

# STAYING ON TRACK

HOW PATRICK PETER AND SUCCESSOR MARC OUAYOUN KEEP DRIVING FORWARDS

*Words: Based on original material written by Chris Tarling  
Photographs: Chris Tarling*

Patrick Peter is one of the most influential figures in the historic car world, having spent decades shaping the events that define classic motorsport. Since its inception in the late 1980s, his company Peter Auto has operated at the highest level, organising prestigious events like Le Mans Classic and Spa-Classic, celebrating the history of sports car racing and touring.





Yet Patrick's path to historic motorsport began in an unexpected place. In 1978, he and his wife launched a public relations company, representing luxury brands in fashion, watches, and jewellery. It was through this work that he first encountered motorsport, when the FFSA, the French Federation of Automobile Sport, contacted him seeking sponsorship for the Coupes de l'Age d'Or at Montlhéry.

"Okay, it was fun, but the organisation didn't work, there was no media and very few spectators.

For the organisers it was quite impossible to find sponsorship. But we liked it. So my proposal to the FFSA was to work together. I believed that with one or two year's work we would find a solution. In '85 they accepted and in '85 we realized a deal with Lanvin, a luxury fashion brand as headline sponsor. We changed the name of the event to Grand Prix de l'Age d'Or Lanvin, still at Montlhéry.

By the end of the '80s the Grand Prix de l'Age d'Or Lanvin was probably the second event for classic cars in Europe. The first one was the Old Timer Grand Prix. Of course it was before Goodwood, before Le Mans Classic, before everything. But it was the second event in Europe. But it was not our event. It was just an agency."

Surprisingly, Patrick admits that cars were not his first passion. "My real passion was the sailboat. But you know, in my generation, because now I'm 70, when you were a little boy in the street, when you see a Ferrari or a sporting car, immediately you

follow it. You like it. It was a dream and when you are 17 you wait week after week to have your driver licence. I know cars. I love the mechanics. And of course, when we had the possibility to work with classic cars, immediately we say yes, I want to do this. We worked step by step, because I was not a specialist in the pre-war car or any type of car. But when you love it, it's very easy to learn."

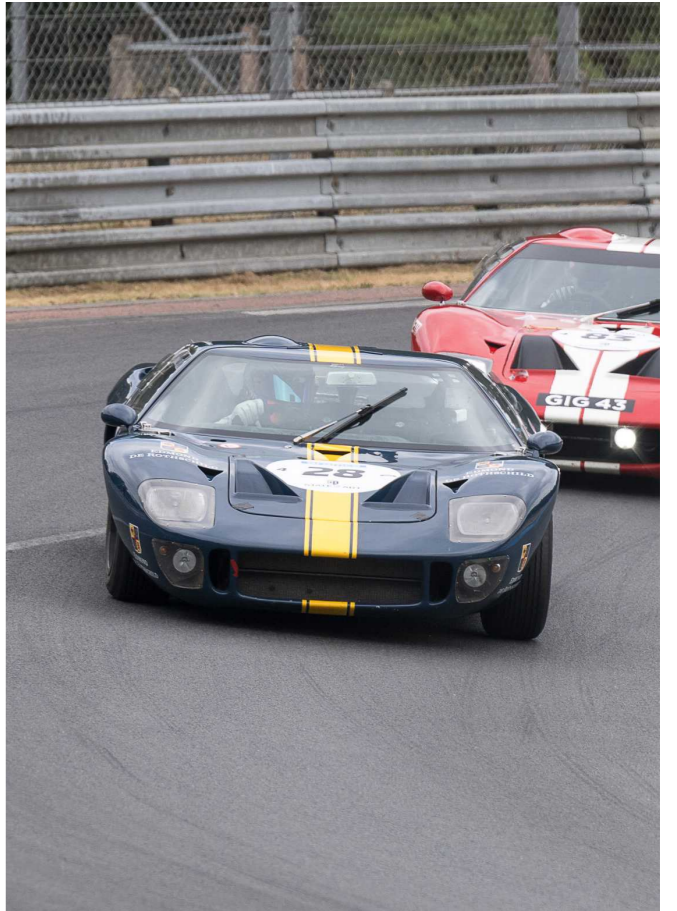
The early years of Peter Auto were far from easy. Classic car events in the late 1980s and early 1990s were niche, appealing mainly to enthusiasts



who were often considered eccentric. "It was a very difficult time. First of all the classic car activity was not at the same level as now. It was for crazy people. It was for completely crazy people and when you discuss it with a sponsor, you tell them what do you do. If you're aligned with a film, with golf, or something normal, it was okay. But it was difficult to convince people of the potential of the classic car. So, yes, those first years

of Peter Auto were very difficult. We had many projects and sometimes many were disappointing. But we had to try to do something, and sometimes it was a fantastic success, sometimes it was completely wrong. But we learned quickly and always said to ourselves that we would do another one."

Spa has always been a particular favourite of Patrick's. "I think Spa is special for all the drivers because it's probably the best race track in Europe, and probably in the world. And for everybody it's a fantastic place. It's impossible for me to imagine a season without Spa. So there's all the difficulties.



The weather is impossible. Today it seems to be perfect. Two days ago it was a disaster. But it's like that. Spa is quite fantastic."

He first visited the track decades ago with the Trophy des Ardennes, returned for the BPR series in the mid-1990s, and by 2010 had decided to transition fully from modern racing to historic grids. "When you build a grid, when you decide to launch a grid, you begin with very few cars. This means you lose money and then you have two solutions. You could take anything to complete the grid and not to lose money, but you will destroy immediately the spirit of the grid. You need to wait. You need to say, 'Okay, I believe in that and they will come, they will come.' Sometimes it's long, sometimes it's very quick. It's why it's very difficult to change a grid. But we can have other activities."

Patrick's love of cars is reflected in the care with which he approaches both drivers and machines. His favourite



cars are emblematic of his journey: "One car for a last drive? I can't choose just one favourite. I would have to choose three. For me it's pre-war Alfa Romeo 8C. It's fantastic. But unfortunately it's a very expensive choice. So, Alfa Romeo 8C, probably Ferrari 250 short wheelbase and McLaren F1 from the BPR. We can use these three cars in Le Mans, because all three are eligible for Le Mans. I love the architecture. I love everything."

His rules have helped ensure that Peter Auto events are both competitive and respectful of the cars and collectors. Continuation cars, which are

often quicker than originals, are given handicaps to preserve fairness. Professional drivers are limited to under half of entrants to ensure collectors participate actively, and incidents are adjudicated with financial accountability to discourage reckless behaviour. "And we have another rule, which many English drivers didn't like at the beginning. If you lose the brakes here and you have a big accident with another car, it's a race incident. You can do nothing. But if in the straight line you push the other guy in the wall, you have to pay 50% of the expenses of the other guy. And I can tell you, it's calmed everybody. It's good, it's why we have this quality of car. You know, Ferrari short wheelbase, you know the value of a car like that. If you destroy the car in the wall, they don't come back. It's finished, we will just have continuation cars. And it's why we have this quality. It's not an FIA rule, it's not a French Federation rule, it's a Peter Auto rule. And it works. At the beginning it was difficult for driver's to accept, because it changed the racing completely."

As Patrick stepped back, Marc Ouayoun emerged as the natural successor. A lifelong Porsche enthusiast, Ouayoun had spent decades in the automotive industry, including leadership roles at Porsche France, where he oversaw the marque's return to Le Mans and helped establish Porsche Experience Centres in France and Canada. His partnership with Pierre Fillon, head of the ACO, brought him into regular contact with Peter Auto events. When Patrick retired, Fillon suggested Marc take the helm. "And when Pierre contacted me to work on historic racing at the helm of





Peter Auto, initially I thought, ‘OK, this is so different from what I was doing, but on the other hand, I thought I have so many connections. I’m personally a fan of historic racing for a long time, and even when I was working for Porsche, I was a partner of Peter Auto, for the Tour Auto, for Le Mans Classic, for years and years. So there was a strong pre-existing relationship. And I had the network to bring manufacturers, drivers, and fans together.’

For Ouayoun, historic racing is about freedom, emotion, and connection. Unlike the modern automotive industry, which is tightly regulated, the historic track allows for joy, adrenaline, and authenticity. He has observed younger drivers gravitating to cars they idolized in their youth or experiencing the thrill of pre-war machinery. “They tell me, ‘It’s incredible to drive these cars. You don’t go fast, but you feel so much emotion.’”

Le Mans Classic has expanded under Ouayoun, becoming an annual event with complementary formats to appeal to different eras and audiences. Le Mans Classic Heritage focuses on the golden era of endurance racing, from Jaguar E-types to Porsche 917s, while Le Mans Classic Legend showcases cars from the 1990s to early 2010s, including LMP1 prototypes like the Audi R10.

“My idea with this Le Mans Classic every year is that we have more presence of manufacturers. Parents can point out the cars of their youth; children can discover the machines that defined the modern prototype era. I want kids to bring their parents and say, ‘Look at this LMP1, this was my dream car.’ I think that the fact that it’s coming now every year will create more visibility for the manufacturers. So we’ll do a lot more storytelling about the big victories of the different car makers in Le Mans, and I think that’s a great platform to engage your community.”

Ouayoun is equally attentive to authenticity and the preservation of historic cars. Grid curation is rigorous, and rules ensure cars remain faithful to their era, avoiding modern modifications that

undermine the spirit of the sport. He is exploring authenticity labels, demonstration formats, and incentives to reward original cars, while maintaining scrutineering standards to keep racing competitive yet respectful. “This is a very serious topic. We can’t go back to 1960s technology—materials and safety standards have changed. But we can keep the cars’ technology faithful to their era, avoiding things like multi-disc clutches on Jaguar E-Types, for example. Fans want to see genuine cars. That’s our responsibility and why we will invest in scrutineering. But we need to do it progressively. We don’t want to discourage good teams and clients.”

For Marc Ouayoun, Peter Auto is more than motorsport - it is culture, heritage, and emotion made tangible. “The scent of oil, the sound of engines, the sight of rare machinery in motion: together, these create an experience no static museum can rival.” Under his leadership, Peter Auto continues Patrick Peter’s superb legacy while shaping the future of historic racing, ensuring that passion, thrill, and authenticity endure for generations to come.

For more information visit [peterauto.fr](http://peterauto.fr) and instagram [@peterauto](https://www.instagram.com/peterauto).

