

Guts, glory and glamour at Concours d'Elegance

Pebble Beach is fascinating. Not only for the cars, but the way it operates. So if you're keen you can get there at 6am for Dawn Patrol. This is basically a chance to see the cars moving under their own steam (and to lay down a blanket by the podium for later in the day) as they drive out onto the hallowed turf of the 18th fairway. After that they barely move for the rest of the day, so you want to be there.

Each car is led out by a golf buggy and then parked precisely on its mark. An army of people are needed to do this, all dressed in identical baseball caps. The owners are stressed because, heck, this is Pebble Beach and they're the highest of high-rollers, used to having people do stuff for them, but wanting to do this themselves because, heck, this is Pebble Beach.

Once they're parked up an avalanche of car detailers descends. Because they've got so dirty travelling the 400 metres from the holding paddock past the front of the hotel and down to the grass.

By 8am all the cars are on the field and



Highlights of the event

by 9am the judges are out. A group of judges is responsible for a particular class and they have to reach a consensus verdict on the best car, but in addition there are celebrity judges: racing drivers, car designers, company bosses and so forth, who get to be involved too. John Lasseter, the boss of Pixar was one. Jay Leno was there, so was Arnold Schwarzenegger.

It's really interesting watching each car being judged. The owners scurry around on the search for documents the

judges have requested, while the car is poked, prodded and generally given a hard time. Several people adopt period dress, which is always amusing.

On the other side of the hotel is the Concept Lawn, which is a bit of a misnomer. McLaren has its MSO 720S

on display, there's a

Performante and a

bunch of other

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including the new Maybach Vision 6 (magnificently OTT) and the forthcoming BMW Z4 (bit of a wallflower after the Maybach). Best of all was the VW I.D. Buzz after VW announced they'll put it into production in 2022.

Back on the lawn the crowds build and the judges keep ticking boxes. It's a long process, but the cars are frequently magnificent. The attention to detail was astonishing.

The Thirties was staggering, the bonnet mascots are sublime, I love when I see a couple in front of their De

Dion Bouton, him deep in conversation with the judges, her discussing her outfit with some friends. Outfit judging is obviously something that hasn't caught on yet.

Several cars are outstanding, but for me nothing grabbed the attention quite like the 1929 Barker-bodied Mercedes-Benz Tourer (it's the blue and chrome affair). The attention to detail was astonishing. So I spent my time trailing the judges, listening to their conversations and chatting to the owners of these vastly expensive

machines, who get just as nervous as you and I about outcomes.

And for those who believe Pebble's tendency to reward cars that have been preened to a standard far beyond how they originally came out of the factory is a pointless chase of perfection, there's always the Preservation class – here it's fine to be seen to be ageing gracefully. Which is more than can be said for all the people on the lawn... (topgear)

