

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

THE RACING CAR: TOWARD A RATIONAL AUTOMOBILE

September 27 - November 27, 1966

Main Wall Label

This is the Museum's third exhibition devoted to automobiles. In the first two (1951 and 1953), concerned primarily with the esthetics of automobile body design, no car was included unless its mechanical performance was considered satisfactory. This exhibition is equally concerned with esthetics, but it attempts to trace to their origin the forms most automobile designers (and most of the public) consider beautiful. The forms are inseparable from automobile technology, and that technology is found at its purest in the racing car.

Racing cars accelerate faster, have higher speeds, steer and hold the road better, and stop more quickly than any other motor vehicles. Their standards of performance are inherently safer than most of the touring cars available to the general public. That an automobile should be safe is a fact of which no one needs to be persuaded. What is less obvious is that the first step in designing a safe automobile is to make certain that its performance characteristics will correspond to those of racing cars, making all due allowance for the comfort appropriate to a touring car.

The automobiles selected for this exhibition range from such pure racing forms as the single passenger Lotus 32 through two-passenger sports racing prototypes, such as the Dino and the Carrera 6, to touring cars and experimental studies. Most of the touring cars included have been successfully raced. The Austin Mini-Cooper and the Citroen, for example, are very different in standards of comfort, economy, and luxury, but both cars have won first place in the Monte Carlo Rally.

The recent competition between two major aircraft companies for the commission to build a supersonic passenger plane produced two radically different designs in response to the same program of functions. What this demonstrates is that engineers and technicians have considerable freedom of choice, even within the most rigorously

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defined program. No designed artifact is the product of exclusively rational decisions. Automobile engineers also have ample freedom in which to exercise subjective preferences, and the designer of an automobile's coachwork may properly be considered to be working at least as much within the realm of abstract sculpture as of automobile technology. The designer is free to choose certain aspects of function for formal emphasis, and to repress others. And the forms he develops are most likely to be beautiful when they have some necessary relation to real function.

David Ash
Technical Director

Arthur Drexler
Director, Department of
Architecture and Design