

COMMERCE

McLaren spurs fan competition through limited 50th anniversary celebration

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McLaren 650S Can-Am

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

British automaker McLaren is celebrating its racing heritage with a limited-run of vehicles created by McLaren Special Operations, the brand's bespoke division.

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The 650S Can-Am vehicles, priced at approximately \$334,500, will be limited to 50 models to celebrate 50 years of the Canadian-American Challenge Cup. Brands often use milestone anniversaries to look back on their own history, and in this case, a highly limited item to commemorate the anniversary will generate buzz for the brand.

"McLaren is a very special car with race history and high collectibility, offering a limited number of vehicles will help keep this as an exclusive vehicle," said Lauren Fix, [automotive expert](#), Lancaster, NY. "All the way back to Henry Ford racing was a way to prove reliability and quality of the vehicle, and McLaren has definitely done that."

Ms. Fix is not associated with McLaren, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

McLaren did not respond by press deadline.

Formula one

Although McLaren was founded before the race began, the five consecutive Can-Am wins from 1967-1971 are arguably what put it on the radar of automotive enthusiasts. While McLaren may not be celebrating its own 50th anniversary this year, celebrating 50 years of the race that put it on the map is a better opportunity to develop a particular product that honors the brand's heritage.



650S Can-Am

Automakers regularly tout anniversaries of many kinds as a way to unite loyalists and generate interest in certain models.

Anniversary celebrations give brands a huge capacity for potential campaigns. They can also act as a vehicle for presenting fans with extensive historical information that would otherwise be scrolled right past ([see story](#)).

The vehicles will be offered in only three colors: "Mars Red," "Papaya Spark" and "Onyx Black," each of which relates to the brand's legacy in its own way. Mars Red takes as its inspiration the vehicle raced by Bruce McLaren himself and his partner Chris Amon; Papaya Spark updates the brand's trademark racing orange; and Onyx Black matches the base color used in later races.

McLaren 650S Can-Am video

To further connect the vehicles to their inspiration, drivers have the option to add a racing livery to the model.

McLaren credits its victories to design and technology, using lighter metal such as aluminum to enable higher top speeds and quicker accelerations. Rather than honor those designs directly, the brand is staying true to the spirit of them by remaining on the cutting-edge of lightweight design.

The bespoke edition 650S¹ will make liberal use of carbon fibre for a similarly sleek-yet-functional design, replicating the noise of the classic vehicles but topping out at 204 MPH and going from a stop to 60 MPH in under three seconds.



McLaren 650S interior

In a statement, Paul Mackenzie, executive director of McLaren Special Operations, said, "The 650S Can-Am is a modern day interpretation with a mixture of functional design features taken from the all-conquering models, combined with the lightest and most pioneering materials available, as was the case with the race cars. The extensive use of lightweight visual carbon fibre, including for the retractable hard top, adds to car's dramatic appearance and with the roof down, drivers are treated to a stirring V8 soundtrack just as Bruce and his teammates enjoyed."



650S diamond wheel

To further emphasize the exclusivity of the vehicle and the special occasion that led to its creation, the vehicles will also feature diamond rims.

When a luxury brand reminds consumers of its storied heritage, it helps to build a myth or prestige around the brand, which in turn reinforces its position as a high-end brand within the industry. Limiting the production to only 50 means that the vehicle will not be a large revenue generator for McLaren despite the price point, but it showcases the brand's allegiance to its roots and ties its newest vehicles to a tradition of innovation and success.

Looking back

Other automakers have celebrated anniversaries through other means.

Last December, German automaker BMW released a documentary to celebrate the brand's motorsport team's 50-year anniversary.

The documentary, "Adrenalin The BMW Touring Car Story," was created by two filmmakers from Denmark who traveled through Europe for a year conducting interviews with BMW Motorsport drivers and management to compile this film. The movie was created to honor and celebrate the anniversary of the team and will likely engage and educate fans and consumers about the accomplishments of BMW in car racing ([see story](#)).

Anniversary celebrations are just as common in non-automotive sectors.

For example, LVMH-owned footwear and accessories label Nicholas Kirkwood is feting its 10-year anniversary with a video game-themed capsule collection, microsite and social campaign.

Based on the 35-year-old eponymous designer's place in the video game generation, the campaign and made-to-order collection play on iconic vintage games, toys and films of the 1980s. With a much younger heritage than many of its competitors, this campaign helps to differentiate the label, showing its modern take on craftsmanship ([see story](#)).

"McLaren has always been about the ultimate in performance, quality and attention to detail," Ms. Fix said.

"Continuing this pattern by producing a limited amount of vehicles to celebrate 50 years of McLaren, represents the it's heritage and provenance."

Final Take

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