

The story of the sunken Bugatti of Lago Maggiore

In 1933, a Bugatti car was brought into Switzerland from Italy without customs' declaration. When the Swiss customs started to trace the car to apply the import duty, the owner had no better idea than to have the car disappear and dumped it into the Lago Maggiore near Ascona.

That was the story for years but nobody knew whether it was real or not until in 1967, when a local diver indeed sighted the wreckage of a car at a depth of 50 m. The car could not be identified at the time and apart from an aborted effort to raise the car out of the lake, there were no further initiatives and it was forgotten again.

During the 2008 carnival of Locarno, the neighbour town of Ascona, a young diver, Damiano, was beaten to death by a group of drunken youths. His family and co-divers, the entire local community was so shocked, that they decided to set up a foundation against youth violence in memory of Damiano.

In order to finance the foundation, his co-divers revived the idea of raising the dumped Bugatti from the lake, make a documentary movie about the event and sell the rights, and eventually restore or sell the wrecked car.

During the early months of 2009, preliminary investigations started to find the location of the wreckage and determine whether or not it was a Bugatti. With the help of Hans Matti, the Swiss Bugatti authority, the wreckage was indeed identified to be a 1925 Bugatti, type 22.

As a result, the foundation decided to proceed with its' initiative; it assured itself the ownership of the wreckage, made all the necessary arrangements to raise the car and a date was set forward for this major event.

Sunday 12th July 2009, a large crowd assembled on the Piazza of Ascona, together with a number of Bugatti's from the Swiss Bugatti Club. Hans Matti in his Type 22 was given the honour of being parked as the first car, the others being a T 13 (Andy Gantner), T 35 (Jörg König), T 35B (Oskar Meier) and my T43.

At exactly 10.30, a large crane lifted the wreckage out of the water after being dumped there 76 years ago. The car had been on its' side, half submerged into the sand. As a result, the part that was under the sand was quite well conserved, half of the body still "intact" even the timber, with both left tyres still having air in them ! The chassis is complete with the engine, radiator, dashboard, etc as you can see in the photograph.

As of today, I don't know what the foundation will decide to do with this car.

Anyway, if there is one Bugatti left with a miraculous history, this must be the one.

Karel Van de Velde, Rolle, 22nd July 2009.