

What to Expect at a Concours

By Richard Price

So, you have spent the better part of the last weekend or so getting your car washed, waxed and cleaned. Now you are ready to show your car at a Concours d'Elegance. But as you get ready to go to sleep you wonder how ready you are and what to expect tomorrow. Are you really ready?

As you prepare your car for a Concours, you will use many different products. Cleaners, polishes, waxes, solvents, window cleaners and leather treatments are just a few of the many items you will use to get your car to look it's best. To be ready to show your car you should have prepared yourself some kind of a kit that has small bottles of each of these products as well as towels, rags and even Q-tips. Being prepared will make the day of the show go much smoother. Talk to friends who have been to shows and find out what they bring. Also think about comfort – bring chairs, an umbrella for shade and a cooler for drinks. It can get pretty hot waiting for those judges to show up. I know that is a lot to get into a Porsche, but modern technology makes some great fold-up compact chairs, etc.

One last consideration to prepare for is getting the car ready for the trip to the Concours site. If you have a trailer, you are lucky. Most participants do not. In fact, unless you are showing in the Concours class, you have to drive to the event. You may want to consider covering parts of the car with removable vinyl pieces or tape to prevent chips and other damage on the way over. These products are available from many sources; some are even at your local hardware store.

OK, so the morning is here. You are on your way over. You have left early so you will have plenty of time to drive over and avoid those water puddles. You also want to have as much time as possible to prepare your car once you arrive. Know what time car placement starts and plan on being there by that time.

Once you arrive you will be directed to the entrance of the Concours site. A volunteer will direct you to the place your car will be on display for the day. Quite often a great deal of thought has gone into where the cars are placed, so be patient and understanding as you are direct to your spot – in the grand scheme of things it makes sense. Once in place unload your car – the chairs, umbrella, detail kit and cooler. Take a moment to get organized. Now locate the registration table and make sure you are registered, get your score sheets and return to your car.

Take a moment and fill out your score sheets. The front sheet requires the most information. All the other pages just need your name and class. As a courtesy to the judges, remove the staple. Fill out the placard that goes on the front windshield. Place the placard and score sheets off to the side, take a deep breath and get ready for the final preparations.

If you arrived early, you should have around two hours to get your car ready. That may seem like a long time, but it is never enough time. Think about all the things you did over the last few weekends while you got the car ready, you now have to do all those things over again in an abbreviated fashion. Start with the area of the car

that will need the most attention – if you are in Concours division that is probably the underside, for Street and Unrestored the motor, for Wash and Shine the exterior. The storage compartment should need the least attention so leave it for last. Think about the areas that took extra work while you worked on the car during the previous weekend. Those are the areas that will need special attention again. Did you find a small oil leak in the motor compartment? Make sure you give that area special attention this morning. Did you have a problem with the glass streaking – you will again this morning. Be systematic. Take each judged area one at a time. Finish one area, close it up and go on to the next. The interior should be near the end of your list because you will need to open it up to open up the other areas – engine compartment and storage. As you finish the interior, give it one last look around for what the wind might have blown in and close the door. Now give the exterior that last walk around detail. Remember the score sheets and placard you filled out a couple of hours ago. Grab them and place them under the windshield wiper. Right about now you are going to hear someone saying, “light dusting only.”

Once you hear “light dusting” it is time to relax. All you can do now is lightly dust the exterior of the car and wait for the judges. At some point the volunteer judges are going to make it to your car – you might be first, you might be last, but your time will come. When they show up, they will introduce themselves to you and ask for the score sheets. Remove the score sheets from under the wiper and hand them to the head judge. The head judge will distribute them to the other judges on the team. At that point, the head judge gets as long as needed to walk around the car. This is when the head judge is looking for fit, finish, and general presentation of the car. Usually this doesn't last more than a minute. Now take a really deep breath because the judging is about to begin. The head judge will ask you to open all the doors on the car. You will find this easiest if you do it in a logical sequence. Open the drivers door, while in there release the storage and engine compartment lids and gas cap if you have one. Now go open the engine lid all the way, open the passenger's door and finally the storage lid. The head judge will instruct the timer to start the 5-minute judging period. You will now get to spend the longest five minutes of your life. You get to watch these judges probe and poke your car like some kind of thorough physical exam. This is not the time to relax. Watch what they are doing. See where they are inspecting. They know where to find problems, so take from their experience and learn new areas to clean you might not have thought of before. You should not talk to the judges during this time, but you can learn a lot by watching.

When judging ends the judges will fill out their score sheets. Usually they will take the time to show you what they found and maybe even offer suggestions. If they do not, it is perfectly acceptable for you to ask. Do not be offended if they are brief – they do have many more cars to judge.

Now you really can relax. Take a moment to stand back from your car and see how great it looks. This is the biggest reward you are going to get for all your work. You now have a car that will really turn heads. Once you do that, take time to walk around and look at the other cars, talk to the other participants, find out their secrets. Most people who are involved in the Concours series will be more than happy to share their techniques with you.

Sometime after lunch, the awards will be handed out. Come over and congratulate those who did well – who knows you may be one of them. Offer thanks to those who took hours and days of their time to organize the event. The day has now come to an end. Pack up everything and enjoy driving your beautiful car home. Oh, you might want to confirm when the next event is so you can do it all over again!