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Under Andalusian Skies

The Sotogrande Grand Prix, a vintage car rally, was really all about the journey.

by Clara Le Fort

Running from 24–27 May, the Sotogrande Grand Prix, a vintage car rally, was really all about the journey. In this first edition, the route started in Seville's Plaza De España and travelled through Cordoba to Sotogrande. The scheduled route took in some 300km each day of Andalusia's most breathtaking scenery, including the famous Flying Quarter Mile over Sotogrande's historic Guadiaro River bridge

On 24 May 2017, over 100 pre-1965 vintage and GT cars were elegantly lined up in the Plaza De España under a soaring heat. The first edition of the Sotogrande Grand Prix was underway. That day, the temperature rose as high as 47°C, forcing the organisation teams to wait for temperatures to cool down so that rally numbers could be stuck on the car bodies.

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THE FIRST EDITION OF THE SOTOGRANDE GRAND PRIX SAW AN INCREDIBLE LINE-UP OF CLASSIC CARS ON SEVILLE'S PLAZA ESPAÑA, THE RACE'S STARTING POINT.



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On the first morning of the race, the winding roads took participants through oak forests, where some bumped into wild black Iberian pigs.

On the next morning, a line-up of pastel-coloured Jaguar E-types, Aston Martins, Porsches, Maseratis and Fiats started making their way to Cordoba, another historical landmark. On this first morning, the winding roads took participants through oak forests, where some bumped into wild black Iberian pigs. The first morning ended with lunch under an alley of towering trees inside the Jardines de Moratalla. Co-founder Filip Bourgoo was first to enter the domain in his light-blue 1949 convertible Bentley MK VI. Ahead of the race, Bourgoo and his wife were making sure every detail was choreographed according to plan. Every kilometre had to be run in agreement with the local Guardia Civil and local teams trained to an exceptional level of service.

Past magnificent iron railings with hunting motifs and a central crest on the gate, the classic cars drove up to the main palace on the royal Moratalla estate through a corridor of gardens framed with fountains, symmetrical bushes and sculptures. There, two immense tables of 100 covers each awaited the participants for a seated three-course lunch. A harpsichord played in the background as conversations unfolded.

In the same spirit, the evening cocktails and dinner took place in the gardens of the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, Cordoba: an ancient fortress that was home to the Christian kings. Guests wandered through three levels of Moorish courtyard, patios, water basins lined with sculptures and fragrant gardens. Under Moroccan-inspired open-air tents, participants in evening dresses and ties rejoiced around tagines and Champagne glasses under a starry night. All knew the next day would be yet another heated race.

Racing through arid landscapes and fields, the drivers reached the private Ascari racetrack by midday — its semi-draining asphalt surface is recognised for its grip, durability and tyre wear. The backdrop to Ascari is a nature lovers' paradise, with mountains and indigenous woodland. A symphony of racing engines welcomed the participants as they gradually made their way to lunch at the club house overlooking the racetrack.

Then it was time to race through the vertiginous cliffs of the Serranía de Ronda en route to the Mediterranean and Sotogrande. Abrupt terrain and picturesque villages kept the drivers alert all the way down to the manicured lawns of Sotogrande: a 7.7-square-mile, privately owned resort community in Andalusia founded in 1962 as a playground for the wealthy. The race ended at the Guadiaro River Bridge for a speed test called the Flying Quarter Mile. Another elegant dinner by the beach, and a fresh breeze from the sea gave a festive touch to this evening in Sotogrande.

The next day, as a final touch, the Sotogrande Concours d'Elegance was staged at La Reserva Club. It showcased 13 models, including an Aston Martin DB2 Volante that raced the 1949 24-hour Le Mans; an OSCA MT4 that won the Modena Grand Prix in 1950; a Jaguar E-Type 3.8 OTS S1; a Lancia Aurelia Competicion owned by Swiss Ferrari F1 driver Gianclaudio Regazzoni; and the only Kellison car in Spain.

In the hilly countryside, countless bottles were opened to honour the participants. Tuxedos, jewellery, delicate dresses and heels further turned the evening into one of celebration. Prizes were handed out, but the feeling most shared was one of gratitude for an exceptional event.

The next edition of the Zoute Grand Prix will take place on 5-8 October 2017. ◇