

The purposeful cockpit of a 1954 Ferrari 750 Monza surrounded by other scarlet beauties as it awaits scrutineering in Piazza Loggia. The Ferrari ahead to the right is a 1955 500 Mondial. (Jan Tegler)

Red Arrow RACERS

In a rite of spring, Chopard joins the lineup at the start of the 2006 Mille Miglia, where legendary cars and drivers enjoy Italian vistas from Brescia to Rome and back

BY JAN TEGLER

All day under the brilliant Brescian sun we have been coming to an understanding, an appreciation of a fabled event and the reasons why this Italian rite of spring inspires one of the world's finest watch manufacturers. It has been visually, aurally and atmospherically manifest since morning. Here before us at shortly after 9 P.M. on a lovely May evening, comprehension meets delight at one famous focal point—the historic wooden starting ramp. This is the Mille Miglia, one of

the greatest racing events in history, and Chopard is part of the fabric of its modern revival.

Karl Friedrich Scheufele, co-president of the company his father Karl Scheufele revived in 1963, blips the throttle on the silver 1955 Porsche 550 RS he is driving and powers to the top of the start ramp on the Viale Venezia in sunny Brescia, Italy. The number 195 stands out on a white disc on the Porsche's door, indicating that Herr Scheufele's car is 195th in the starting order for this race.

He is teamed in this legendary competition with a legendary co-driver, Jacky Ickx. But the famed Formula One and sportscar driver Ickx is not present alongside Scheufele as the car crests the ramp.

Flashbulbs explode when the Porsche comes to a halt. Each competitor who has crossed the stage this evening has received similar attention but none more so than Chopard's co-president and his "guest" co-driver. In a cheeky and charming move, Chopard ambassador Eva Herzigova



The excitement at the start of the Mille Miglia is palpable, like no other classic car rally in the world. The Argentinian team of Van Lierde and Van Lierde blast off down the Viale Venezia in their 1928 Bentley 4.5 liter. (Jan Tegler)



Top: The Italian team of Miletto and Baccarelli roll over the famous start ramp in the Viale Venezia in their swoopy 1937 Fiat 508C. The Chopard name is everywhere, even here at the focal point of the start. (Jan Tegler)

Bottom: Karl Friedrich Scheufele and top model, Eva Herzigova, approach the start ramp in the Viale Venezia followed by paparazzi and enthusiastic applause from the crowd. (Chopard)

has replaced Ickx in the right seat of the silver sports car, joining Herr Scheufele for the exciting trip over the start ramp.

After several minutes in a fish-bowl of lights, paparazzi and spectators, the race officials count down the Chopard pairing and give the signal to start. Herr Scheufele heeds the order and puts the 550 RS in gear. With a wave and a bright smile from Herzigova, the duo motor down the start ramp and blast off down a half-mile-long corridor of cheering Brescians into the night.

“Even though I’ve done it many times, I’m still not tired of doing it,” Scheufele remarks.

Classic and classy

It is a spectacle like few others. As one priceless classic car after another crosses the starting ramp, the twenty-fourth running of the modern Mille Miglia gets underway. Chopard and the Scheufele family have been a part of the spectacle since 1988 and are now almost as well identified with it as the famous symbol of the race: the Red Arrow, or Freccia Rossa. To understand their passion for this classic and to comprehend the Mille Miglia’s significance requires us to look back, even as Karl Friedrich Scheufele puts the first of 1,000 miles under his wheels in the Italian darkness.

Translated from Italian, “Mille Miglia” simply means “1,000 Miles.”

Four men from the northern Italian city of Brescia chose the distance. Taking inspiration from the city-to-city races popular at the turn of the century, they opted for a road race, a grueling trial that would cover much of the Italian peninsula—from Brescia to Rome and back. It would be run flat-out over a distance of 1,600 kilometers. The driver with the lowest elapsed time would be the victor.

Recently returned from a trip to the United States, one of the founders, Franco Mazzotti, had a brainstorm for the name of their new race. He realized that 1,600 kilometers was roughly equal to 1,000 miles—*mille miglia*. It rolled off the tongue neatly and the “Coppa Mille Miglia” was born.

Seventy-seven racers rolled over the start ramp in the Viale Venezia

on March 26, 1927, for the first Mille Miglia. Organized by Renzo Castagneto under the auspices of the Brescia Regio Automobil Club d’Italia, the race grew over the next thirty years far beyond what its founders imagined. A long list of famous racing drivers from Nuvolari and Ascari to Fangio and Moss competed.

The race really did improve the breed. Among the advancements the Mille Miglia spurred were improvements in carburetion, fuel consumption, ignition, spark plugs, starter motors, headlights, brakes, windshield wipers and, with the 1955 race, the debut of fuel injection. As none other than Enzo Ferrari noted, we have the Mille Miglia to thank for the class of sports touring cars known as “Gran Turismo,” or GT, cars.

In the prewar and immediate



Left: The boattail tail end of a 1935 Aston Martin Ulster. The variety and quality of classic cars at the Mille Miglia is staggering. (Jan Tegler)

Middle: An Alfa Romeo 6C 1750 waits in the long line for scrutineering from Piazza Loggia to Piazza Vittoria. (Jan Tegler)

Right: Chopard ambassador, Eva Herzigova, seated in the 1955 Porsche RS Spyder driven by Karl Friedrich Scheufele and Jacky Ickx. On her wrist is a 2006 Mille Miglia GTXL in yellow gold. (Chopard)

postwar era the race was an expression of freedom and glamour during a time of political oppression and depressed economics. Before television existed in any meaningful way, the Mille Miglia was the only sporting event which could actually be seen in a large part of country by a large part of its population. Government and municipalities paved existing paths and actually created new roads specifically for the Freccia Rossa.

The Mille Miglia was a colorful diversion, an entertainment for the average Italian struggling to make ends meet, and it literally captured their imagination. As the speeds of the racing cars and the number of racers increased, so too did the crowds surging along the highways. The first tragedy to visit the Mille Miglia occurred in 1939, when a Lancia careened out of control in Bologna, killing ten spectators, including seven children. The next year the 1,000-mile race was banned and a truncated nine-lap competition (the Gran Premio di Brescia) over a 104-mile course was run.

Conflict overtook Italy and the rest of Europe for the next five years,

and it wasn't until 1947 that the Mille Miglia resumed. As before, it was a flat-out competition. Now, however, in the wake of technological leaps brought about by WWII, speeds reached new heights.

After the 1957 race, when a major accident marred the event, the government put a stop to racing on public roads and, though modified versions of the classic were tried in 1958, 1959 and 1960, the flat-out 1,000-mile test was finished.

Revival and Chopard

Shortly after making a left off the Viale Venezia, Karl Friedrich Scheufele brought the Porsche 550 RS to a stop, trading a Czech beauty for a Belgian ace. Scheufele and Ickx then set off on the 1,000-mile test just as they had in 1989, when Scheufele first drove in the event. The pair's first outing in the Mille Miglia came just seven years after the race's modern revival.

The Mille Miglia was sorely missed by Italians after its demise. Brescian enthusiasts in particular lamented its absence on their yearly calendar. "The most beautiful race in

the world," as it was often referred to, had become a rite of spring and a claim to fame for the northern Italian city. In 1977 the Automobil Club of Brescia decided a commemoration celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the first Mille Miglia was in order and appointed a small group of Brescians to organize a new Red Arrow Race.

Over the next five years, they planned a revival of the Mille Miglia. The new event would pay tribute to the original race, running from Brescia to Rome and back over public roads, but the nature of the competition would be different.

The new Mille Miglia would be a "regularity test." Conducted over three stages (Brescia to Ferrara, Ferrara to Rome, Rome to Brescia), the revival event is essentially a time-speed-distance rally. Competitors must complete each stage as a whole and regularity tests (maintaining a target speed over a distance or covering a short specified distance in a specified time) embedded in the stages in targeted times, governed by the class their car races in. The closer a competitor comes to matching the targeted times at the end of each stage, the more points are



The British team of Joice and Wakefield in their 1953 Frazer Nash Le Mans in line for scrutineering. (Jan Tegler)

accumulated. The overall winner is the team with the fewest deviations in time and therefore the highest number of points.

Navigation is the other half of the challenge. Competitors are given roadbooks prior to each stage. The volumes contain a series of diagrams, illustrated by rudimentary direction markings, symbols, place-names, the occasional photograph and distance indicators marking the distance between diagrams and the total distance covered at any point on a stage. For those new to the event it's all very confusing, but through trial and error, and with the help of fellow participants, even first-timers can find the finish line.

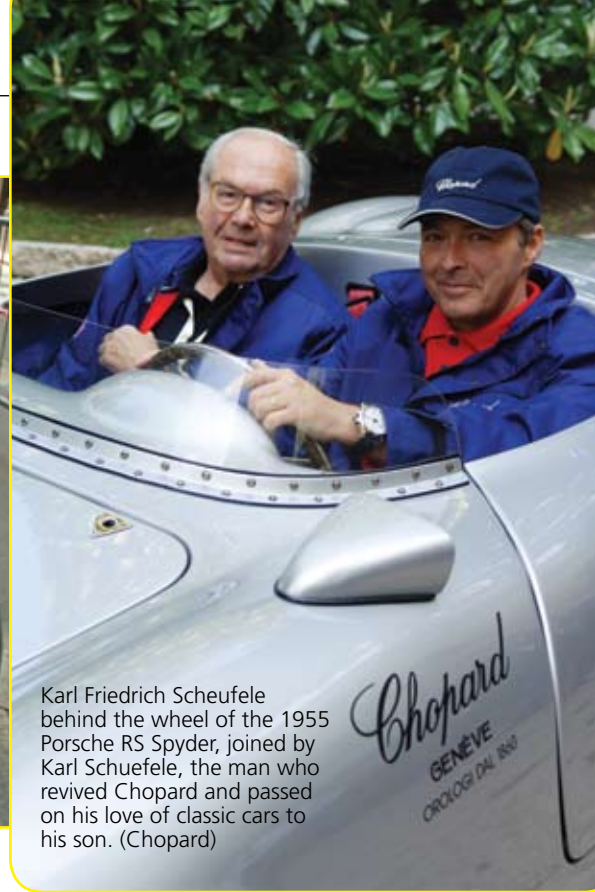
The modern era

In 1982 the first modern Mille Miglia was run. More than 150 classic vehicles lined up at the start, many presented by manufacturers who had participated in the original race. The new version was open to classic automobiles crafted between 1927 and 1957, coinciding with the term of the

Mille Miglia and one of the greatest periods in automotive history. The revival was a great success, the new formula capturing the spirit of the original race and the imagination of a new generation of enthusiasts. Held biannually through 1986, the Mille Miglia grew quickly and in 1987 became a yearly ritual.



Alex Zanardi (right) and Marco Saltalmacchia (left). Zanardi is a former Indycar champion and Formula One driver. Famous worldwide for his exploits both before and after losing his legs in a 2001 racing accident, Zanardi is a hero in Italy. He drove a specially modified BMW 507 in the 2006 Mille Miglia and caused a sensation everywhere he went. (Jan Tegler)



Karl Friedrich Scheufele behind the wheel of the 1955 Porsche RS Spyder, joined by Karl Schuefele, the man who revived Chopard and passed on his love of classic cars to his son. (Chopard)

Chopard was there almost from the beginning. Karl Scheufele has been an enthusiastic collector of classic cars for many years. He passed his passion on to Karl Friedrich, who grew up driving vintage automobiles.

“The car I learned to drive with was a Jaguar 3.8 liter Mk II. It was the heaviest steering you can imagine.

Right: The Mille Miglia Gran Turismo XL



Chopard introduces new Mille Miglia watches annually. This year's collection includes the Gran Turismo XL (inset, upper right), the first non-chronograph version.

The gears were really hard to change. It was a very difficult car to park. But you really learn how to drive when you drive a car like this."

In 1987 Chopard's co-president heard about the Red Arrow Race from a friend.

"I discovered the Mille Miglia in 1987, when the revival of the race was just beginning and nobody, except real insiders, had heard about it. I was very much into classic cars already. It was simply a passion at the time rather than a business interest. I knew vaguely what the race used to be but I didn't realize until then that it was to become a revival, grouping 375 cars."

Intrigued by the revival, Karl Friedrich went to see it for himself in 1988. He was immediately captivated but found it difficult to follow the event from the outside looking in.

"I said, 'Next year, I really want to participate.'"

And so he did, ascending the starting platform in his father's 1955

Mercedes 300 SL, a car which has run the race every year since 1989 without ever experiencing serious mechanical woes. Driving in the Mille Miglia would be enough for most, but Karl Friedrich wanted to be more involved. Chopard, he decided, would be a sponsor of the race, but not in the traditional way.

The watches

"I spoke to the organizers and I said, 'Wouldn't it be nice if every year the participants can go home with a souvenir that they can wear all the time, something that reminds them constantly of their participation in the Mille Miglia? We decided to create a limited series for every year of participation for the drivers and another series available for sale. In the very beginning that was really small quantities for the series of the year, and when that was sold, there were no more watches available until the next year. Out of this, a Mille Miglia collection developed. We still

have these annual series and at the same time we have a permanent Mille Miglia collection, which really became a big success."

The idea of an elegant and sporty watch produced in numbered series (according to teams' starting number), presented to each participant in the race annually, caught fire, adding to the modern event's luster and creating a tradition inseparable from the Mille Miglia itself.

"The idea was not to be just a passive sponsor but to be an active partner in developing the event further and promoting the race through a watch all around the world," Scheufele explains. "Many people know about the Mille Miglia today who might not know about it, and we feel honored to be a part of it."

Interestingly, the association between watches and the Mille Miglia extends back to the original race. In the mid-1950s Breitling crafted a promotional steel chronograph for the Mille Miglia and reportedly parachuted the timepieces over the crowd!

Karl Friedrich Scheufele has driven in almost every Mille Miglia since his first outing in 1989. The partnership with his famous co-driver is also one that has lasted many years.

"We met in 1988 for the first time and I was brave enough to ask him if he wanted to come along. I

Scheufele and Ickx cruised to a 360th place finish, enjoying the sights.

expected he would say, 'Well, I don't really have the time.' But he said, 'Yeah why not? I'll come.' So in 1989 I found myself for the first time in the Gullwing and for the first time with Jacky Ickx. And then I found myself driving all the way! Jacky said, 'Look. I love Italy. I love the countryside. I'd like to watch what's going on but I really don't care so much about driving myself.' So he suggested I drive. I was kind of nervous. I was thinking, 'Am I doing things right? Is he comfortable?' But somewhere near Rome he fell asleep, and I thought, He must be comfortable!"

Celebrities from the world of racing are as much a fixture on the Mille Miglia as those from the worlds of fashion, TV, films, business and the wider world of sports. Strolling past a well-known hotel near the Piazza della Loggia, we came upon a lovely BMW 507. But this was no ordinary 507 roadster. The normal steering wheel was missing, replaced by a modern racing yoke with special controls. Then we looked at the pilots' names on the side of the car, Marco Saltalamacchia and Alessandro Zanardi.

"Alex" Zanardi, as he is known in the U.S., is one of the world's most famous racing drivers. A champion in the CART IndyCar series and an ex-Formula One driver, Zanardi now competes with BMW in the World Touring Car Championship,

driving a BMW 3-Series race-car modified with special hand controls for throttle, brakes and gearchange. Critically injured in an IndyCar in Germany in 2001, Zanardi lost both legs above the knee, but has rebounded to race again professionally. Last year he was a co-driver in his first Mille Miglia. This year he piloted the 507, causing a sensation everywhere the race went.

While many of the drivers in the race are notable, every car entered is a star. The Mille Miglia is without doubt the top vintage car rally in the world and attracts a selection of the best classic automobiles on the planet. Participation is limited to 375 entrants, but hundreds more apply to be "invited" to race. Only the finest, most relevant machines are accepted. Entry fees are high and the cost and effort required to take part are considerable, but the experience more than rewards competitors.

Taking it easy

This race has been humorously referred to as a kind of food-and-wine tour. The Italian countryside is so beautiful and the national fare so varied and delicious, who could blame anyone taking this touring approach?

Karl Friedrich Scheufele has raced the Mille Miglia in just about every fashion it can be raced. Now he, too, prefers to take it easy.



"I did the sporting approach many times but now I take a relaxed approach, because the environment, the countryside, everything is so beautiful to look at. So now I'm part of this group of people who enjoy the Mille this way."

The team of Giuliano Cane and his wife, Lucia Galliani, triumphed for the ninth time, winning this year overall in their 1938 BMW 328 MM with 14,849 points. Scheufele and Ickx cruised to a 360th place finish with -289,266 points, enjoying the sights, sounds and fellowship of the event.

"As they say, never change a winning formula. People don't participate just to receive a Mille Miglia watch, but it is something they look forward to. All around the world I meet people who have done the Mille Miglia and who proudly wear their watch. It's a great community in a way," sums up Karl Friedrich. ☺