



Octane

Fuelling the passion

The *Cool* issue

FROM MINI TO McQUEEN
THE CARS, THE PEOPLE,
THE MOVIES, THE GEAR
& THE PLACES...

Plus

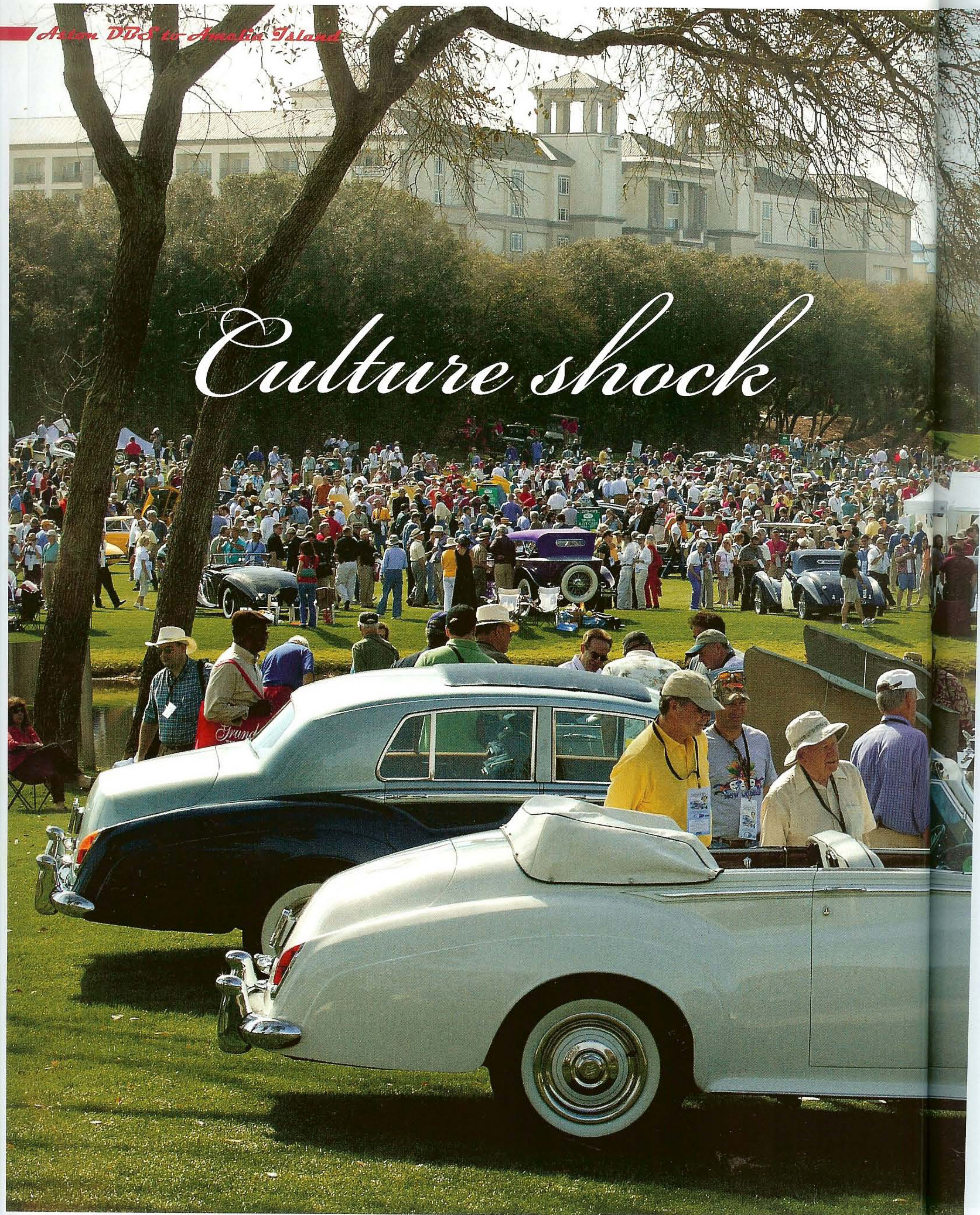
Jaguar XKSS, Honda NSX
new Aston DBS, Saab 93
Porsche 962, Alfa Giulia

COLLECTORS' EDITION

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Culture shock



There's more to Florida than Disneyland. *Octane* bluffs its way among the beautiful people at the world-class Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance – by arriving in the new Aston Martin DBS

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HAT'S TORN IT. Maybe we should have left that trail of breadcrumbs after

all. Randomly scrolling through the menus without first checking the manual has rendered the satnav mute, the on-screen display now resembling a Rorschach rendition of Hattie Jacques. It's dark, foggy, more than a little damp, and the twisted, gnarled Spanish oaks lend the backdrop a 'let's go for a walk down by the old deserted graveyard' horror movie vibe. Welcome to Amelia Island, Florida. Beautiful by day, impossible to navigate at night. Especially if you're directionally – and technologically – impaired.

It seemed like the perfect gig: drive Aston Martin's flagship DBS to what is arguably the best concours in North America, before heading to Miami via a few work-related get-togethers. Soak up the atmosphere, mingle with the beautiful people (before striding off at a mighty clip once they rumble us) and regress to childhood with all the 007 connotations. Does the DBS stack up as a proper GT and will those US johnnies be susceptible to the latest V12 model in the marque canon?

Like you need to ask. Having eventually found *Octane* HQ, we're greeted on day two with the soon-to-be-familiar query of 'Is that the new V12?' by everyone on the reservation, from van drivers to car park attendants. That and 'Are you lost?' A reasonable assumption, but here one motivated more by the California licence plate.

The Aston certainly belongs in this exclusive enclave. The two-day build-up to the main concours on Sunday, March 15, consists largely of meet 'n' greets and seminars from the great and the good of racing and hot rodding's glorious past. Those and tyre-kicking opportunities proffered by established blue chip brands and wannabes alike. Nowhere but outside the Ritz-Carlton on Amelia Island can the juxtaposition of a Spyker C8 and a Paris Hilton lookalike with the legend 'Angel' emblazoned in gold on super-tight hot pants appear normal. It's that kind of place. No cultural imperiousness on our part, you understand, more a sense of slack-jawed wonderment. You've got to see it to not believe it.



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And everyone is incredibly friendly. So when visiting from London, a city that the mass media will have you believe requires a stab vest and tin helmet to traverse safely, this naturally comes as a shock. It's almost as though you're being pummelled by politeness, which is really rather nice. Everyone wants to be here, the boorish egos that blight many highbrow car events having seemingly been left at the door.

Saturday's RM Auctions sale lends a little light relief from the new stuff, with a fabulous array of arcane Americana among the many European classics. Unfortunately, all hopes of bagging a Dual-Ghia for a song evaporate in a picosecond. Same too for the rather fabulous Touring-bodied Hudson Italia – on Borrani's – and one-off '54 Packard Panther-Daytona dream car, as penned by Dick Teague (the man who gave the world the AMC Pacer). Bidding is buoyant(ish), even if interest in Ferrari 250GT Californias appears to be waning, a high – and unaccepted – offer of just shy of \$2m being some way short of the £5.6m RM knocked out the ex-James Coburn car for last year.

Altogether more entertaining are the reactions to auctioneer Peter Bainbridge's vowel-contorting delivery. His almost theatrical air of bombast is persuasive, one local claiming: 'Every time I hear that limey talk, I feel like I should stand to attention.' A point lost on his mojito-swilling companion: she's busy clicking her sparkly heels together while staring transfixed at a man with a parrot on his shoulder.

And then the big day arrives. As the early morning mist clears, the precisely manicured lawns of The Golf Club of Amelia Island play host to 150 or so classics running the gamut of forgotten etceterinis to cutting-edge hot rods. Many of them are still queuing up as the concours opens at 9am; a surreal cavalcade of Bohman & Schwartz-bodied Cadillacs, vocal four-cam Porsche sports-racers and a Mercedes-Benz W196 streamliner on the back of a flatbed vying for your attention.

Founded by sometime racer, finder of significant 'lost' cars and Cannonball Run veteran Bill Warner, and now in its 14th year, this event is a must-visit for all car lovers.

Even if you hate concours events and feel that all classics look better for a little road rash, you'll be surprised by the standards of preservation as well as restoration on display here. From one of the least disputed styling masterpieces in motoring history – the Phantom Corsair – to a gloriously unmolested OSCA MT4, there's something for everyone.

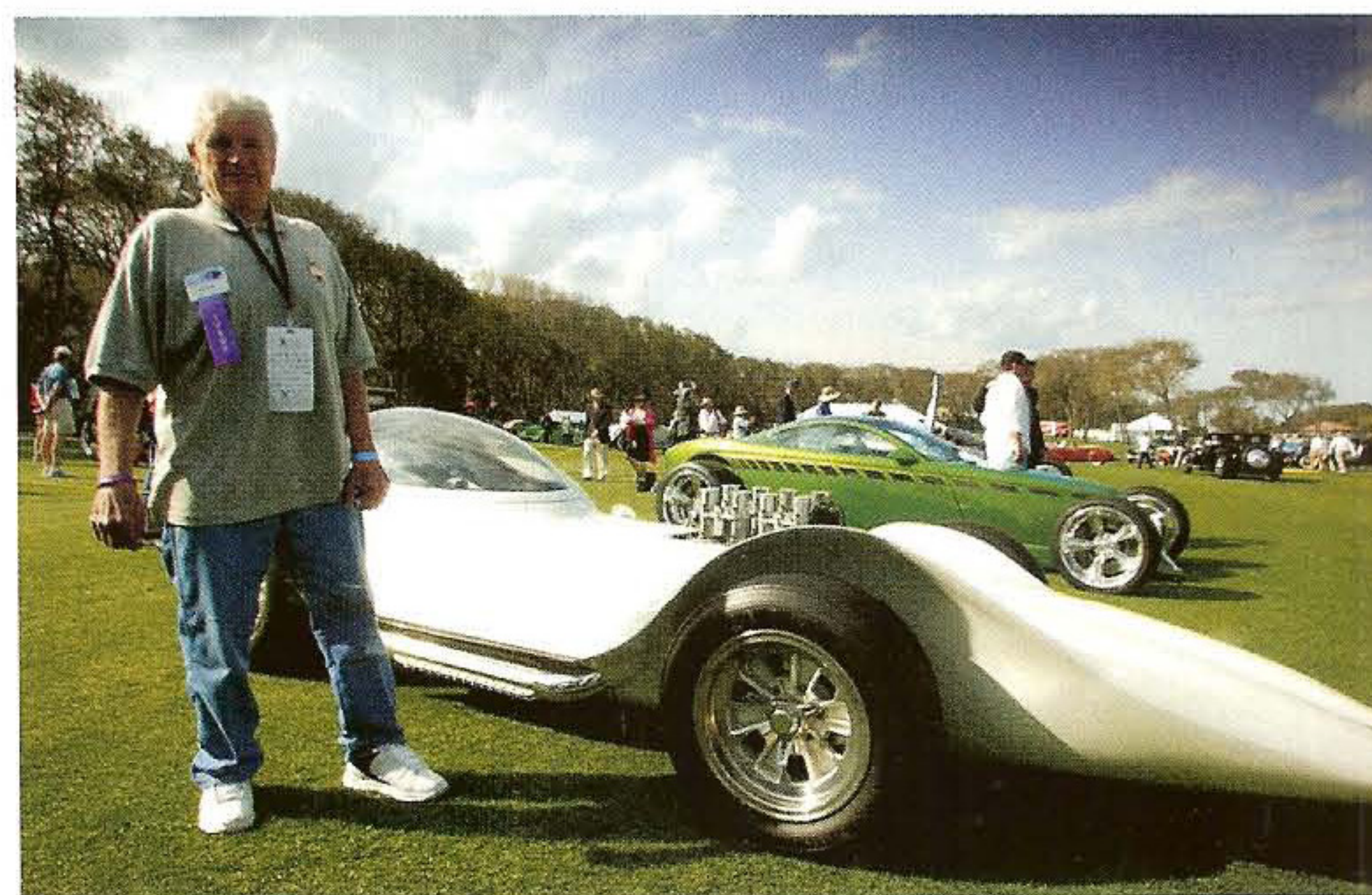
Each year, the organising committee tries to outdo itself with new and inventive classes. There can be few other events where a gaggle of American Bantams, that uniquely American take on the Austin Seven, flanks a dozen '50s Indy dinosaurs. And that's before you factor in everything from an ex-Björn Waldegård Porsche 911 Safari rally veteran (as campaigned on Sears' own-brand whitewalls...) to a Georges Irat; multi-hued front-wheel-drive 1930 Ruxton to Fiat *Otto Vu* Supersonic.

By midday, the place is packed. Hotter than hell, too, the wool and fire-ants-weave jacket proving a dumb choice after all. Judges look crimson-faced in their constricting blazers and ties, but at least they're being chauffeured around in golf buggies, with one of their number prompting millimetre-perfect avoidance techniques on our part. But the wheelman in question is Johnny 'Lone Star JR' Rutherford so it's all cool and groovy: he's a great guy. And, as obits go, 'Pasty white hack dies in freak low-speed accident with triple Indy 500 winner' has a certain ring to it.

Elsewhere, this year's guest of honour David Hobbs proves chatty, laid back and gracious. With much of this prolific racer's back catalogue on display, from Penske/Sunoco Ferrari 512M (gorgeous, if not a winner in period) to Group 4 BMW M1, via F5000 Lola T310 and Gulf Ford GT40, all that's really missing is a Morris Oxford with a Hobbs Mecha-Matic transmission – his first competition tool. There aren't many on the East Coast, we imagine, or anywhere else for that matter.



From top
Surreal cavalcade waits to enter concours; snapshots of bling outside the Ritz-Carlton; hot rod hero Dean Jeffries with Mantaray; Penske/Sunoco Ferrari 512M fronts David Hobbs tribute – but where's the Morris Oxford?; any colour Ferrari as long as it's... yellow.



**'THE ASTON'S CIVILITY IS
THE BIG DRAW. THE NEW
TOUCHTRONIC PADDLE
SHIFT IS A REVELATION'**



There has to be a winner, though, and this year's Best in Show award ultimately goes to the barking – and smoky – 1931 Voisin C20 Demi-Berline from The Munder Collection. On an entirely personal level, wish fulfilment arrives courtesy of hot rodding superstar Dean Jeffries and his extraordinary Mantaray. Nominally based on a Maserati GP car chassis (which one remains a mystery), this Ford small-block powered, asymmetrically sculptured device still appears out of this world 45 years after it won big at the Oakland Roadster Show. Effortlessly friendly, Jeffries seems genuinely touched by the reaction to his – and the 'ray's – appearance, saying: 'Thanks to this car I've been able to see the world. I've taken it everywhere, even Egypt. I love showing it, and I love the fact that people still want to see it.' As do we, Michael Douglas' stunt double (yes, you read that correctly) proving to be an absolute gent. One who's owned a Ford GT40 Spider for the better part of 40 years, too. Lucky man.

Then comes the highpoint of the trip: riding in the back of the Aston as Mark the snapper and publisher Geoff head for 'nearby' Fernandina Beach for dinner. Though nominally a 2+2 (the rear seats are optional), the DBS isn't remotely comfortable for rear-ferried passenger. Not even if you're on the stumpy side. The meal is soured by the knowledge that the whole process has to be repeated later. Alcohol helps, mind.

Day four and it's off for a meeting at the Collier Collection in Naples, the drive consisting of endlessly straight roads, the flatness of topography providing an ideal place for a few high-speed passes. You would imagine. Unfortunately, the sheer number of nonagenarians blighting the blacktop, allied to the quantum volume of fuzz, reins in temptation. And when free of hectoring commuters, middle-lane bandits and on to some private roads (your honour), the Aston disappoints slightly. It's a lovely car, really it is, but the DBS just doesn't feel particularly quick: certainly not 0-60mph in 4.3sec and on to 191mph quick, although we suspect that's down to the ECU throttling back to cope with US low-octane petrol. At 150mph, though, it's rock solid, and undramatic enough for the wingman to make hotel reservations on his mobile without hyperventilating.

The Aston's civility is the big draw. The ride quality is surprisingly supple and the new Touchtronic paddle shift a revelation. With memories of the rubbish system that came free with the Vanquish not entirely exorcised, we expected it to be easily discombobulated but it's a cracker. It's an exceptional auto and there's no baulking once it's hot.

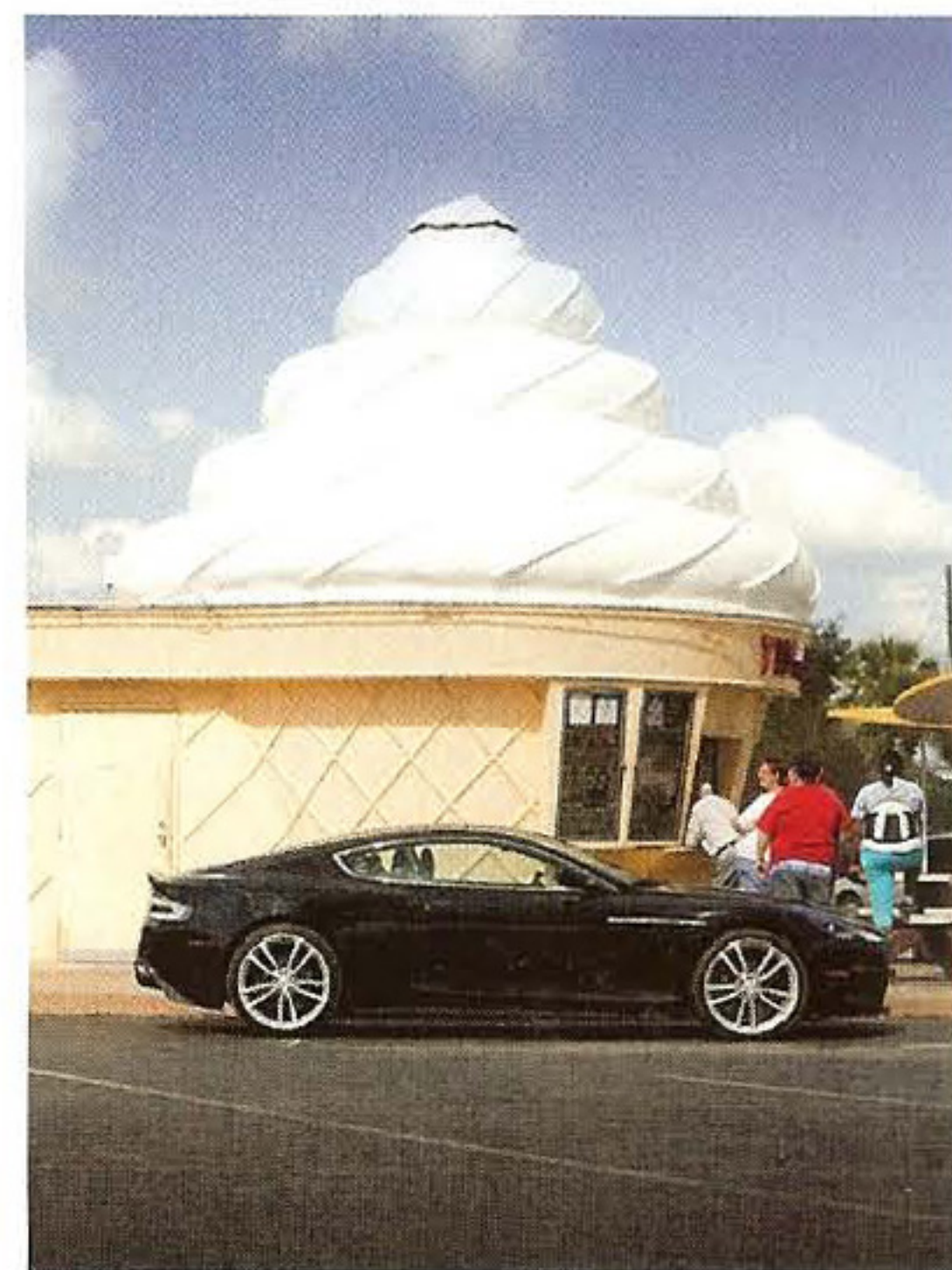
On arrival at Naples in early evening, the designated driver screws up (again) with a tour of every dead end and industrial unit before we finally make it to the hotel. Fortunately the primal scream therapy lasts only as long as the time it takes for us to get to the bar. Another day, and there's little driving save for an evening visit to the downtown area. A brief one as it transpires: it's St Patrick's Day and there are only so many green wigs and inflatable shamrocks we can stomach. So we retire to the hotel to watch '80s B-movie crashfest, *The Junkman*.

Up at half-past dark, then follows the long and achingly boring drive along Route 41 to Miami. Florida is much like you imagine Norfolk will be, given a few more decades of global warming – flat and humid, with funky fauna and bloodsucking insects the size of pterodactyls. Sticking religiously to the speed limit, and staring at the horizon, we have plenty of time to ponder what, precisely, constitutes a flag-burning meeting? That, and whether it would be ethically acceptable to stuff a Chrysler 392 into a Toyota Prius.

On arrival in rain-lashed Miami, it's time to hand back the car. And with some regret, too. Though perhaps not bowled over by its outright urge, we identify the DBS as a proper gran turismo; one that we would happily give garage space to had we the necessary £159,043. Few cars of this type engender such an overwhelmingly positive response from bystanders and other road users, and it's all too hard not to be seduced by something that looks and sounds *this* good. Ferrari should be fretting.



Left
Was there ever a cooler-looking XJ-S? Line-up of Bob Tullius Group 44 racing Jags and Triumphs was impressive, especially for visiting Brits.



Clockwise from above
Indy display celebrates the glory years; from the sublime to the ridiculous; Brock Yates (centre) and Johnny Rutherford (right) see the funny side.

