



THE BUGATTI CELEBRATION AT THE CHÂTEAU ST. JEAN



The Bugatti Factory Home – the Château Saint Jean, nestled amongst the trees in Alsace.

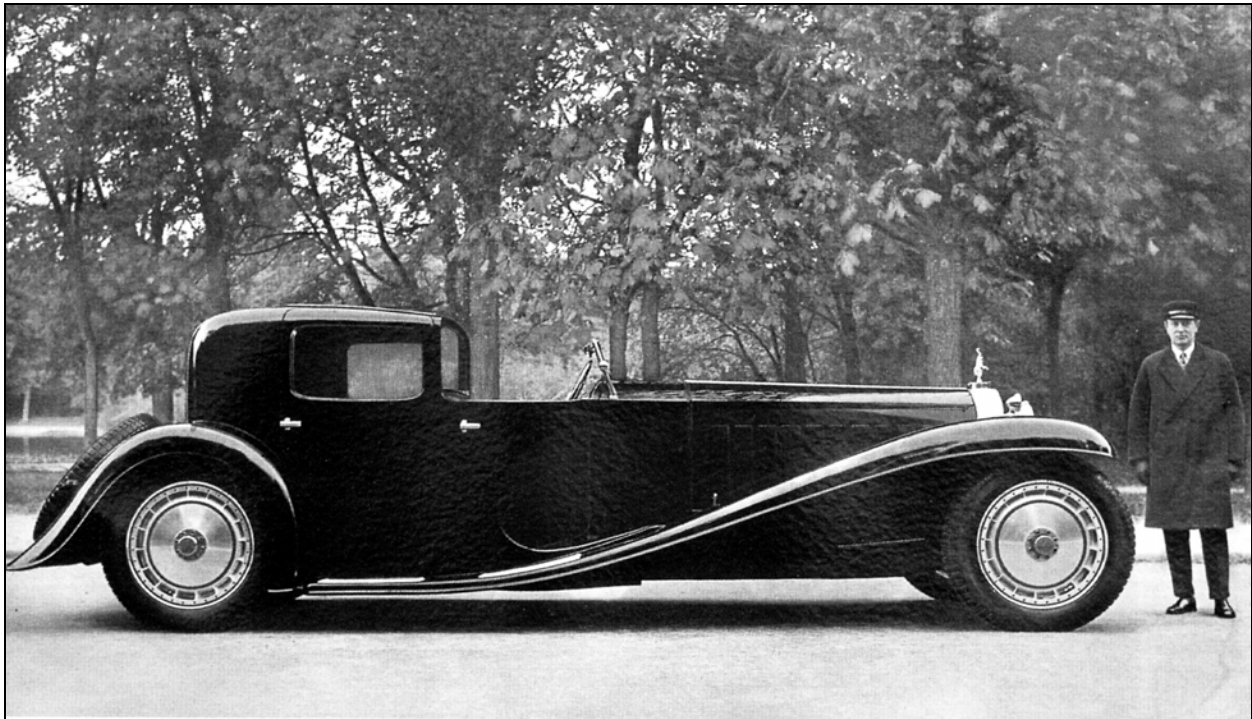
Part 1: The Guests Arrive Chez Bugatti

France's famed driver, **Aristide La Fontaine**, and his lady, Maria, were dressed in new attire from a post-race shopping spree in the fine boutiques along the Cote d'Azur. The victors in the recent Grand Prix de Nice were the guests of honor at the Bugatti Post-Race Event. It was an event that promised a degree of opulence rarely seen since the days before the stock markets crashed five years ago. Yet this was expected of France's famed automaker, Ettore Bugatti, whose personal invitation to Molsheim had been done in the finest hand-lettered calligraphy and stamped with the Bugatti seal.





Aristide and Maria were nonetheless surprised to find that the car picking them up at the train station in nearby Dorlisheim was one of the classic Bugatti Royale models. In fact, it was Ettore Bugatti's personal car – a Bugatti Type 41 Royale “Coupe Napoleon” – and it was driven by the family's own chauffeur. The Coupe boasted a straight 8 cylinder engine and was the epitome of the refined engineering that typified the brand. It was one of only six built (the last coming off the line in 1933) and was painted in a deep black, with only the slightest hint of blue, reminiscent of the country's racing heritage.



Driving from the station, the two lounged in the back of the Type 41. La Fontaine found it a pleasant journey. The chauffeur navigated the country lanes in an unhurried fashion that left a gentle breeze coursing through the passenger compartment. The day was beautiful; a spring chill was in the air and new leaves were sprouted upon the trees. Only a few errant clouds dotted the skies.

It did not take long before they had arrived at the gate leading into the Château Saint Jean, upon Rue Saint-Jean. The gateway to the Château was glorious, combining a flourish of Roman stone architecture set into a section of a ruin from a medieval wall. The iron work of the gate itself was shaped into the essential curve of the Bugatti trademark radiator, though that was a coincidence of the design, the very definition of art and the style that epitomized Bugatti.



Once they entered within, they found themselves upon a short circular gravel drive that came to Chateau's front entry stair. To either side ranged a perfectly manicured and expansive lawn. The light green of the grass shone in the afternoon sun. The Chateau – or perhaps it would be more fitting to call it a great house – breathed an exquisite elegance. To the sides were two coach houses nestled amongst the trees. Nearby was the orangery.

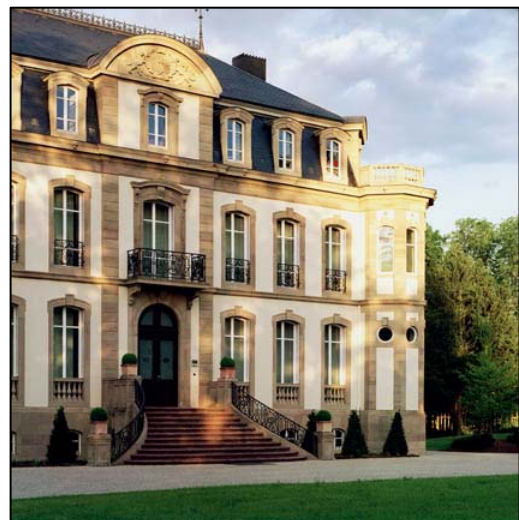
It was there, beside the orangery, that Aristide first noted that many tables and chairs had been set around a finely made wooden pavilion graced with pillars that supported a tiled roof. From the side, a ramp served the top of the central platform. The pavilion sheltered what he guessed was to be some sort of car. Its contours remained hidden from view, cloaked heavily in extravagant, deep blue velvet coverings. Aristide surmised that the car, if indeed it was that, was larger than a racing machine.

The tables and chairs set before the pavilion were a bright white, as were the fine linen table clothes. A dozen waiters, also clad in white, strode purposefully between the tables, laying down many bottles of champagne as well as finely fluted glasses and trays of hors d'oeuvres. Maria smiled as she took it in. She turned to Aristide, "What sort of photographer am I to have not brought a camera!"

"It is good that you didn't" the French driver quipped – "We are the guests of honor!"

She laughed as the Type 41 "Coupe Napoleon" purred to a stop before the stairs of the Chateau. The two looked up at the arched doorway as **Ettore Bugatti** walked down toward them. An attendant graciously opened the car's doors and reached out to escort Aristide and Maria from the car. They greeted the famed automaker.

"Congratulations!" Ettore called out shaking Aristide's hand. He turned to the others assembled, "Maintenant, we have our victorious French drivers chez nous!!" He paused, then added quietly, "Though I wish you had raced a Bugatti – and not a Salmson!"





Aristide nodded cordially. It was a question that begged a diplomatic response – and it was one he had prepared for: “Oui, that’s true – and the other cars on the podium were yours! Vive la Belle France!”

Although he respected the designs of Bugatti, he was loyal to his blue Salmson 8C, one of only a handful of the brand’s cars that mounted a modified 8 cylinder airplane engine. The car’s aircraft heritage was apparent to the racer, who liked the analogy of flying through the curves upon the race course – and many mechanics were surprised to note that the engine’s maintenance cycles were not based on miles driven, but rather on the number of hours running, as was common with aircraft. A Salmson 8C was a rare car indeed and Aristide knew he was lucky to have one to drive.

Aristide glanced around and realized for the first time that many of the other race drivers and noted guests were already there, standing beside the stairs. He could see **Sebi Orsi** of Italy, **Victor Hugo** from Belgium, and even the “**Volcán**” standing together. Germany’s **Godeschalk Hegkman** stood apart and somewhat stiffly, as seemed to be his normal posture. He was dressed in his trademark white Teutonic uniform, with his odd sword once again hanging upon his hip. Yet where was...? No, **Vitez Rychly** of Czechoslovakia, whose hatred for the German was now a matter of frequent press attention, was nowhere to be seen.

Rychly had driven to 2nd place in the Grand Prix, making the race at Nice his second time in as many races to be on the podium. The Czech had thus taken the lead among drivers in the Épreuve based on point standings. He also drove a Bugatti T51A, so his absence this afternoon was odd. Aristide pondered if the Czech’s absence had been upsetting for Ettore and the Bugatti factory.

Aristide’s thoughts turned momentarily dark as he considered that perhaps the rumors were true – the Czech pilot had remained in Nice searching for his fiancée, **Veronika Vilhelmova**, whose disappearance during the Grand Prix remained something of a mystery. Or maybe his absence meant that some sort of foul play was already afoot.

He measured the thought grimly. There was still the matter of the two bodies found in the race paddocks after the fires had been extinguished.... And he recalled the sound of gunfire that had caused many to flee the raceway, even as the drivers had pressed onward to the finish line.

Surely, these weren’t the first bodies that the Czech had encountered in his racing career, that much was known. Of all the drivers, it was only the Czech who employed a body guard. No, Aristide recalled, not one – he had two men. If the rumors about his



early exploits were even half true, the Czech was more than simply a cunning driver. Aristide's face twisted unconsciously into a scowl as his eyes narrowed.



A flash from a camera tripod brought him back to the moment. He glanced back toward the coach house that stood to the left of the Château. For the first time, he noted two race cars were parked there, gleaming in the sunlight. Then Ettore led the guests in applause to honor the victorious racers celebrating the win at the Grand Épreuve at Nice. And first among the drivers was France's very own race pilot, Aristide La Fontaine.

Part 2: Dinner is Served, Al Fresco

The guests and racers were escorted to the orangery and pavilion for a celebratory dinner. All were soon sitting at the fine tables. It wasn't long before the clink of champagne glasses accented the wonderful murmur of conversation. The songs of the birds and the gentle rustling of the leaves in the breeze added to the glory of the moment. Many bottles of champagne were consumed as the sun fell low in the sky. Then dinner was served.

There were no less than five courses, including several dishes drawn from the Alsace region, including port rouelle with shallots, thyme, and sauerkraut, covered in sliced apples and smoked pancetta. An onion flan in shortcrust pastry with béchamel sauce paired well with the meal, along with a salad garnished with figs. It was a feast befitting royalty – and **Ettore Bugatti** made clear in dinner conversation that such standing should be accorded to race drivers, not only for their daring but also for their unofficial role in popularizing the automobile among common people. For that, the Bugatti factory was grateful – Bugatti's cars were designed so that they could be driven around town by the common man as any car and yet easily converted for racing if desired. Off with the headlights and fenders, lighten a bit here and there – and voilà, prêt pour la victoire!

After dinner, **Aristide** and Maria drank Cerdon, a demi sec with a graceful purple label and a sweet, bubbly taste. They were surprised to find that it was bottled in the Rhône-Alpes region in southeastern France, quite near Annecy, an ancient town not far from



the Swiss border in the Haute-Savoie. Finally a Fromage Frais Tart with crème fraîche was served for dessert, with a selection of fine dessert wines.

As tea and coffee were served, the conversation of the guests turned to racing, though most continued to wonder at the form concealed in layers of dark velvet in the pavilion just a few meters away. An electricity filled the air as one by one the guests realized that Ettore Bugatti's mood seemed to reflect that something far more interesting was afoot than the post-race party. Whatever was concealed under the soft wrappings upon the platform was certainly to be presented with a drama that few had anticipated.

Nonetheless, the guests and drivers were soon deep in conversation. Whatever was hidden in the velvet wrappings would wait for now. **Petrus de Salvion Bernardus** of Switzerland soon paired up with **Mr. Rhys Kingsford-Smatter**. The two began discussing some truly radical engine modifications that might work in the Bugatti T51's 2.3 liter, straight 8 cylinder engine. It seemed the Swiss driver was willing to dare anything as an experiment – and Kingsford-Smatter was more than willing to comply as it suited his gambling nature. Indeed, the British industrialist and cigar aficionado, whose massive size and weight compared only to his vast fortune (wealth made in international shipping and paper supplies), seemed quite interested in testing his latest ideas on a modern racer. They were soon lost in conversation some sort of radical gearbox design.

Both **Victor Hugo Stéphane de Broqueville** of Belgium and **Godeschalk Hegkman von Grebeneck** of Germany were drawn to **Marcus Wagner**, the American race aficionado who was been known to collect and race Bugattis on the wood tracks of New York state and at the famed brickyard at Indianapolis. Soon, Victor was addressing the differences between Bugatti and his new Duesenberg race car, an area that Marcus seemed to know well.

It wasn't long before the new driver from Portugal, **Pedro Gomes**, also joined the conversation, yet the American seemed to have little patience for the Portuguese driver's heavily accented English. On the other hand, the Belgian was clearly onto something as the American began to offer his assistance with modifications to features of the racing engine in the Duesenberg. Yet the persistence of Pedro Gomes paid off and soon Marcus seemed to take a liking to the Portuguese driver, and offered some assistance with the Bugatti tire system as well.

As the drivers talked with the many guests, the newcomer from Portugal jumped atop a chair to better introduce himself to those assembled.

“Me, **Pedro Gomes**,” he began in broken English, “is proud to represent my family, and the fantastic family of Ettore Bugatti, who I call my racing-father and also of Portugal,



my home country. This is the country where my brother died while teaching me to race. To be a part of this great gathering of drivers, I aim to shine in the comparison, is truly a great honour to me.”

The Portuguese driver bowed and hopped down. With a quick shake of the hand, he seemed to want to make his way toward the Swedish lady, **Madeleine Lindén**. Yet he was pulled back into the conversation again by the Bugatti collector, **Marcus Wagner**, and watched carefully as the blond northerner walked past, the Italian driver, **Sebi Orsi**, following closely behind.

The American may have been helpful to Gomes, but he was also a tad overbearing in his manner and rather abrupt. But what could Pedro do? He laughed it off and offered “to give Mr. Wagner dreams of counting sheep-decorated cars – that would be lovely!”

Indeed, those who listened carefully noted that Pedro’s demeanor was somewhat provocative – indeed, his face seemed to have a swarthy look, like a daring navigator, yet he somehow looked overly self-confident. One thing was clear, he was truly a Bugatti fan, and so it was not long before he and Wagner were discussing Bugatti racing history and car modifications. Jean Bugatti, the designer, soon joined into the conversation and they were soon discussing details of the aerodynamically styled Bugatti T32 “Tank” that had raced in the 1923 Grand Prix at Lyon.

Aristide and Maria found themselves at the head table with Ettore himself. Seated across from Maria were **Amb. Watanabe Tomitani**, the Japanese Ambassador. Also there was none other than **Madeleine Lindén**, who had come south from Sweden to make the formal announcement of the upcoming Isloppet race at Laxforsen. Though Maria talked extensively with Madeleine, both she and Aristide found her to be generally uninformed about racing matters, though that didn’t seem to stop some of the drivers, most notably **Sebi Orsi** from repeatedly attempting to befriend her, probably attracted by her beautiful blond hair and joyous nature. It was all so very amusing to watch.

The other men paid little heed and remained deeply engaged in discussions about wheel design and braking methods. **Aristide** lead the conversation as his interest was focused on his desire to adopt some of the Bugatti technology works to his Salmson. Sadly, he found that while **Ettore** was somewhat humored by the thought, he remained uncooperative. The Salmson factory was a direct competitor to Bugatti, after all, Aristide reasoned – there would be no help here.

It was then for the first time that Aristide noted with passing interest that **Amb. Watanabe Tomitani** seemed more tense than usual and somewhat distracted. His command of racing terms and designs usually made him an engaging conversationalist, but now he was strangely quiet more often than not. A few times, Aristide caught him



as his attention strayed, his eyes fleetingly drifting as he fiddled with a pair of deep brown wood chopsticks, inlaid with mother of pearl.

Despite his distracted demeanor, it was **Tomitani** who first made note of the new Bugatti brake and wheel system design – not Ettore, who seemed momentarily shocked that the Ambassador had such knowledge in advance of his own intention of making a formal announcement. Ettore recovered quickly and offered that this newest modification would be made available to all of the Bugatti drivers for the next race in Sweden, if they choose to have it.

Ettore explained that all of Bugatti race cars, from the T35 model onward, could employ a newly designed wheel and hub that placed the brake drum and pads inside the wheel itself. Thus, the brake shoes and drum could be instantly changed when the car made a pit stop. By swapping the tires, the brakes as well were changed, refreshing both at once. Ettore was proud to add that this new modification would give any of the Bugatti drivers a definitive advantage. Graciously, he offered that any of the drivers attending the party could come to the factory and examine some of the new T54 cars if they wished – perhaps a few might change to drive the Bugatti brand?

Even in the wake of such a gracious offer, few seemed interested. **Aristide** smiled but said nothing. At another table, **Sebi Orsi** casually downed a half glass of wine as if it were a shot of whiskey. Then he coughed. Orsi, the Italian, was a well-known Maserati man. Others drove Alfas and were quite committed – and the Monza design was well-known as a leader on the tracks.

Ettore continued on as if nothing were amiss. He must have recognized that his offer was somewhat less than successful, however, as he added that as with all such modifications, there were drawbacks to consider, of course. Principally, the system reduced the car's structural strength somewhat, making it more vulnerable in the event of a collision. Similarly, the road handling was more touchy, possibly resulting in greater damage to the car from skids and impacts with debris. For some, this might make the modification a decision to be reached with careful consideration, Ettore noted. Each of the drivers who raced Bugatti would have to decide on his or her own.

At that, one of the guests stood up and tapped his glass lightly with a spoon. All eyes turned toward a man at one of the side tables – he was tall, blond and quite obviously of Norwegian extraction. He cleared his throat and made an announcement....



Part 3: A New Driver for Norway

“It is my sad, but necessary duty to pass on that my beloved patriot and race driver, **Megane Omalie**, has withdrawn from the Grande Épreuve,” the man began. A murmur of surprise came from the crowd. Many liked the woman driver from Norway.

He continued, “Yet with every passing winter, there is a spring. As Norway’s Ambassador to France, I have been asked to report that Miss Omalie regrets that with the recent accident and the events of the Grand Prix de Nice, she has elected to quit the season and take her car to America. There, she has been promised a lucrative contract to race on the wooden circuits of New York and Ohio, where no doubt, she will emerge as the new racing star on the tracks. She wishes all of you her heartfelt best. You may also rest assured that her decision has been vetted with the Government of Norway, which expresses their utmost support for her decision and salutes her for her commitment to racing excellence.”

Before he sat down, he gestured toward another driver who stood up promptly. At once, everyone recognized the Spanish driver, **Teide “Volcán” Sorolla**. A few in the crowd guessed what was about to transpire – for they knew that the Volcán’s mother was Norwegian, having married a seafaring Spanish naval officer.

The Volcán spoke with a calm authority. “Those who know me well, know that my full name is **Teide Sorolla-Ledaal**, though the press often drops the honor of my mother’s name, Ledaal, that is due my Norwegian heritage. Yet it is this heritage that drives me now to make this decision – from this day forward, I will drive in the colors of Norway!”

The Norwegian ambassador and his small entourage applauded briefly, though most others only did so out of politeness.





Whether the Volcán's car was black or red with a white and blue stripe meant little to the assembled race pilots – they still had to face him next week on the ice in Sweden, as the same impetuous, explosive and unpredictable man in his Bugatti T35B model.

The Volcán smiled wryly, recognizing the collective thought, and continued, “And I am happy to also state that I have accepted the Norwegian government's offer of special ice racing tires for my Bugatti.”

With that statement, he lifted his champagne glass and offered a toast.

“To Ettore Bugatti – the greatest car engineer and designer in the world! I am sure I speak for all here when I say, thank you for the wonderful event. We look forward to seeing the Bugattis once again dominate the podium of the Isloppe in Sweden!”

Most of the racers whose cars were built in Molsheim smiled and drank along, while the others seemed to take the matter with some humor.

Sebi Orsi stood slowly. Everyone wondered what and if the famed Italian Maserati driver might say in the wake of the Spaniard/Norwegian's toast. Orsi smiled, his eyes dancing darkly. He looked across the field of tables and slowly lifted his glass.

“I promised I would make no toasts, yes, but it is a must. The Bugatti, it is a beautiful car, no? The Maserati, it is a beautiful car, yes? So we are of the dream to drive such things. Like a beautiful woman, these cars, she must be very fast on the track. I must therefore thank Senor Bugatti for his fine work – for Bugatti, it is an Italian name, no?”

Orsi drank and then smiled broadly. “I have spoken enough. Let us hear from our Swedish lady – unless, of course, she wishes to accompany me for a promenade!”

As Sebi Orsi sat down and all eyes turned to **Madeleine Lindén**, who strode purposefully to the pavilion. The time had come to introduce the Swedish Isloppe.