

Petrol Head



It is no coincidence that Chopard is principal sponsor of the prestigious Mille Miglia rally. The father and son behind the A-list's favourite jeweller are proud owners of "about 30" classic cars, each lovingly restored and safely preserved in one of the Scheufele family's three garages. But they are far from museum fodder. As Karl-Friedrich Scheufele exclusively reveals to *QP*, every one of his automotive jewels has the chance to make the commute to work - or even the 1,000 miles between Brescia and Rome and back.

Simon de Burton

Vice President of Chopard Karl-Friedrich Scheufele at Chopard's watch plant in Meyrin, in front of his 1935 Aston Martin Ulster.



(Above) Chopard's Mille Miglia watch for 2006 is the time-only 'Gran Turismo XL'.
 (Left) Karl-Friedrich in a 1929 Bentley with his wife Christine, competing in the Mille Miglia road rally. First run in 1927 by the Brescia motor club from Brescia to Rome and back, the race was banned in 1957 when a crash killed 10 spectators. The Mille Miglia was revived in 1984 with safety paramount, and Chopard joined as sponsors in 1988. Only well-maintained cars manufactured between '27 and '57 are permitted to participate in the four-day event.

The *QP* offices become a veritable hive of activity when the Editor's discreetly stretched, security-glazed Hummer draws up to the car park with its wheel trims gently spinning. But the staff at Chopard's Geneva HQ cannot rely on any such early warning systems to signal the approach of Vice-President Karl-Friedrich Scheufele; his passion for cars means he has a different one for every day of the month. And then some.

One day he might arrive in a 1970s, acid-yellow Porsche Carrera 2.7 RS and the next he might waft in behind the wheel of his father's Bentley R-Type Continental. Unless, of course, he is going through one of his pre-war phases, in which case the conveyance of the moment could be a 1929 short-chassis Bentley or a 1935 Aston Martin Ulster.

A boy thing

The Scheufele automotive gene spans three generations: Karl-Friedrich's father, Karl, remains a keen classic rally entrant, and his father before him - another Karl - had the car bug too.

My first question concerning the current Scheufele fleet is, of course, how many? At first, I attributed Karl-Friedrich's reluctance to give a precise answer to a matter of security, but he is deliberately vague about the subject for a far more serious reason:

"We usually say around 30 cars, because it is important that neither my wife nor my mother ever know the true figure. That way, my father and I might still be able to buy the occasional extra car without being found out," he explains.

"The first car I ever bought was a 1960 Porsche 356, which I acquired aged 25 as a driveable restoration project. Sadly I no longer own it, but we do still have the car from which the collection really blossomed - a Mercedes-Benz 300 SL, which my father sold to my mother's father, who in turn gave it to me!"

For impecunious classic-car fans such as myself who fret about finding water-tight accommodation for just a single clapped-out



- Highlights of the Scheufele Collection**
- 1935 Aston Martin Ulster
 - 1965 Aston Martin DB5 Vantage
 - Austin-Healey 3000 MKI
 - Maserati 300 S
 - Alfa Romeo 8C 2300
 - 1955 Ferrari Monza 750 Barchetta
 - Mercedes-Benz 300 SL roadster
 - 1929 Bentley 4.5 litre short chassis
 - 1954 Porsche 356 Speedster
 - 1973 Porsche 911 RS Touring
 - 1965 Mini Cooper S
 - 1968 Ferrari 275 GTB
 - Bentley R-Type Continental
 - Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'gull-wing'
- Chopard Classic Car Events, 2006**
- 11th-14th May**
Mille Miglia, Brescia, Italy
 - 20th-21st May**
Grand Prix Historique, Monaco
 - 27th May**
Chopard Classic Rally, Moscow
 - 14th-16th July**
British Classic Car Meeting, St Moritz

"Cars and wristwatches do have a great deal in common and attract a similar sort of passion - although the logistics of storing a collection of wristwatches are happily far less complex!"

old banger, it is encouraging to hear that the co-head of one of Switzerland's wealthiest watch dynasties also has trouble garaging his collection - although Karl-Friedrich's problem is simply that he doesn't have a handy Airbus-sized hangar in which to keep everything together. "We have to store them in three separate locations. It is every collector's dream to have one convenient place in which to house their cars, because the secret to keeping old cars in good condition is to protect them from the elements in just the right atmosphere; not too damp and not too dry.

"Our philosophy with the collection is not just that all the cars should be in good, running order, but that they should all be regularly driven. They are not like paintings or sculptures which are just there to be looked at; they are there to be used and enjoyed."



(Top) Karl-Friedrich Scheufele and regular Mille Miglia co-driver Jacky Ickx - the legendary long-distance sports driver - about to embark on the 1,000-mile drive in a 1950s Porsche Spyder.

(Above) Another Mille Miglia watch being launched by Chopard this year is the rose-gold split-seconds chronograph.



(Above left) From last year, the Jacky Ickx flyback chronograph (€4,320), honour of the Scheufele family's close friend.

(Above) Karl-Friedrich Scheufele pictured in the famous Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'gull-wing', which has endured the 1,000 miles between Brescia and Rome 12 times.

(Left) Not your average garage: Karl-Friedrich leans proudly against his acid-yellow 1973 Porsche 911 RS Touring Carrera. The cars in the background and foreground are his Porsche 356 Speedster and Ferrari 375 GTR, respectively.

Wings of a gull

It is for this reason that the Scheufeles keep every car 'on the button' and in excellent, but not necessarily 'concours' condition. "One of my favourite cars is the DB5 Vantage which has never been restored since it was built during the 1960s. It is in good, used condition and I love the patina it has developed over the years," explains Karl-Friedrich enthusiastically, showing a different side to the sometimes reserved and considered persona displayed in his day-to-day business.

"I would far rather see a classic car in that condition than one which has been over-restored and stripped of its real character, although rebuilding an old car sympathetically is something which fascinates me - I really enjoy meeting all the different people who get involved and researching the history of the car. It is something one never forgets."

One of the best-known Scheufele restorations is the Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'gull-wing' coupe which has taken part in no fewer than 12 Mille Miglias - the prestigious Italian classic-car rally, of which Chopard has been the main sponsor since 1988. "That car stands out because of its colour - most gull-wings are a rather boring silver, but during the restoration process we discovered that ours had originally been painted metallic strawberry red when it was first exported to California, so that is the colour we returned it to."

It is lack of time rather than inclination that prevents Karl-Friedrich from tuning and repairing the cars himself - although it is hard to imagine someone who is always so immaculately turned-out getting up to his elbows in grease. But there is no doubt that Mr Scheufele knows what is going on beneath the bonnets of his stable of thoroughbreds. "I don't usually have

time to do more than clean the cars and check oil and water levels and so on. But if something goes wrong during an event, I know where to look. The great thing about old cars is that problems usually stem from something simple and often electrical. They can usually be repaired quite quickly. With a modern car, however, it is more likely to be an electronic problem, and that is not so easy."

The watch connection

The powerful link between cars and wristwatches has proved to be a valuable marketing tool for Chopard since it produced the first Mille Miglia watch 18 years ago. The brand has gone on to offer automotive fans the 'Racing Colours' collection, the Jacky Ickx limited edition (the multiple Le Mans winner is a family friend and frequent co-driver), the Mille Miglia Alfa Romeo chronograph and the Monaco Grand Prix Historique series of watches, which will be available for the first time in steel this year, as well as gold.

"Getting involved with the Mille Miglia was obviously the catalyst which prompted us to produce our first car-themed wristwatches, and those lines and line extensions have been extremely successful for us," says Karl-Friedrich. "Cars and wristwatches do have a great deal in common and attract a similar sort of passion - although the logistics of storing and maintaining a collection of wristwatches are happily far less complex than for a collection of cars!"

It is quite clear from talking to Karl-Friedrich, however, that he does not need to be part of a crowd to enjoy his old cars. "Simply getting behind the wheel and driving the 30 kilometres from home to work is just wonderful. It could be in the 1965 Mini Cooper, or the Porsche 2.7 RS, the Aston Martin... Every one of them makes me smile." ◊