



Collectors' Cars - A Guide

Why do people collect cars?

by Toby Skingsley



Why collect old cars when there are plenty of modern vehicles with up-to-date technology, heated seats and a level of automobile safety not seen before? The fact is that many people wouldn't hesitate to swap these modern commodities for the charm of an old car. WorldGuide consulted experts, including Florian Seidl, CEO of independent car specialist and tour organizer [carficionado \(www.carficionado.com\)](http://www.carficionado.com), based in Munich, Germany to find out what makes these cars so special.

History. Some people love the romance of having an old car. These vehicles open a window into the past, a time machine capturing the mood of motoring at a certain period in history. Collectors enjoy the marvelous characteristics and workmanship untypical of modern cars. Prewar cars, like Duesenbergs, Bugattis and Bentleys boast a long-forgotten artisanship. In the same way, others love owning and driving old sports cars with history or breakthrough design features, especially if they have proven successful in competitions.

Nostalgia. Adults want to own the cars they loved when they were kids. "Many collectors are simply fulfilling the dreams they had in their youth," Seidl told WorldGuide. "When they were teenagers, many of them had posters of these cars on their walls. As adults, they can afford to buy them." Younger collectors are more likely to buy European sports cars like Ferraris, Maseratis or Aston Martins, built from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, while older ones tend to be interested in cars from earlier eras. Therefore, looking at what cars your children have on their walls is a good indication of which models will become future classics.

A project. Many enthusiasts love the restoration and maintenance work involved in keeping old cars. These people are less likely to buy an expensive showpiece vehicle, instead opting for cheaper, although still authentic, automobiles and investing in their own personal restoration project. It's a fun, albeit expensive hobby.

Making money. A collector's car can be an investment. Buyers snap up cars in the hope they will increase in value over time, much like a fine wine or piece of art. Some investors may enjoy the thrill of taking a gamble with a vehicle. After all, there is always a risk in the future price development of a car.

Collectible significance. Collecting cars can be compared with collecting art. In both fields, collectors possess a similar vein of fascination with their favorite works, and a sense of pride of owning a piece.

Making a statement. Owning a great classic car that stands out makes a social statement. “Collecting cars is one of the few expensive hobbies you can show the outside world simply by using it the way it was designed to be used,” says Seidl. “Other lavish hobbies involve a more direct way of showing off, such as inviting someone into your house to show off your collection of African Art.

The community. Collecting is a sociable hobby. There’s a whole community, with clubs and events centered around these objects of mutual desire. Collectors become a part of a social circle of enthusiasts, and simply driving or working on your car gets people talking to you. Owners of the highest-valued vehicles see themselves as a part of an exclusive group, socializing at events like [Pebble Beach](#) in California, Concorso d’Eleganza at Lake Como, or [Mille Miglia](#) in Brescia.

The scene, though, has drastically changed over the last 30 years. “Before, these great cars were the realm of real car mechanics and handymen, for people who had a passion for cars and enjoyed renovating them,” says Seidl. “Today it has become a more exclusive field, where wealthy people have recognized the potential for making lucrative investments. You still see enthusiasts from all walks of life, but there are a lot more investors than there used to be.”

Introducing classic cars

Objects of fascination for millions, these colourful, sturdy, metal machines provide endless hours of pleasure. Ask any enthusiast - they'll tell you that there's nothing quite like being in the presence of a well-maintained collectors' car.

But what is the attraction? What makes a car a collector's item, and what creates its value? Read on for answers to these questions and many more for a general overview of this vast topic.

Definitions

Classic, vintage, historic, antique – these are some of the terms used when referring to any old car. But in professional circles you’ll need to be careful. For example, the word vintage defines cars that come from a period of around ten years after the First World War. A classic, while a rather loose term meaning any fine, old car, is strictly defined by the Classic Car Club of America.

To give you an idea of terminology, WorldGuide has prepared a list of eras in automobile history.

The Veteran Era: 1890s

Veterans were the first automobiles to be powered by internal combustion motor engines, which run on petrol. This was in contrast to earlier vehicles powered by steam. Cars of the veteran era included the three-wheeled Motorwagen, patented in 1886 by Karl Benz. There were no unified standards of design or functionality during the Veteran period, and because

automobiles were a relatively new phenomenon, petrol was difficult to obtain. Vehicles were mostly snapped up by wealthy enthusiasts rather than the general public.

The Brass Era: ca. 1900 – 1919.



The Brass Era gets its name from the use of brass in the cars' exterior. This period can also be called the Edwardian Era. There were a huge number and variety of manufacturers at this time, leading to increased competition and rapid progress in technology. The first battery-operated electric ignition systems appeared at this time, although many engines were still started by a crank. Standards in design and functionality were becoming established, with experimental designs becoming rare. The body was often open, with a front windscreen but no

side windows. Some models even had a roof. One of the most widely available cars of this time was the Ford Model T. Some enthusiasts call automobiles from this era horseless carriages because they resemble a carriage on wheels.

The Vintage Era: 1919 – 1930

As mentioned, the Vintage Era refers to a period of roughly ten years from the end of the First World War to 1930, coinciding with the Great Depression of 1929. Automobile travel took off during this time: In 1919, cars were still a pretty rare sight.

“Cars at this time were relatively expensive and, with a few exceptions, beyond the reach of the average working family,” Ian Ferguson, committee member of the VintageSports Car Club (www.vsccl.co.uk) in Great Britain, told WorldGuide. “Therefore, buyers demanded quality and performance rather than comfort and convenience.”

But by 1930 this was changing. Cars were mass produced and could be seen almost everywhere. By the end of the Vintage Era automobiles were becoming more practical for their passengers. Manufacturers focused on comfort and accessories like car radios and heating. Designs became even more unified and most cars had a closed body by 1930. There were still major differences when compared to today's cars: Much of the vehicle consisted of detachable parts, headlights and wings could be removed and replaced if damaged, and petrol tanks were often above the driver's feet. Because of increased mobility, changes in society were becoming visible – drive-in restaurants became more common as did out of town shopping centres.

Post Vintage and Post War Eras: 1930 – ca. 1960



The period following the vintage era is described as Post Vintage, or sometimes Pre-war. Cars manufactured after the end of the Second World War until the end of the 1950s belong to the Post War Era. During these two periods, automobiles began taking the shape of how we know cars today. Headlights and wings became integrated within the body of the vehicle, which was becoming more streamlined. A boot at the rear became standard and open-bodied cars went out of fashion.

Furthermore, the number of manufacturers decreased, with names like Ford, Bugatti, Volkswagen and Citroen dominating. The term “antique car” often refers to objects manufactured up to the Post War Era.

Modern Era: post 1950s



The end of the Post War Era in the 1950s marked the beginning of what is known as the Modern Era. The beginning of this period saw the manufacture of modern classics such as the Ford Mustang, the Mini and the Morris Minor. During this time, front-wheel drive became dominant.

Later, as cars became increasingly computerized, computer aided design also began playing a large role in the design and manufacture of cars. This modern era includes the models that will become the collectors' cars of the future.

Classic Cars

Some terms differ depending where you are. The description classic or full classic is used in the US by the Classic Car Club of America to mean a car built to a certain standard between 1925 and 1948. Elsewhere, the word classic is often used as a generic term for a collector's car.

Future classics are likely to be cars produced from around 1990 up to present day. However, some older cars will become classic in the future too.

Other Terms



In Germany – an important market for collectors' cars – people use the pseudo-English term Youngtimer to describe vehicles of the 1970s up to 1990, while vehicles over 30 years old are called Oldtimer. The term historic or antique is often used by tax authorities to refer to a car of a certain age (often around 20 years.) for tax purposes. An example is Great Britain, where a historic vehicle is one over 25 years of age and is exempt from

car tax.

What gives a collector's car its value?

Not all cars become collectors' items. There are a number of factors that make some cars more desirable, and thus more valuable, than others.



Because a car is old or scarce doesn't automatically make it a valuable collector's item. The most valuable cars are usually those that were special when they were new. This special feature could be a certain technological breakthrough at the time, custom coach work, a certain unusual design, or even a minor deviation from a standard model. Thomas Hanna is CEO of the German company Die Pontonmanufaktur (www.mercedes-ponton.de), which restores and maintains

classic Mercedes cars. "If an automobile was already exclusive when it was new, that's a big advantage for its status as a collector's car," Hanna told us. "A limited number of specimens and proven reliability also go a long way to increasing its collectability."

The following list provides further points that determine the financial and collectible

value of cars.



- Professional collectors are looking for something that is rare. There's little pride in owning a car that has been made 5 million times, so a limited amount

of specimens on the market increases demand and therefore value. Many models weren't manufactured on mass in the first place, so became valuable commodities fairly quickly. This is especially true of pre-war cars. For example, Ettore Bugatti built a mere six Bugatti Royales from 1929 to 1931. In 1987, one of them was sold at auction for \$8.7 million. Cars made in higher amounts can become valuable too, since their numbers can dwindle over the years because of accidents, wear and tear and poor maintenance.

- The original value often determines current value. Usually, the most collectible cars were already highly priced when new.

- The more original and authentic the car, the more valuable it is to a collector. The car immediately loses value if any parts have been replaced, such as engines, gearboxes, axles, body parts, and even upholstery. The vehicle should be as close to the original as possible. When buying a car, independent experts should check these details. That's why maintenance is vitally important when owning a car – whether it is already a collector's item or has the potential of becoming one.

- Condition. As with any collector's item, condition is paramount to value. Is the piece a well-kept original" Or has it been neglected and now needs restoration work"

- The value of a car is drastically reduced if it has been in an accident, has been incorrectly restored, or converted to another type of car (for example from a coupé to a convertible). In fact, many experts would advise against purchasing it at all. This is one reason why documentation of a vehicle is important regarding the history of the car.



- You could have two identical cars, both original and in excellent condition. But one could attract far more attention to a collector than the other because of previous owners. "If a car was owned by a member of the royal family, a Hollywood star or racing driver, the car's value can increase by up to 40%," says Seidl. Sports cars that have been successful in famous competitions, such as the 24 Heures du Mans are also generally higher in value. The 967 Ferrari 275 GTS that sold for \$4 million

in 2005 was one of only ten built and had appeared in the 1968 film The Thomas Crown Affair.