

AUTOMOTIVE

Luxury marques make a splash at Monterey Car Week

August 15, 2019



The Home of Bentley experience at Pebble Beach. Image credit: Bentley Motors

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Luxury automakers from around the world are celebrating milestones and touting new models at Monterey Car Week, including at the iconic Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

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Running through Aug. 18, Monterey Car Week is America's most prestigious automotive event. Automakers leverage unique experiences and share innovative concepts to reward loyal drivers and earn headlines.

"Monterey Car Week attracts some of the wealthiest car aficionados in the world," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of [Autolist](#), San Francisco. "This means any brand worth its lambs-wool carpet uses the week to promote itself to potential new buyers, reward and celebrate its loyal owners and generally cultivate an air of exclusivity.

"Premium brands looking to elevate their image also use the event to burnish their luxury credentials to attract wealthy buyers who haven't considered the brand yet," he said.

Monterey debuts

Automakers start to build hype for Monterey months ahead of time.

In April, British automaker Aston Martin and RM Sotheby's announced plans to auction off a 1964 Aston Martin DB5 that was only owned by one person for 40 years.

Aston Martin is hosting three days of auctions, but Sotheby's will host the one-off auction for the vehicle on Aug. 15. Produced in the Aston Martin factory in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire, the DB5 will be the subject of Sotheby's annual Evening with Aston Martin ([see story](#)).

Other auctions at Monterey will include lots of pre-war automobiles, sports cars, luxury and custom vehicles.

"More than 100 cars are expected to sell for over \$1 million, and the wealthy attendees are the ideal audience for luxury automakers," said Julie Blackley, communications manager at [iSeeCars](#), Woburn, MA.

Two new models from Aston Martin will also have their North American debuts this week, the Valhalla hypercar and the DB4 GT Zagato Continuation heritage sports car.

British automaker Bentley Motors will be celebrating its centennial as the featured marque of the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, where classic models will be on display. Monterey will also mark the first public exhibition of the third generation Flying Spur and the American debut of the EXP 100 GT.

Aside from legacy automakers, disruptive brands will also have a presence at Monterey Car Week.

British automaker McLaren will debut the new McLaren GT by MSO at Pebble Beach. With a wide range of personalization options, the GT will be available this fall starting at \$210,000.

Italian electric vehicle manufacturer Automobili Pininfarina will showcase its latest design of the Battista, a pure-electric hypercar. The hypercar will be included in a parade of classic cars made by Pininfarina SpA.

"One common theme is luxury automakers partnering with notable designers for limited edition vehicles like the Pininfarina-designed Karma GT and two limited-edition 2020 Maseratis designed by Italian fashion house Zenga," Ms. Blackley said.

Auto pop-ups

In addition to special reveals, automakers are also hosting exclusive experiences at Monterey to better engage with consumers.

Aston Martin is partnering with Hilton's Waldorf Astoria and Swiss watchmaker Tag Heuer for the automaker's "Club 1913" VIP experience. Licensed California drivers can also book curated test drives at Club 1913.

Set in a private home, the Home of Bentley will showcase the "Crewe in America" experience through test drives, an interactive commissioning studio and a Bentley boutique.

Outside of major automotive events, luxury automakers are going in new directions to get more consumers in the driver's seat.

This year's offerings from Aston Martin's Art of Living program include behind-the-scenes access to Le Mans, road trips through Utah or the Swiss Alps and factory access. The new AMR Driver's Club experience will provide training on driving its vehicles on a racetrack, categorized by different levels of experience ([see story](#)).

Similarly, German automaker Mercedes-Benz invited consumers to explore its latest models in an Atlanta experience center.

Located at Phipps Plaza, the Brand Center offered consumers the chance to virtually test-drive vehicles and interact with Mercedes' newest in-car technology. This opening followed a series of Brand Centers in other markets, which have helped to drive traffic to dealerships ([see story](#)).

"Automakers like Ferrari, Lamborghini, Rolls Royce, Bentley, Aston Martin, Jaguar Land Rover, McLaren and Mercedes-Benz all host events, drives, tastings and new model previews that are exclusive to current owners," Autolist's Mr. Undercoffler said. "This goes a long way with this 1 percent group of car fans, as they're a group accustomed to being feted at limited-access events."