



Supercars then and now - Part II

Published: September 22, 2017 By: Glen Smale

Online version: <https://www.virtualmotorpixblog.com/supercars-then-and-now-part-ii/>



Ferrari Enzo 2002 (Museo Enzo Ferrari in Modena)

Supercars then and now - Part II. The times, they were certainly a-changing The sound of The Beatles, Rolling Stones, the Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, and others, heralded the dawning of a new age - the age of freedom and increased affluence. During this period, wealth came to a much younger group of the population, a group that was considerably larger than the privileged few who had previously enjoyed such affluence earlier in the



century. Where high incomes had typically been the domain of more mature and seasoned industrialists and entrepreneurs, ownership of supercars was mostly restricted to this elite group at a time in which you were born into wealth.



Aston Martin's 100th birthday: (from L-R) DBS (1970), DB4 Convertible (1962), DB4 SS (1962), and DB4 GT Zagato (1961) at the 2013 Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, Italy

But it was on the Continent in the sixties where the first shots were fired in the supercar wars, and where the label 'supercar' really took hold. Lead by Italy, supercars such as the beautiful 1955 Ferrari 410 Superamerica (top speed 165mph) and the 1959 Maserati 5000 GT (top speed 170mph) set the stakes very high indeed. France launched an assault with its uprated 1959 Facel Vega HK500 powered by a 390bhp 5.9-litre Chrysler V8 (top speed 147mph). During the 1950/60s, Great Britain was the largest manufacturer of sports cars in the world, of which the 1966 AC 428 was a fine example. Equipped with American power (Ford Galaxie 6997cc V8), the AC topped out at 141mph.



Jaguar E-type Series 1 (1961-68) Prescott Hillclimb June 2006

Despite the introduction of the E-type Jaguar in 1961 with a claimed top speed of 150mph and a bargain price of under £2000, it was unquestionably the red-blooded cars from Italy that captured the public's attention. Nothing could compete with the awesome power and lithesome beauty of Maserati's 4930cc V8 Ghibli SS and Lamborghini's Miura, both introduced in 1966. Boasting a 385bhp 4.0-litre V12, the Bertone-designed Miura could reach a staggering speed of 175mph. Not to be outdone, Ferrari launched its 365 GTB/4 in 1968 at the Paris Salon, which was dubbed the Daytona. The Italian stallion, powered by a mighty 4390cc V12 developing 352bhp, equalled the top speed of the Miura against which it was pitched. These three cars were all produced in small numbers, around the one thousand mark each, to ensure exclusivity.





Lamborghini Miura SV (1972), at the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, Italy - 2013



Ferrari 365 GTB/4 Daytona (1968), Geneva Motor Show, 4 March 2008

Getting in and out of a supercar in the 1960s presented a few problems for those fashion-conscious mini skirt wearers (try getting out of a Lamborghini Miura in a mini skirt in an elegant manner). As supercars were now within reach of a great many more people, this included an increasing number of female drivers. Not only were supercars powerful and fast, but these cars also began to display more luxurious appointments such as leather upholstery, air conditioning, sound systems and the like. As a result, the younger jet setters, entrepreneurs, stock brokers, assorted celebrities and wannabes all with varying waistlines, needed to be accommodated and manufacturers had to take this into account. Enzo Ferrari would most likely have thrown such a buyer out of his office because in the early days *Il Commendatore* needed to be satisfied that you were worthy of one of his cars, and that you



were going to race the said car, before being considered worthy enough to buy a Ferrari.



Lamborghini Countach 5000S, photographed at Brooklands 2006

In the boom years of the late '80s, a visit to the car park of a stock broking firm would get you more supercars per square foot than any motor show could boast of - and you could view them all without paying an entry fee. A firm favourite around this time was the Lamborghini Countach, a striking, angular bodied supercar that probably epitomised the genre more than any other. Current trends today show that supercars are increasingly the choice toys of newly crowned pop stars, movie stars and sports celebs, most of whom will never test the supercar's true performance potential. These stars buy such exotica because their bank balance allows them to and their PR guru has probably told them that it would look good to parade around in one. Great for the image, good for the manufacturer's coffers, but sadly, many of these supercars are destined to sit out their lives, hidden from view, alongside a collection of 4x4s and SUVs in some huge garage. Previously supercars would most likely be seen at race tracks or even be driven in competition by a suitably skilled



driver.



Porsche Carrera GT at the British Motor Show at the NEC in Birmingham, UK, 2004

Today's modern, silky smooth supercars need to satisfy the various action groups as regards reduced noise, exhaust emissions and safety features, in an attempt to make supercars increasingly inoffensive. In an age when electronic driver aids soften the effects of any poorly executed manoeuvre or warn you before it even happens, a certain amount of driver skill and exclusivity has been lost. The current generation of supercars pander to the well-heeled jet setter, young company executives, celebrities and socialites. It has therefore become important for manufacturers to install all the driver aids and computer assistance available to compensate for a lack of high performance driving skill, thus making such cars ever-bigger and heavier.

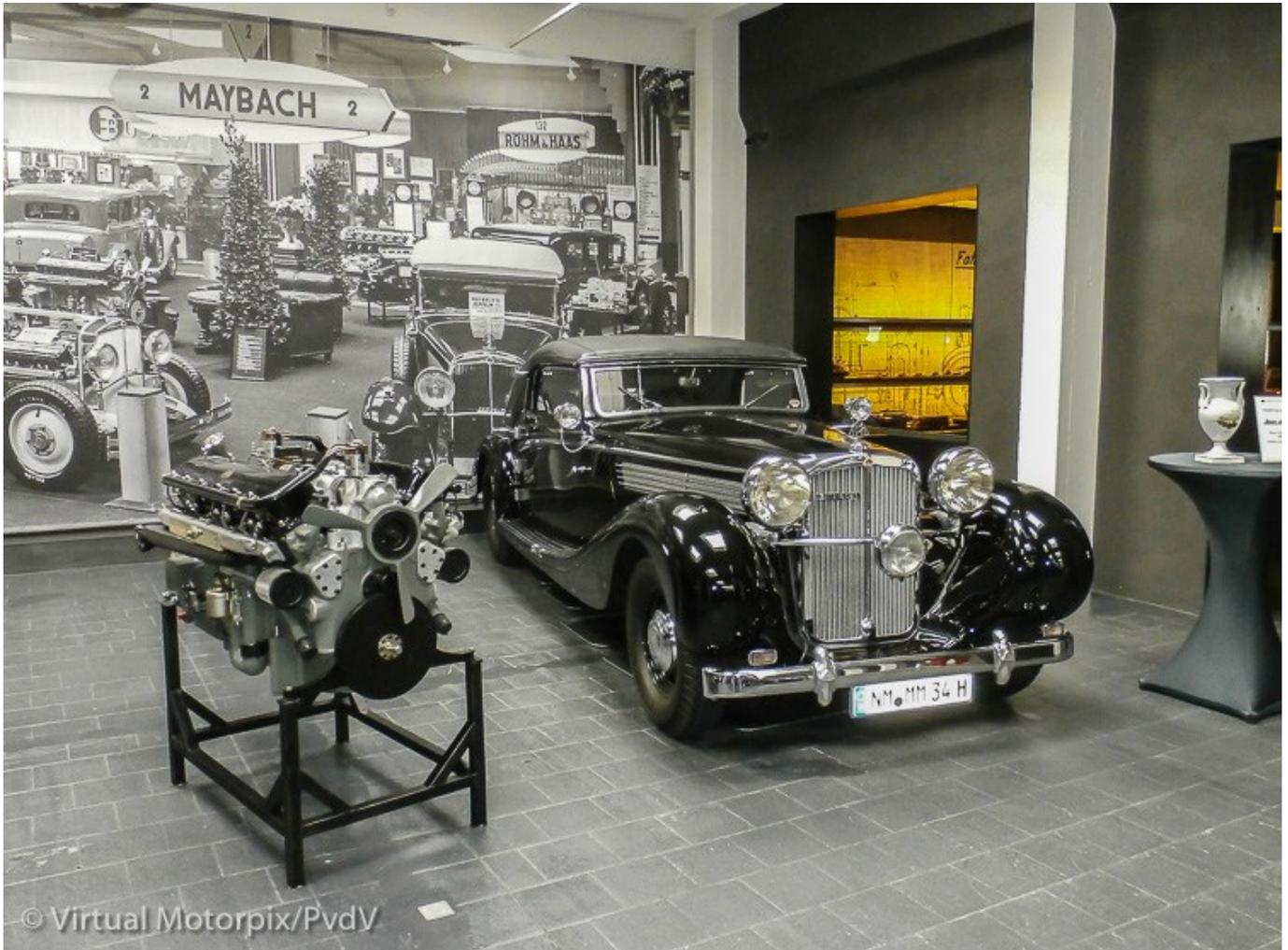


Bugatti 18/3 Chiron (1999) at the Schlumpf Museum, Mulhouse, France, 2007

Bugatti's recently launched its 8-litre, 16-cylinder, 1500bhp Chiron capable of a top speed of 261mph (420km/h) at a cost of €2.4-million each. Only five hundred cars are to be made. Land speed records are set by vehicles such as these. But then, thinking about it, the Chiron's 12mpg is probably not too far removed from the ground-shaking 5-litre 8-cylinder Mercedes Benz 500 K Spezial Roadster which cost a monumental \$12,000 in Germany in 1934 (about forty percent more than the most expensive Cadillac V16 at that time) and which had a top speed of just over 100mph (165km/h).



Mercedes-Benz 500 K Spezial Roadster (1936) from the 250-strong Louwman Collection, The Hague, 2013 Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, Italy



Maybach SW38 which was an exhibit at the 1938 Geneva Motor Show but here taken at the Automuseum Maybach in 2015

But in reality, the supercar crossbar has just been raised a few notches. In the old days, it was only a few very well-heeled members of the gentry who could afford the top sports cars in the world. Consider how many people could afford a 4.5 litre Bentley or a Maybach in the 1920/30s. Equally today, it is the true supercars, the 1993 McLaren F1, 2001 Aston Martin Vanquish V12, 2002 Ferrari Enzo, 2004 Porsche Carrera GT, 2014 Pagani Zonda Revolución with a 6-litre V12, the 790bhp LaFerrari and many more, that are out of reach of most ordinary folk.



Ferrari Enzo at the Ferrari Racing Days at Silverstone, 15th and 16th September 2012



Bugatti Veyron 16.4, Wilton House 2009

There is an age-old cliché which is still applicable here today, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” While the 1960s opened up the supercar market to a whole new group of eager buyers, it was still only the more highly skilled drivers who could explore the performance potential of the pinnacle of cars in this segment. This reality still holds true today...but we can dream!

If you have missed [part I](#), [here it is...](#)

Written by: Glen Smale

Images by: Virtual Motorpix/Glen Smale, Zoltan Papp & Pim van der Veer (more images on our website: www.virtualmotorpix.com)



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