

Junkyard of treasure

A forgotten collection of antique cars comes back to life.
RICHARD PHILIP reports.

A collection of abandoned old cars was found on an estate near the city of Poitiers in the west of France, including one that turned out to be worth millions.

The broken-down, rusty cars were cramped together in shelters with low, metal roofs. From far, they looked like cars in a junkyard, which was probably why nobody realised their true value for almost 50 years.

Recently, the owners of the collection suspected that one of the cars might be valuable. They invited experts to take a look at them. The experts were from the car department of Artcurial, a French company that specialises in selling valuable objects.

Artcurial's experts, Matthieu Lamoure and Pierre Novikoff, had years of experience in identifying cars of historical value. When they arrived, they were stunned by what they found at the estate. There were 60 vintage, antique and classic cars. Some of them were manufactured before World War II. The cars had big brand names or marques, such as Ferrari, Maserati, Bugatti and Talbot-Lago.

Mr Lamoure and Mr Novikoff concluded that the cars were extremely important and made arrangements to put them up for sale at an Artcurial auction. (An auction is an event where valuable objects are sold to the person who bids the highest price. In last month's issue of *What's Up*, we ran a story about a painting by John Constable, which was sold at another auction house, Sotheby's.)

History on wheels

One car belonged to Egypt's King Farouk, who ruled from 1936 to 1952. King Farouk was known for his extravagant lifestyle. He spent lavishly on food and wine, had almost a thousand suits, a necktie collection and a coin collection. He also collected some of the best cars during his time, one of which was this Talbot-Lago T26 cabriolet (see "Car styles"). It was bought for slightly over one million Singapore dollars at the auction.

But, the real star of the show was a Ferrari California Spider. It is an extremely rare automobile. Only 37 cars of this model were ever made. This one was first owned by the French actor, Gerard Blain, and was later sold to another famous French actor, Alain Delon. Delon was photographed



THE Ferrari after it was cleaned up.

The 1961 Ferrari 250 GT SWB California Spider with piles of books on it (left) was the biggest prize discovered in the collection. Next to it is a 1956 Maserati A6G 2000 Gran Sport Berlinetta Frua.

in the car with the equally famous American actress, Jane Fonda, during the filming of the movie, *Les Felins*, in 1964. Historians thought that the car had been lost forever. When Artcurial found it, the car was sitting in a shed with old car magazines piled on it. It is considered a historical treasure and was the most expensive car at the auction. It was bought for about \$25 million.

The man behind the cars

The cars that had been "lost" all these years were part of a car collection started in the 1950s by a businessman named Roger Baillon. He ran a transport and truck manufacturing company in the west of France. He made a fortune building trucks. His real

passion, however, was collecting cars. Mr Baillon was not like King Farouk, who collected cars simply because he wanted to show off his money and power by owning expensive things. Mr Baillon really loved everything about cars. He was fascinated by how they worked – how their bodies, engine, wheels, mechanical and electrical parts functioned together. Besides being able to appreciate the inner workings of a car, he also enjoyed what it looked like on the outside, its design and style. He even designed and built his own car in 1947. It is known by its French name, L'Oiseau Bleu, which means the Blue Bird in English.

He wanted to start a museum featuring his car collection so that others could enjoy it. So, he bought

a plot of land in the west of France and stored his collection there. Unfortunately, his dream of setting up the car museum was dashed. In the 1970s, his transport business declined. He started losing money and was forced to sell around 50 of the cars in his collection. The remainder stayed on his estate.

Mr Baillon died around 10 years ago and his son died in 2013. When his grandchildren inherited the cars, they did not know how rare and precious they were until Artcurial's experts came and assessed them.

Old, but good as gold

Mr Lamoure and Mr Novikoff could not believe their eyes when they saw

the cars. The cars were not stored in solid, fully covered, high-tech garages. They were parked in sheds with wooden posts holding up flimsy metal roofs. Climbing plants and weeds had invaded the passenger compartments of some of the cars. In some places, parts of the metal roof were resting directly on the cars. But, the wear and tear could not hide the cars' beauty.

"Certain cars, much like paintings or sculptures, are works of art, created by artists," said Mr Novikoff. "Not only the engineering, but their styling reflects the history of design," he added.

Mr Lamoure compared the beauty of cars to that of famous paintings. He said people can "feel the same emotion" whether they are looking at a beautiful



THIS Panhard-Levassor Dynamic coupé X76 was made between 1936 and 1940.



ARTCURIAL's auction. This car is a Maserati A6G Gran Sports, one of only three built by the famous car designer, Pietro Frua.

painting by the artist, Pablo Picasso, or the perfect design of the Ferrari California Spider.

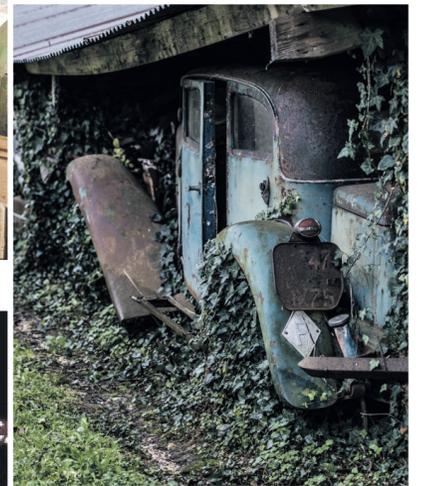
Some of the cars were restored before they were displayed and sold at the auction. Others were displayed and sold in their **derelict** condition. People were willing to buy them because of their historical significance. One of the cars, which sold despite its poor condition, was the Talbot-Lago Grand Sport coupé (see "Car styles"). The car, with a collapsed rear, was sold for about \$2.5 million.

Almost 16,000 people from all over the world attended the auction and nearly all the cars were sold. It looks like Mr Baillon's dream of sharing his passion for cars did come true after all.

– Pictures courtesy of Artcurial

CAR STYLES

Cars come in different shapes and styles. Most cars you see on the road are "sedans" (also called "saloons") with two rows of seats, an engine compartment sticking out in front and the boot at the back. This story mentions two other styles. A "cabriolet" (say "ka-bri-oh-lay"; also called a convertible) is a car with a roof that folds down. A "coupé" (say "koo-pay") is a style of car with a fixed roof, two doors, and a sloping rear.



IVY and other wild plants had covered some of the cars.

VINTAGE, ANTIQUE OR CLASSIC?

Experts use different terms to classify old cars. They have slightly different definitions of whether a car is an antique, a classic, a veteran, a vintage, or a pre-World War II model. Generally speaking, a **veteran car** is one that was built before 1919, a **vintage car** is one built between 1919 and 1930, a **pre-World War II car** is one built between 1930 and 1948, and a **classic car** is one built between 1950 and 1980. An **antique car** is a broad term to describe any car that is over 25 years of age. This means, a veteran, vintage, pre-war or classic car may also be called an antique car.



CAR experts Matthieu Lamoure and Pierre Novikoff.