

HOW THEY PICK THE WINNERS

Just what are those concours judges looking for?

By Mark Vaughn – reprinted from Aug. 13, 2007 AUTOWEEK

What do they look for, those guys in the Brooks Brothers blazers, bow ties and boaters who walk through the field at a concours and pick the winners? What are they marking down on those clipboards? And do they really take away points for grass clippings in the tire treads?

To find out, we asked the best in the business.

“You have to be familiar with your subject,” said Glenn Mounger, former co-chair at Pebble Beach, now head of honorary judges there.

Like most of the best judges, Mounger would learn as much as he could about the cars he was going to judge before he ever got to the concours. Still, he realized there was more to it than that.

“You have to be open to things you may not know, if there’s a point of authenticity and the entrant has supporting documentation, you have to be open to considering that.”

“The condition and authenticity of the car is one of the first hurdles, the stuff like period-correct hose clamps and screws,” said Pebble Beach chief class judge Winston Goodfellow.

The problem might be when cars get a little too perfect.

“My philosophy is, if it’s done better than the factory, if the panel gaps are perfect and the stitching on the seats is straight instead of wandering a little, I don’t have a problem with that,” said Goodfellow. “But if something was originally flat black, it should not be restored in glossy black. As long as it’s done to original intent, that’s okay. But when you veer away from that, that’s not acceptable.”

Those are the details, but the best judges can see both the forest and the trees.

“It’s a beauty contest,” said Larry Smith, longtime judge and now chairman of the Meadow Brook Concours. “We’re not looking for the screw slots to be clean and no grass clippings under the footwell.”

“Before we judge anything, I have all my guys go out and walk the line, see what makes an impact,” said Goodfellow. “It’s amazing how often your gut instinct is right.”

Still, the world isn’t a fair place. You may love your car, but the next guy may not.

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” said Smith. “And believe me, there are some people that are in very high positions in the design world that have a different sense of beauty than what my personal definition is. I’ve seen judges pick some ugly cars.”

Smith adds, of course, that, “All in all, people in the design world have a good sense of what makes something attractive, and we really do pick those people out (to judge).”

And once you are a judge, be nice.

“One of my big things is you’ve got to realize that the people who bring the cars there, without them you don’t have a show,” said Mounger. “Everybody has to be treated fairly, give everyone the benefit of the doubt, always treat the entrant with respect, never give a cursory judgment, always give the full respect of the entrant and the car.”

And most of all, keep it in perspective.

“Don’t take it so friggin’ seriously,” said Goodfellow. “We aren’t negotiating arms reductions or hostage releases, we’re raising money for a charity.”

Pebble Beach head judge Ed Gilbertson likes to say that concours preserve history, which is a good point, too. And it’s wheeled history, remember. So after the concours, “Go drive it and enjoy it,” said Goodfellow, “For God’s sake, enjoy it.”

Sidebar:

THE SIX THINGS JUDGES LOOK FOR:

1. Beauty
2. Proportion
3. A striking car with presence
4. Historically accurate – the right pieces, parts and paint
5. The car assembled as it was or as it was intended when new
6. An envelope, stuffed with cash, the judge’s name scrawled on the outside, discreetly left in the glove compartment at judging time (oh, c’mon, we’re *kidding!*)