the Mille Miglia ended, it was reborn as an historic rally (regularity race) for cars manufactured prior to 1957 and that were registered for the original 1927-1957 races. The 2023 re-creation counted 405 entries (47 Alfas!) including 74 cars that took part in the Mille Miglia between 1927 and 1957. Long live endurance racing!



Lining up for the 2022 Mille Miglia re-enactment. Entry fee for the 2023 Mille varied from \$12,500 - \$18,500 which included two participants, hotel rooms, meals, race documents, welcome bag, parking for your historic racer and of course mechanical assistance if needed.