

# ART ON FOUR WHEELS

How the automobile reflects our achievements, representing humanity's finest ambitions, technology, style, and taste.

Preface written by Jan Baedeker and Robert Klanten

There hardly is any better key to twentieth-century history than the automobile. If future archaeologists study the dusty artifacts of our era, it will probably be the last surviving sports and racing cars, which will tell them the most about the technical possibilities and social aspirations of the Homo automobilis on the eve of the third millennium. In retrospect, it seems almost visionary that Filippo Tommaso Marinetti already put the aesthetic relevance of a race car ahead of the formal meaning of “Nike of Samothrace” in his Manifesto of Futurism in 1909. In fact, the early years of the automobile, in the first half of the twentieth century, are kind of the antiquity of our age of speed, which is slowly but surely coming to an end.

No other machine or technology has made such a global triumph in the last century, has significantly changed the world, or has been able to give its users such a sensual and intense overall experience—neither the plane nor the cinema nor the internet. The automobile was experienced with the senses: visually, acoustically, and olfactorily, with every fiber of the body. It opened new expanses of possibility, broke through the boundaries of space and time, promised unlimited freedom and individuality.

Since the earliest days, the purest and, at the same time, the most powerful embodiment of the automotive principle was the sports car—a mythical being, born in the spheres of racetracks and given to the people on the road, now domiciled somewhere between fantasy and reality. Sports cars were avant-garde, carved in sheet steel and aluminum, and they were mobile sculptures of progress at the forefront of technological development. Major brands such as Porsche, Ferrari, Maserati, or

Mercedes-Benz primarily owe their present-day appeal to their classic sports cars, which brought engineering innovations and motorsport experience into a desirable form tamed for civilian life on the streets.

No other object shaped the aesthetics of this time as much as the automobile. And the external appearance

was so crucial in the buying decision, like in no other industrially manufactured item. The top speed of a sports car was abstract and made almost only for their owner to experience—meanwhile, the body curves were highly representational and immediately understandable for each viewer. Thus, the spirit of the time was not only revealed in

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Making the most of its 1.5-liter engine, the Porsche 550 Spyder toppled giants from here to the Targa Florio.

