

# CLASSIC CITROËN CELEBRATION

## CITROËNS CELEBRATE AT AUTODROME

WORDS & PHOTOS: BILL HUNTER



The chassis, motor, drive train and all other parts of the car shown here on the Autodrome were off-the-showroom-floor Rosalie. The bodywork and headlights alone were changed.



Three Rosalie reconstructions were made available for the weekend. Similar reconstructions are housed in a British museum. 106 World records were achieved between 15th March and 27th July 1933 in the 8hp 4 cylinder car.

- travelled 300,000 kilometres, day and night for 134 days, at an average speed of 93 km/h. This car was to become widely known as the Rosalie, and its record has never been equalled.

A lucky French car enthusiast and friend to our magazine took a trip to France recently and encountered a very special celebration at the old Autodrome racing circuit at Montlhéry, on the outskirts of Paris, during the first weekend in October.

Even though it coincided with the France versus All Blacks World Rugby semi-final that drew an audience of 16 million Frenchmen, the show managed to attract a huge crowd.

### SCARS OF WAR

For many admirers, it would be the one and only chance they would ever have to see the old Autodrome and its attendant laboratories, machine shops, testing grounds, garages and spectator stands. Although the place retains the atmosphere of its glory days when it hosted Grand Prix, 24 Hour, other races and speed record attempts, it also bears the scars wrought by WWII when it served as a prison and a military depot. By 1945, it had become a pitiful ruin.

Since then, the concrete oval track has been partially restored. But land prices in the district and the demands of nearby military establishments are likely to be the deciding factors in determining its future. Protests to save the track will no doubt follow.

The event on this particular occasion was held to celebrate a number of Citroën speed and distance records set over the years, including one famous occasion when in the summer of 1933, a standard off-the-floor 8 hp production car - the AC 4



This car, kept under cover for the event, is a 1924 5 hp Citroën Trèfle still capable of 100km/h. In the background is a 1923 Citroën chauffeur-driven B2 Landaulet.

### CITROËN BY THE MAGNUM

The names, serial numbers and appearance of early model Citroëns may not be familiar to many Australians, other than those who remember reading Herge's Tin Tin books, or others who can recall the front wheel drive car that was imported to Australia in the early 1950s that had the unusual feature of locating the gear change lever on the dashboard. The 'Traction' was considered to be 'particularly French', and the Australian market took to it like Veuve Cliquot champagne.

Aficionados at Montlhéry were treated to many other Citroën delights by the magnum. Displays of over 200 of the finest, most authentic representatives of the marque, dating back to the early 20th century, were only part of the offering.

Replicas of the original record setting cars could be admired close-up, and recorded on thousands of digital camera memory cards. And twice a day, these same replicas made several circuits of the Autodrome, and could be photographed from the trackside as they roared past the public stands. The need for replicas arises from the fact that the originals were destroyed in the war but plans,





The modified Citroën 2 cv Barbot achieved an average speed of 90.960 km/h for 12 hours at Montlhéry in 1953 with a 348 cc motor.



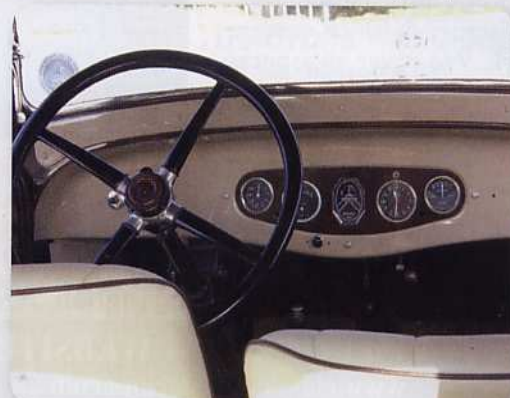
The 5 cv Citroën 'Docteur' was also known as a 'Cloverleaf' (Trèfle)



The fast and pretty Citroën DS convertible was able to travel at the higher levels of Autodrome circuit.



The above photo shows a 1933 4 cyl 8hp car, very popular in France, known as the 'Rosalie'.



The simple but graceful dashboard of a 1929 Citroën C4.

specifications, and other records were found in the Montlhéry archives, and these were used in the Citroën workshops to build the cars seen here on display.

## GOING FOR A SPIN

Now and again, some lucky bystander got to ride in one alongside the driver. There were no records to be set, however, so they rarely mounted more than a couple of levels up the steep incline of the oval. Other spectators, including your correspondent, were invited to become passengers in other, more mundane models. The generosity and camaraderie of the owner, Christian Soyé, was charming beyond measure. 'It's a pleasure to share the enthusiasm,' he assured me, as he hooted the klaxon and waved to the crowd.

The bodywork of the replicas also follows the 1933 design, when some lightening and streamlining of the body work was made to the 'Petite Rosalie', but the chassis, engine, transmission and other running gear were all inspected and sealed under the watchful eyes of scrutineers, and a battery of movie cameras. Diligent searching of Youtube will turn up a few minutes of the event.

## 2CV SISTER

Partnering Citroën in the Rosalie record was the oil company Yacco who, on another speed and distance record some 20 years later, supplied the oil and lubrication that helped keep a 2CV Citroën running at 90.960 km/h for 12 hours, and 85.02 km/h for 24 hours. This little car, lightened and streamlined like its big sister, was also on display over the weekend. Those who are familiar with the original 2CV, the 'deuche', will be suitably impressed. The driver at Montlhéry certainly seemed to be as he ran for a

short while right up on the top layer of the oval. It proved to be a bit too much, though, and he soon dropped down a couple of levels.

## FRENCH FRIENDS

Although the weekend was mostly a Citroën event, there were some other very impressive cars about. One in particular was the blue Simca. M. Pierre Flahaut, who was a works driver for Simca with victories including the Bol D'Or and the 12 Hours Paris race. He had fond memories of a number of Australian drivers of the period.

My thanks to Pascal Pannetier of the Magazine 'Route Nostalgie' who made the arrangements for me to gain entry to the Montlhéry Circuit, and to Jean-Pierre Bush who drove me through the Parisian traffic to get me there. And just for the record, France won the semi-final against the All Blacks. ■



Mr Bionnet has driven his 1923 Citroën Labourette in France, Switzerland and Belgium. He undertook a 1,400km trip in one day



Mr Pierre Flahaut, now in his 80s, was formerly owner and works driver for Simca in the 1950s, achieving victories in 12 hour Paris events and the 1951 and 1954 Bol D'Or series.