



A Classic Cruise in California

By Alejo Tenutta

THE CALIFORNIA MILLE IS CELEBRATING ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR.

Imagine staring through the windshield of a 1925 Lancia as bright green leaves clouding thunderous red oaks part like mighty waves in order to make way for the beautiful driving roads that run through the natural splendor of northern California. Sound like heaven? That's the California Mille, an annual driving event where some of the country's most ardent auto enthusiasts meet for a 1,000-mile drive through picturesque terrain. The 2010 gathering will take place

from April 26 to 29 and will feature the crème de la crème of historical racecars. As always, entry regulations for the Mille are in place in order to maintain the authenticity of the event. Participating automobiles must be at least 53 years old.

The California Mille is simply a North American re-creation of the Italian Mille Miglia that ran from 1927 until 1957. Martin Swig, the gentleman whose passion for vintage cars

inspired him to ask the Italian Mille organizers to authorize a California version, believes that northern California scenery equals Italy's splendor. He not only proposed the idea but has also made it a reality 19 consecutive times. "Northern California looks more Italian than Italy," explains Swig, "and it didn't take much thought to realize that our state was perfect for the re-creation of this great motoring event."

When the first Mille Miglia revival was held



in 1982, some of the cars participating were only 25 years old (still quite the feat!). Now, those same autos are taking the 1,000-mile trek with more than 50 years on them. As such, a few exceptions have been made to allow cars created after 1957 to participate, as long as they have the same design as the 57 or an earlier predecessor. Take, for example, Jaguar XK-120s, which are eligible. The next generation Jaguar XK-E, however, is out of luck. Opportunities such as these attract

only those with a sense of adventure, and this year's gathering will be no exception. Although the original event was a race, Swig assures drivers that it is closer to a scenic tour than an actual dash for the finish.

According to organizers, cars from all over the globe will arrive in San Francisco in late April. On Sunday, April 25, more than 70 historic racecars will be displayed on Nob Hill during a free car show in front of The

Fairmont Hotel. This first part of the event gives the public an opportunity to meet the drivers and see their cars.

The following morning, drivers will travel north on California Highway 1. The Mille path meanders on natural back roads that offer an amazing scenic experience that only northern California can provide. Drivers will discover the beauty of Tomales, Glen Ellen, Calistoga, Oakville, Pt. Arena, Boonville, Mendocino, and



Ukiah, among many other quaint towns.

Over the years, these roads and towns have become a draw for enthusiastic drivers, and the California Mille will be revisiting many of these locations.

"We'll revisit areas that have been favorites with our drivers over the years—the fantastic Lost Coast, Honeydew, and the Avenue of the Giants, with redwoods even older than our cars," explains Mr. Swig. When cars arrive in Mill Valley, Mayor Stephanie Molton-Peters once again will rename the

city Mille Valley for the day. The 20th-anniversary drive concludes in Sonoma on Thursday, April 29, and becomes a free car show in the parking lot at the Lodge at Sonoma, where local car enthusiasts will be able to check out the rolling splendor.

This year's California Mille will not only mark the 20th anniversary of this spectacular event, but the 100th anniversary of Alfa Romeo and the 150th anniversary of sponsor Chopard watches as well. Historic car buffs up and down the coast will be watching for the cars during the four-day tour. ■