

# Martin Swig

*Elder statesman of the Stateside historic car scene*

Words and photography Martyn Goddard

**MARTIN SWIG**, car collector, vintage racer and founder of the California Mille, was born in New Jersey in 1934. The family moved to San Francisco when he was 12, at the dawn of the hot rod scene – and when you could legally drive at 14. He graduated from Stanford University in 1956 and joined European Motors, selling Fiats, Alfas and Lancias – the start of a 40-year career with his multi-franchise San Francisco Auto Centre, which he sold off when his real estate holdings outperformed his automotive business. The deal gave Martin time to develop his interest in classic cars. In 1982 he was the only American entrant in his first of 20 Mille Miglias. *Road & Track* magazine mentioned the event and interest among friends in California encouraged Martin to found the California Mille in 1991.



**1 // TOYOTA 2000 TIN TOY**

I purchased this Japanese toy over 40 years ago for \$35 and it still has the sticker on the box. I can't believe how expensive these tin toys have become. I have hundreds of models but have never focused on one make; I collect any automobile make of interest.

**2 // 1931 CHRYSLER CDS**

Chrysler campaigned this car in Europe, where it was driven by Frenchman Raymond Sommer to third place in the Spa 24 Hours. I have raced the car at the Monterey Historics about 15 times.

**3 // CARRERA PANAMERICANA PLATE**

This is Ak Miller's original 1954 plate. I tried to buy his *El Caballo de Hierro* in the 1990s but it didn't happen, so now I am having a recreation built to attach the original plate to.

**4 // RICHARD CRAIN SCULPTURE**

This 3ft long sculpture of a Packard Le Baron Twin Cowl was a gift to myself after receiving the first payment from my real estate deal. It takes pride of place on my coffee table.

**5 // 1929 HILLCLIMB TROPHY**

This was given for the fastest time of the day at Mount Tamalpais to Mr BM Sharpe in an Essex automobile. I collect automobilia, especially items connected with the Bay area.

**6 // SILVER PLATE**

I held a party at the Monterey Historic races and a Mr Barra, from Buenos Aires, attended. He was an unofficial ambassador of the automobile movement in Argentina. Shortly after, I received this plate inscribed to *Amici Americani della Mille Miglia*.

**7 // ALFA 1900 WALL SCULPTURE**

I have two life-size sculptures made by Carrozzeria Galbiate, one in my office and the other at home. I love the Alfa Romeo 1900, the car in which I competed in my first Mille.

**8 // ALFA DISCO VOLANTE MODEL**

A 1952 original, commissioned by Alfa Romeo from famed Italian model-maker Michele Conti. Only two Coupé and two Spider examples were made. I bought them because I liked the cars. It was only later that I discovered what I had.

**9 // 1982 MILLE MIGLIA PHOTO**

My first Mille Miglia in 1982. This is the official startline photo of John Lamm and myself in my 1955 Alfa Romeo 1900. John's article in *Road & Track* created great interest in a US Mille event.

**10 // ORIGINAL WATERCOLOUR**

A painting of my Alfa 6C 1500 leading a column of classic cars on the Mille, painted for me by the Japanese artist who painted every cover of *Car* magazine in Japan.

**11 // 1925 LANCIA LAMBDA**

I love this car, which I bought from a guy in Sydney, Australia. I flew there for a personal handover. Lancias were so advanced and had the first monocoque chassis and a V4 motor. I love cars of this era; cars of the 1950s and '60s are like modern cars, only less reliable!

**12 // CALIFORNIA MILLE LOGO**

In 1991 a designer friend came up with his take on the classic 1000 red arrow sign for our new event in California. We didn't know then that it might make trouble [with the organisers of the Mille Miglia] in the future.