

# Exodus of classic cars



The damage, however, had already been done, and Dovaz was visited by all types of people, including many aspiring purchasers who thought they would be able to acquire a classic car for ‘next to nothing.’

Some even demanded that Dovaz respond to them in English. When he stated that under no circumstances would he sell any of his collection, he was abused and reproached about the terrible condition of his vehicles. Thieves and souvenir hunters climbed over the walls, and even helicopters buzzed around the farm. The absolute low point came when a thief used an oxyacetylene cutter to remove the entire front axle of a Bugatti Atalante. Dovaz was given no peace and the situation became completely untenable. As he did not want to dispose of his cars, he took the only decision that he reasonably could; he decided to move the collection.

In 1984, the entire collection was moved to a secret location. Again, it was Guido Bartolomeo, who informed Hesselmann that there would be a removal of all the cars, which meant that Hesselmann was able to photograph the exodus of the cars. The whole project was organised and paid for by Michel Dovaz. He was furious – furious at Hesselmann, the journalists, the thieves, and the prying eyes.

Two years later, in 1986, Hesselmann, together with the author Halwart Schrader, published his famous book about the collection, entitled

*Sleeping Beauties*. Bearing in mind the events of the past, and owing to the cooperation by the author, the tone of the book was somewhat more reticent than the *Stern* article. The address and identity of Michel Dovaz were not revealed (he was called ‘Pierre’ in the book), and his character was presented in a better light. Hesselmann was well aware of what had happened in the past, and what his role had been, but this did not discourage him from publishing the book. Indeed, *Sleeping Beauties* was a resounding success.

In October 2007, more than twenty years after the first edition, a new book<sup>2</sup> about the collection, by Hesselmann and Schrader, appeared. It was an expanded edition, including the information from 1983 and 1984. Although the authors were well informed about the developments surrounding the collection, no mention of them was made in the new book. Hesselmann and Schrader were quite happy to give the impression that the ‘fairy tale’ (as they called it) continued unabated.

But, perhaps, after 25 years, this is the right time to redress the balance, and hear the other side of the story.

*Opposite: the relocation of the Dovaz collection, 1984. (Courtesy Didier Lainé/Éditions LVA)*



## 1928 Bugatti Type 44 Fiacre

Chassis number 44580

The Type 44 was a popular touring car, of which about 1100 units were built from 1927 to 1930. Its eight-cylinder in-line engine developed 80hp from 3.0 litres of capacity. Michel Dovaz's Type 44 with chassis number 44580 has a somewhat traditional looking Fiacre body, reminiscent of the design of a stagecoach, which was a look that appealed greatly to Patron Ettore Bugatti.

The brand new vehicle was delivered to banker Baron Léo d'Erlanger in 1928. In 1946, René Veignant of Paris purchased the vehicle. Renowned French Bugatti specialist Henri Novo later equipped the car with Grebel headlights, and the aluminium wheels of a Bugatti Type 49. In the 1950s Michel Dovaz became the proud owner of the elderly car.

At Villemaréchal, the Type 44 was housed in an open barn, along with an Alfa Romeo 6C2500 Competizione and a Jowett Jupiter. By that time,

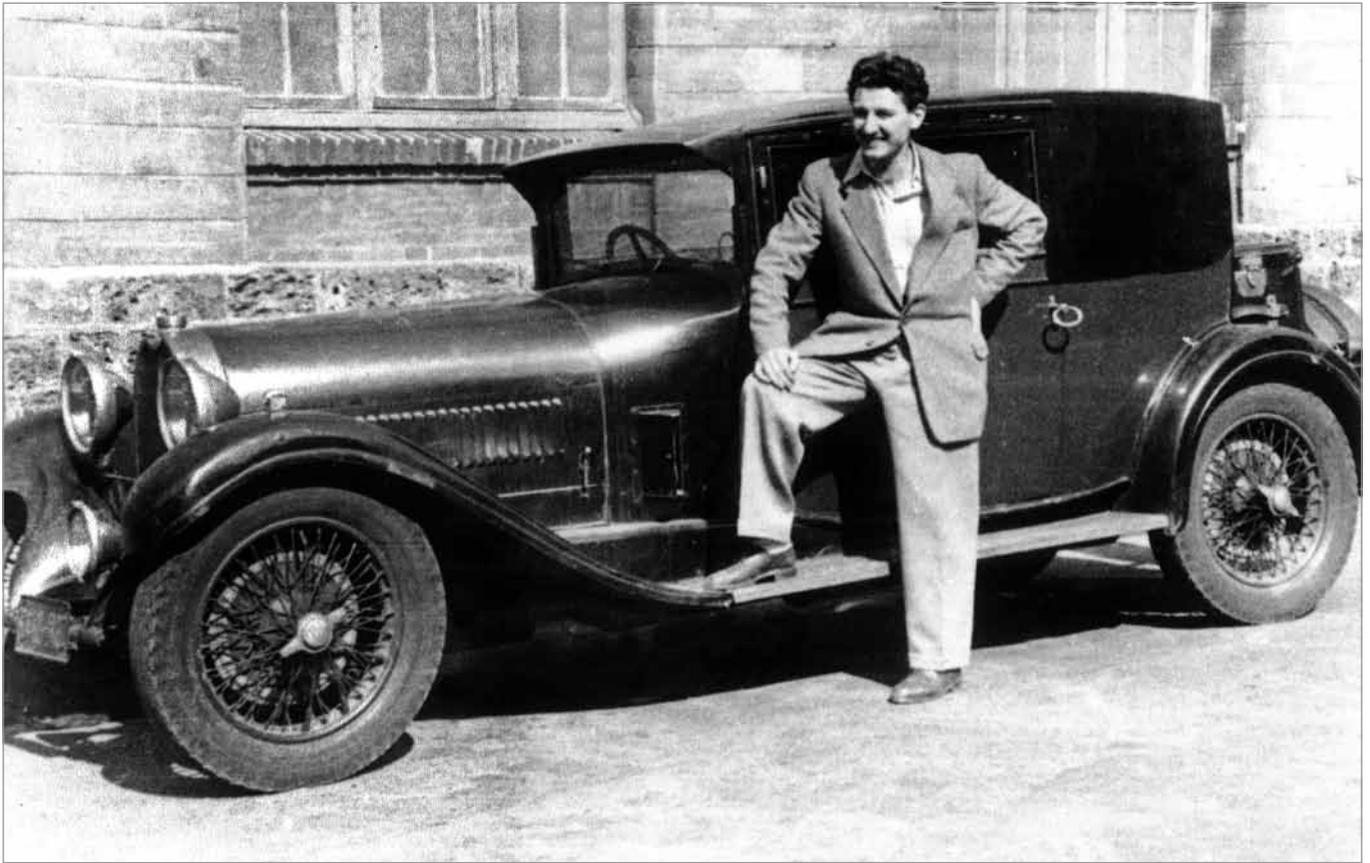
### Technical data: Bugatti Type 44 Fiacre

Engine .....	eight-cylinder in-line 2991cc
Bore x stroke .....	69 x 100mm
Compression ratio .....	unknown
Power .....	80hp
Top speed .....	87mph
L x W x H .....	unknown
Weight .....	1100kg
Wheelbase .....	312cm
Front track width .....	125cm
Rear track width .....	125cm
Production date .....	1927-30 (T44)
Production number .....	1100 (T44)
Original price .....	unknown

the roof cover had already rotted away and the wooden structure beneath was clearly visible. Later, at the Musée de Sarlat, the car was displayed next



*During the relocation to southern France, 1984. (Courtesy Didier Lainé/Editions LVA)*



*Bugatti #44580 with previous owner, Rene Veignant from Paris, 1940s/1950s.  
(Courtesy current owner)*



*Decorated as 'barn find' at the museum in Sarlat, 1989-90.  
(Courtesy Edmund Nankivell)*

to a Bugatti Type 57 Fontana, in an authentic 'barn find' scene, covered with straw and surrounded by old agricultural implements. When the museum was closed in 1990, the Type 44 was sold to French pharmaceuticals manufacturer Jean-Michel Bonabosch, along with six other Bugattis. Just a year later, in 1991, Bonabosch sold the Type 44 and two other Bugattis to another Frenchman, who still owns the cars today.

The vehicle was completely restored between 1994 and 1997, and is now in a concours condition. It was displayed not only at the Louis Vuitton Classics 1997, but also at the Paris Rétromobile trade show.

**1938 Alfa Romeo 6C 2300 B**  
**Mille Miglia Touring**  
Chassis number 815053

The business that Alfa Romeo eventually sprang from was founded as early as 1906 in Milan, by a Frenchman named Alexandre Darracq. In 1925, Alfa Romeo began manufacturing vehicles with six-cylinder in-line engines under the 6C designation. The 2.3-litre 6C 2300 first rolled off the line in 1934. Only 106 of the Mille Miglia version, which developed 95hp and was paired with an aluminium body by Touring, were ever made.

One of the five Alfa Romeos that had once been owned by Michel Dovaz was the 6C 2300 B Mille Miglia with chassis number 815053. In 1946, the vehicle was imported to Switzerland from Italy by a Mr Hoffer, who sold it to Jean-Louis Fatio (CH)

in 1953. Three years later, Dovaz registered it in Switzerland under his name, and in 1958 he did the same in France. At Villemaréchal, the Mille Miglia shared a barn with three Bugattis and two Cords. This was a real privilege, given that it was the most protected storage location on the property. The photos taken in this barn made the 'sleeping beauties' world famous, even though the Alfa was identified as a Fiat 1100 in the book of that title<sup>1</sup>.

At Sarlat, the 6C 2300 was shown in a Mille Miglia racing scene. In 1990 it changed hands and was owned by museum founder Thierry Giovannoni, who eventually sold it to Douwe Heida from the Netherlands. The latter restored the car, and gave it a light blue paint job, which, according to Heida, was the original colour as confirmed by Carozzeria Touring. In 1999, Heida won the class victory at the Concourse d'Elegance Paleis Het Loo. He sold the car to Raoul San Giorgi (B), but eventually bought it back. The Alfa was subsequently sold to a German



*The Alfa after its arrival in the Netherlands, 1990. (Courtesy Douwe Heida)*