

CLASSIC DRIVER

It's Martini Time for this Works Lancia 037 in London

Lead
Celebrating the New Year with a martini at Duke's Hotel seemed like a fantastic idea, especially when the car that took us to the world-famous cocktail bar was a Works Martini Racing Lancia 037. Did we say that we like our martinis drifted, not stirred?

Where Henri sat...



"I have the best car I've ever had here," boasts Henri Toivonen of his Lancia 037 during a television interview ahead of the 1984 Rally of the Thousand Lakes in Finland. The ensuing grainy and oversaturated footage of the great Finn wrestling this very Lancia around hairpins and over countless 'yumps' on his way to third overall is nothing short of spellbinding, and as good a reminder of the magical Group B era as any.

Less Thousand Lakes, more Thousand Gridlocked Commuters



It's fair to say the pace is a touch more sedate as we edge out of [Girardo & Co's South West London showroom](#) and embark on our journey towards the centre of the city. We've been reliably informed that the car has a good temperament and is very well behaved, so we should face no problems doing the things one might ordinarily do during a day in the capital - nipping to the shops in Chelsea, popping for lunch in Mayfair, and sightseeing along the Mall, before heading for one of the best martinis in town at Duke's Hotel, for example. At least that's what we're all crossing our fingers about and hoping - this is an Italian rally car from the 1980s, after all, built for devouring miles of gravel tracks and not jostling with London's abysmal traffic.

Not fooling anybody





Observing passers-by's reactions to the car as we noisily buzz through boroughs is particularly amusing. Some drop everything and instantly draw for their camera phones, while others stare slack-jawed, clearly unable to fathom what business a noisy white old car covered in stickers has in an urban environment so obviously out of its comfort zone. It might be wearing number plates, but it's not fooling anyone. We even momentarily become the focal point of a sightseeing tour, much to the dismay of the guide trying to keep the attention of his tourists.

Going the whole hog



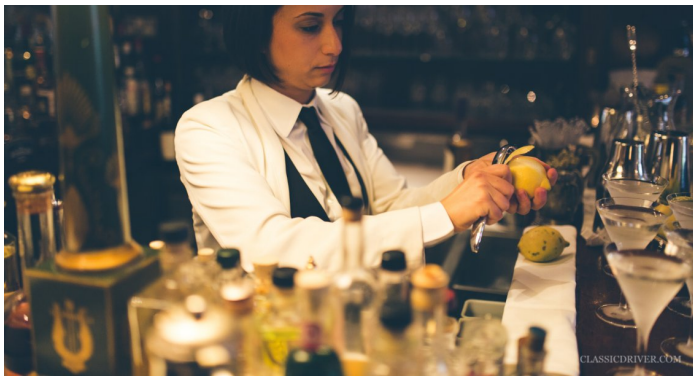
You might be wondering why we chose such a car for our New Year celebration in London? Other than the Martini livery, the answer is simple. Because if you're going to drive around a city in a car as impractical as a low-slung modern supercar or a goliath Chelsea tractor, why not go the whole hog and opt for something so hilariously unsuitable that the driving - normally a chore in London - becomes an event in itself? The rudimentary glass-fibre bodywork might be scruffy, the panel gaps laughable and the rear visibility non-existent, but it's so much more charming for it and contrasts wonderfully with the luxury façades of Chelsea and Mayfair. It makes you feel like a bit of a rebel, and rightly so.

Working up a thirst



After a somewhat sweaty day of retail therapy (about the only ventilation in the cockpit of the 037 is the tiny flap in the centre of the roof - how did Toivonen cope in the sweltering heat of the Acropolis?), we're ending the day at Dukes Hotel on St. James's Place, for what is widely regarded as the finest martini in London.

Drifted, not stirred



Rumour has it that Ian Fleming, who was a Dukes regular, dreamt up James Bond's famous 'shaken, not stirred' instruction in the century-old, stately drawing-room-like bar. We wonder what 007 would make of the Lancia parked, in pride of place, on the hotel's concourse?

Martini time



If you want a robust drink that packs a stronger punch than the Lancia's rorty Abarth engine, yet is mixed with the finesse and theatre of Henri Toivonen on the very edge, you simply have to try Dukes' martini. In fact, it's the perfect tippie on which to slowly sip while reflecting on another year. It's been a tough one in many respects - a glance at any newspaper's front page will confirm that - but that's more cause to enjoy all that life has to offer moving forward. Needless to say, Classic Driver will continue to provide our readers with light-hearted distraction and opportunities to daydream, no matter what the world throws at us. Happy New Year!

Photos: Tom Shaxson for Classic Driver © 2016

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/cars/its-martini-time-works-lancia-037-london>
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.