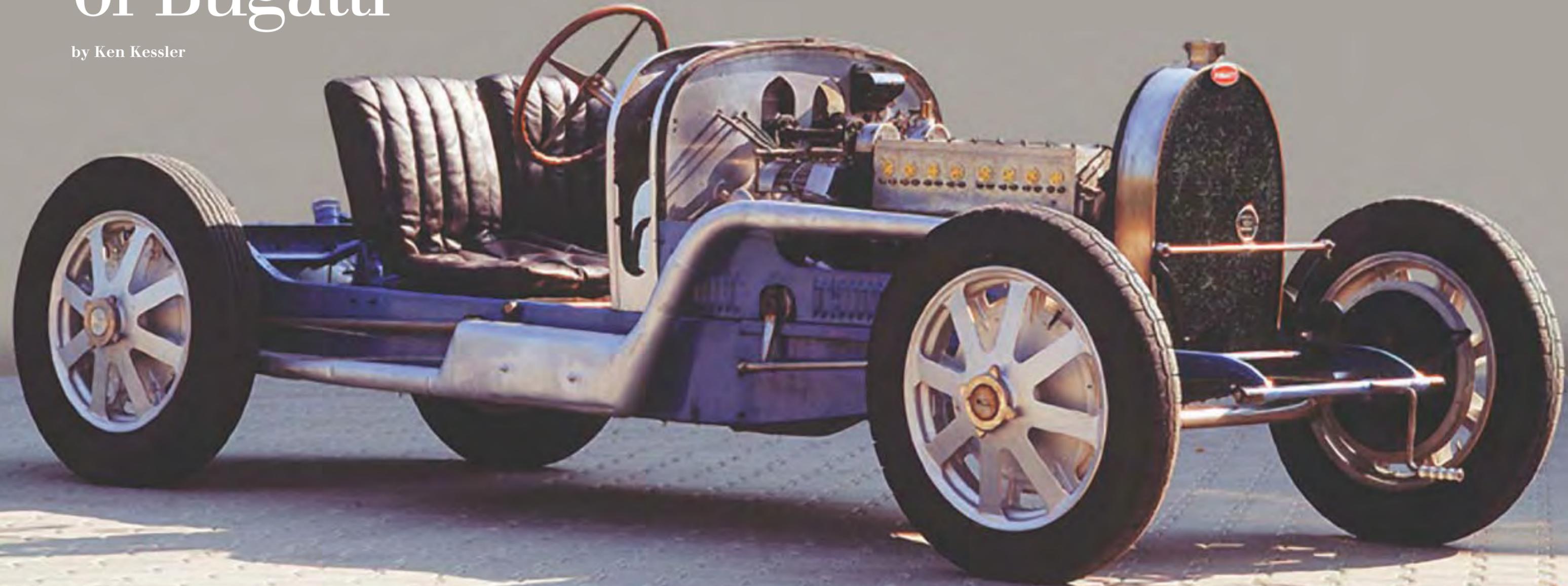


Parmigiani Evokes the Golden Era of Bugatti

by Ken Kessler

The Parmigiani-Bugatti driver's watch will be released in 2003 to coincide with the launch of the Bugatti Veyron. The automotive-themed watch epitomizes the Veyron's radical design and recalls the heyday of 1930s motoring with its transverse movement.



This Ettore Bugatti 'Calandre', produced in the 1990s, echoes the Mido watches of the 1920s. The design neatly uses the distinctive Bugatti radiator grille and cap to create an instant classic. Parmigiani Fleurier's watch takes the same idea that radical step further.



Watch companies, especially the most prestigious ones, choose their automotive alliances with care. Think Girard-Perregaux and Ferrari, Bvlgari and Cadillac, or Breitling and Bentley. Some are natural partners and some may be marriages of convenience, but the brands involved in such liaisons pay close attention to their collaborators' standing and prestige, as well as the quality of their wares. The connection between a revered, revived name like Bugatti and a recently-arrived auteur such as Michel Parmigiani isn't as apparent as that between Girard-Perregaux and Ferrari (Girard-Perregaux's Gino Macaluso was a championship rally driver and Italian racing hero), but the spiritual links are there.

Parmigiani Fleurier have built an enviable reputation as a first-rank watch house in an embarrassingly short time; they have been trading as a 'manufacture' only since May 1996. Part of the reason why Parmigiani Fleurier have earned the respect of watch lovers so quickly is because of Michel Parmigiani's status as one of the world's foremost restorers of irreplaceable Breguet clocks and watches. In keeping with the standards of Abraham-Louis Breguet, Michel Parmigiani decided from the outset to produce watches only for those with the most refined taste – as did Ettore Bugatti with motor cars. Not surprisingly, Bugatti himself was a Breguet aficionado.

After a number of failed attempts at reviving the Bugatti name, it looks like the greatest of the pre-

war automotive legends is back: not least because the force behind the revival is Volkswagen Group. In 1998, Volkswagen acquired the name to add to its prestige line-up, alongside Bentley and Lamborghini. Volkswagen chose well: the name could only stand for a supercar. Bugatti was to pre-World War II motoring what Ferrari was, and is, to motoring from the second half of the 20th century onwards.

A history of excellence

Ettore Bugatti was a true Renaissance man. When the local electricity board angered him, he made his own generator. To tour his factories, he produced his own electric cart. He lived by the adage: "If it looks right, it is right." And although time caught up with Bugatti – his conservatism allowing rivals to surpass him in the 1930s – he still managed to produce the most successful racing car of all time, the Type 35; the most beautiful of all time, the Type 57 Atalante; and the most opulent of all time, the Type 41 Royale, which had a 12-L engine and measured 7 feet from windscreen to radiator cap.

Volkswagen clearly understand the qualities that make a Bugatti a Bugatti, not least Ettore's refusal to compromise. Thus, we can assume that the Bugatti Veyron, due to be produced in late 2003 at a rate of around 50 per year, will be the supercar of its era. Volkswagen has revealed that the Veyron will feature a 7-speed gearbox; a 1001 bhp, 16-cylinder engine with four



turbochargers; a top speed of 252 mph and acceleration of 0–186 mph in 14 s; and that it will ride on specially-developed high-speed tyres from Michelin. Its price? A cool £1 million.

A reflection of the car's design

For the associated Bugatti watch project, Parmigiani Fleurier's Vincent Bérard has created a transverse movement that places the watch's dial on the side of the wrist in the manner of driving watches of the 1930s. The dial is oval-shaped, representing the form of the celebrated Bugatti logo, as well as

Parmigiani's emblem. The automotive theme continues with an in-house movement that has its bridges and constituent parts arranged on a horizontal axis rather than a vertical one. The Parmigiani-Bugatti watch's innards are visible through six transparent sapphire crystals fitted to an 18 ct. white-gold case shaped not unlike a pre-war supercharger.

The movement is as radical as the car it represents, with five plates making up the main part of the calibre 370 movement, while the design of the wheelwork has been fashioned to recall sports car hubcaps. Bravely, the movement is a manual and not an automatic, but the winding mechanism has a power reserve of 10 days and the reserve indicator is on a wheel. Open the back of the case and two crowns are exposed, both connected to an original dynamometric system. By using a special tool, the user sets the time and winds the movement.

Like the Veyron itself, the Parmigiani-Bugatti watch will be ready in 2003 and will be issued as a strictly limited edition, corresponding to the number of actual Veyrons produced by Volkswagen. The watches will be offered first to the cars' owners for a sum of around £50,000 but, if a Veyron purchaser decides not to buy a watch, it will then be offered to the public. We can't imagine that many Veyron owners will be able to resist. ◉



Bugatti's other timepieces

Parmigiani Fleurier's design for Bugatti is not the first watch to wear the red oval on or as its dial, nor are wristwatches the sole horological connection with Bugatti. Ettore Bugatti owned a Breguet portable carriage clock made in 1931, a copy of Breguet No. 2793. As the eminent watchmaker George Daniels stated in *The Art Of Breguet*: "Bugatti's mechanical philosophy was as uninhibited and varied as Breguet's and his purchase of the clock is a fitting tribute to the great horologist." Bugatti also owned a magnificent Breguet pocket chronograph, sold in 2002 by Antiquorum.

Bugatti is also remembered for fitting an 8-day watch with chronograph – also made for him by Breguet – to the steering wheel hubs of the legendary Type 41 Royale. However, the most famous of the Bugatti-related watches is the wristwatch made in the shape of the iconic stirrup-shaped radiator, produced in limited numbers by Mido in the 1920s. Bugatti gave these watches as presents to successful drivers, cherished employees and privileged customers, and around 10 are believed to have survived. Among the owners were Bugatti himself, his son Jean and drivers Rene Dreyfus and Louis Chiron. When Bugatti-Midos appear in auction, prices hover around the £20,000–£30,000 region, depending on condition and provenance.

More recently, there have been quartz replicas of the radiator watch, while the short-lived revival of the marque in the early 1990s yielded a range of watches made for Bugatti by MHR.



Further information: Parmigiani, Tel: 020 7722 2438, www.parmigiani.com