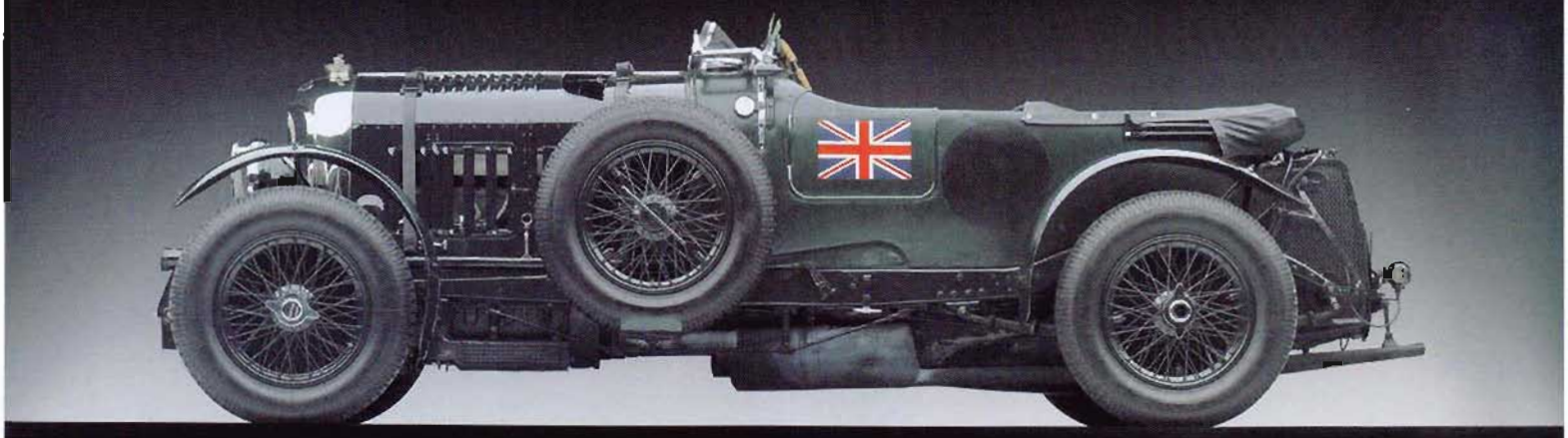
Ralph Lauren launched his Polo brand in 1968 with a man's tie, and went on to build up a company with products sold in 65 countries. This commercial success has enabled Lauren to build up a wonderful collection of cars, of all ages.

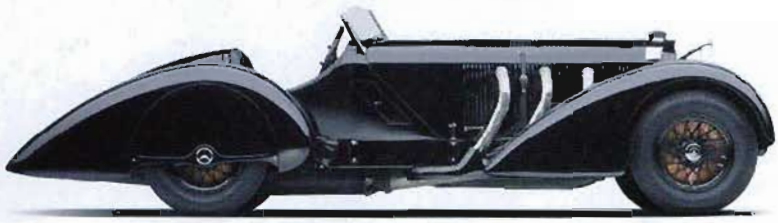
Now, a selection of the cars from this collection is due to be exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, USA, a revolutionary – and surprisingly controversial – move for the museum. Additionally, a book on the collection to compliment the exhibition will be launched this spring.

Fourteen of the cars in the Speed, Style and Beauty exhibition are featured over the following pages, along with an interview with Ralph Lauren himself.

The Ralph Lauren collection



A car fanatic from childhood, designer Ralph Lauren has built up a collection of the greatest cars. Here, he shows 14 of his favourites



'I remember going to Pebble Beach with my family and seeing this car drive down and I was mesmerised. When I had an opportunity to buy it, it was quite an exciting moment'

1930 MERCEDES-BENZ SSK

Of the 30 or so SSK models produced by Mercedes-Benz, this one is unique. The coachwork was designed by its original owner, Count Carlo Felice Trossi, who drew the sketch from which a British coachbuilder made the car a reality. Trossi was a successful racer who was once involved with Enzo Ferrari's stable of drivers, but began driving Mercedes in the 1920s. The lines of this SSK are particularly voluptuous, with its bold and highly polished grille and its long bonnet accounting for more than half the length of the body. Crested pontoon wings are mated to an extended body, with a gracefully tapered tail, a sculpted panel between chassis horns and jaunty rear wheel spats. Lauren has owned the 'Count Trossi' SSK since 1988.

Below
Count Trossi, a man of great taste as well as racing skill, was responsible for the astonishing design of this particular SSK.

'In the early days, when Ferraris were raced, they were simply fast. They were designed to win. But it's in their accidental beauty that I would define what Ferraris are'

1954 FERRARI 375 PLUS

Developed from one of Ferrari's most majestic competition cars (the 375 MM), the later 375 Plus was so designated because it had an enlarged engine to produce more power. Like all Ferraris of its time, there were no specific blueprints for its design. Instead, highly skilled metal workers created this beautifully rounded form by hand, using hammers and dollies. In doing so, they simply followed the verbal instructions of Pininfarina, head of Ferrari's favourite coachwork company, who imagined the car in his mind alone. The result was stunning in appearance, but also incredibly reliable and fast. This example was the last of five built.

1955 JAGUAR D-TYPE

In response to faster and tougher competition at Le Mans that threatened to usurp its successful C-type, Jaguar created the D-type. Its track record speaks for itself, with three consecutive wins between 1955 and '57 at Le Mans. This is one of only ten long-nose D-types built, capable of 190mph and driven by Mike Hawthorn, Paul Frère, Masten Gregory, Ivor Bueb and others, achieving second place at Reims in 1956 and sixth at the 1957 Le Mans. It was crashed at the '58 Le Mans but went on to clock 161.278mph at the Antwerp Speed Trials in 1964.

'The D-type is one of my favourites because it won at Le Mans a few times, but also because of its timeless shape and sleek design. It looks like a car from outer space'

'It's a very heavy car to drive. Today I find it amazing that this car, which is so heavy and so full of equipment, could also be so fast to drive. I get as much of a thrill driving a Bentley as I do a Porsche'

1929 BLOWER BENTLEY

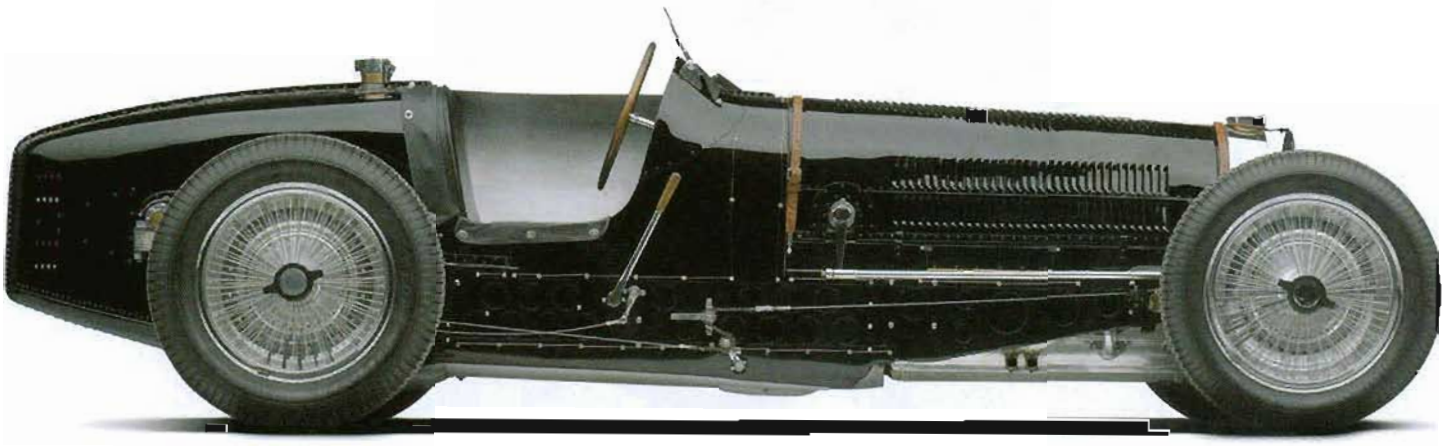
The so-called Blower Bentley is arguably the most glamorous and thrilling of all Bentleys ever built. 'Blower' refers to the supercharger (placed at the car's front), a mechanism that increases air intake for the 4½-litre engine, more than doubling its power from 110 to 240bhp. Company founder WO Bentley despised this 'falsely induced means' of increasing power, so it was racer Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin who fathered the idea. This is the fourth of five built, and one of only two short-wheelbase models. It was raced at Brooklands and Le Mans and in the French GP (finishing second), Irish GP (fourth) and Tourist Trophy, by Benjafield, Ramponi, Birkin, Brousselet, Gas and Trevoux.

'The Type 59 may not have won many races, and it was obsolete when it was introduced, but it was a car that was designed totally from an aesthetic point of view – a race car that was a work of art'

Below
Long, lithe Type 59 was built for competition – this one was raced continually until 1958.

1933 BUGATTI TYPE 59

Although the Bugatti Type 59 Grand Prix was made for racing, it is considered by many to be the prettiest race car ever built, exemplifying the same great style found in Bugatti's touring cars. The horseshoe-shaped radiator was supposedly modelled after the archway leading into the city centre of Molsheim, home of Bugatti's factory. Built between 1933 and '36, the Type 59 is the last of a series of grand prix cars produced by Bugatti. In its two years as a works car, this example was raced by Varzi, Nuvolari, Brivio and Benoist.



1938 BUGATTI 57SC ATLANTIC & GANGLOFF DROPHEAD

Introduced at the Paris Salon of 1933, the Bugatti Type 57 was fashioned for wealthy buyers who were more interested in refined looks than high speeds. However, the SC designation of both these cars indicates that they are fitted with superchargers for increased power. Owners could work with various coachbuilders to create their own design: the drophead coupé (top) was created by Gangloff in France. Only three Atlantic coupés were ever built, of which this one (main pic) was the last. The most distinctive feature of its body is the exposed seams with button-head rivets running down the spine and around the wings, a throwback to an earlier model.

Above
Wonderful Atlantic (main picture) was designed by Jean Bugatti; Gangloff drophead (inset) is one of only two produced.

'The Atlantic is probably the most beautiful car in the world in both its details and its overall shape. You can view this car from any angle and it still looks amazing'

'The first time I saw a McLaren was in a London showroom. As I read up on it, and as I took test drives in it, I realised this was a car like no other'

1996 McLAREN F1

Designed by Gordon Murray, the McLaren F1 was the world's first all carbon composition production car and the world's fastest production car, capable of 230mph and a 0-60mph of 3.5 seconds. Three people are able to fit into the body's remarkably narrow envelope because the driver's seat is placed centrally and is flanked by passenger seats located slightly behind. Despite the powerhouse engine, the F1 measures only 25mm longer than a Porsche 911. Lauren's example is the 55th of 75 F1s built.

1955 MERCEDES GULLWING

Considered by some to be the greatest road car ever built, the 300SL coupé is more familiarly called the Gullwing because of its doors, which open upwards. This unusual means of accessing the cockpit came about because of the body's tubular frame. Comprised of a myriad of small welded tubes, its side members occupy so much space in the sill areas that conventional doors wouldn't have been practical. The Gullwing was quickly sought after by celebrities, despite its uncompromising characteristics.

1955 PORSCHE 550 SPYDER

Like most Porsche products, the 550 Spyder has a cerebral appearance that emanates intelligence and classic timelessness. And yet the design is also brief and essentially cute, creating a clever and comely schizophrenia. The term *Spyder* is an Italian designation for a light, two-seater competition sports car. This zippy car was so easy to drive that one road tester suggested that beginners 'might do well to stay in constant contact with the speedometer'. Actor James Dean would have done well to heed that advice, suffering a fatal crash in his brand new 550 Spyder on the way to a race in California in 1955.

Below
Lauren's 550 has escaped the years of racing that many were subjected to, particularly in California.

'When I was growing up, or at least when I got to the point of deciding what cars I wanted, there was always an image of Porsche as the intelligent car, as opposed to the Ferrari, which was the racier car'

1958 FERRARI 250 TR

The Testa Rossa (Italian for 'red-head') derives its colourful name from the fact that the cylinder heads of its V12 engine are coloured red. This hypnotic Testa Rossa is the creation of Sergio Scaglietti, a talented coachbuilder who had never trained as a stylist but whose innate ability impressed Enzo Ferrari nonetheless. He never put pen to paper to sketch a shape, doing everything by eye and saying that 'good taste, aerodynamics, style and function' were the main elements of his designs. This example, bought by Lauren in 1985, is the 14th of 34 built.

'Ferraris are fast, they make amazing sounds, they are designed with the flair of Italy, and they all have purposefulness'

1961 FERRARI TR SPYDER

Showing the styling of yet another of the coachbuilders utilised by Ferrari, the seductive lines of this 250 Testa Rossa '61 Spyder were conceived by Medardo Fantuzzi. A heavy-set man with a way with a hammer and metal, Fantuzzi began his apprenticeship with the Maserati firm in 1924 and stayed with the company until it withdrew from racing in 1957. Given his reputation, he easily established his own coachbuilding business. Fantuzzi produced the coachwork for just two Testa Rossas in 1961, this one going on to win the 12 Hours of Sebring driven by Phil Hill and Oliver Gendebien.

'The 250 GTO is considered to be the great Ferrari collector's piece and the ultimate in its class. But I have many different ultimates that I think are the most beautiful for the years in which they were created'

1962 FERRARI 250 GTO

Designed under a shroud of secrecy, the birth of the Ferrari GTO was initially guided by engineer Giotto Bizzarrini, the company's controller of Experimental Car Development. In 1961, Bizzarrini's group became the casualties of firings and the completion of the new model was entrusted to Mauro Forghieri. The 'GT' in GTO stands for *Gran Turismo*, an Italian term used to describe a high-performance luxury sports car. The added 'O' is for *Omologato* – homologated for racing. The GTO went on to become one of the most legendary automobiles, winning two races in 1962, and the following year placing in the top ten in every race in which it competed. This one started out with Luigi Chinetti's legendary NART team in the USA.

1950 JAGUAR XK120

Dominating headlines for the 1948 London Motor Show was the new Jaguar XK120, which Motor Trend magazine later called 'a car that will be honoured and admired by motoring enthusiasts for years to come'. Previous British designs were typically austere and formal but the XK120 was flamboyant, distinctive, rounded and flowing. Although the company planned to make only 200, this slinky roadster was an overnight success, and demand for it was especially huge in southern California, home of film studios and image-conscious stars. Clark Gable took the first delivery of an XK120 in the United States and others such as Humphrey Bogart would soon follow, making the new Jaguar an integral part of Hollywood life. Ralph Lauren's XK120 is one of just six alloy-bodied Roadsters built, and was raced in three road races during 1950: the Targa Florio, the Parma-Poggio di Berceto and the Giro dell'Umbria.

'All the Jaguars represent to my mind both the countryside and the English race tracks. They look great in that wonderful dark British Racing Green. Some were beautiful in shape and functional on the track'

'I've always seen cars as art. Moving art. While friends of mine were into paintings, I somehow felt that the real beauty of owning a rare and magnificently designed car was the fact that you can use it'

AN INTERVIEW WITH RALPH LAUREN

Memories of his father's Pontiac, his first car – a Morgan – and the success that enabled him to build up a fantastic collection of the world's greatest machinery

What was the first automobile that you remember as a child, and why do you remember it?
I'm not sure it could be called a real car, but I remember looking out the window of my apartment house when I was about five or six years old. There were these twins about my age, two boys, and they had just gotten a bright red fire engine for their birthday, with two bells on the back. I always wanted a car like that. So I guess the first car I ever fell in love with was this toy car, and I never forgot it.

Were you a car enthusiast from childhood?
When I was growing up, cars were part of every boy's life. You weren't aware of being an enthusiast, you just tuned in. Sitting with my friends, we'd count the cars; we'd say how many Chevrolets had gone by, how many Oldsmobiles, how many Pontiacs. You could recognize every car.

Given that you grew up in New York City, was there a family car? In what car did you learn to drive?
[Laughing] I learned to drive in my father's navy blue Pontiac fast-back sedan, with the torpedo back that went straight down. It was a beautiful car, and it had an Indian head on the front hood that was a golden colour. I loved that car. But I was the youngest in a family of four, so by the time I got the car it was pretty old and shabby. And then I still had to battle my two other brothers to be able to take a date out in it.

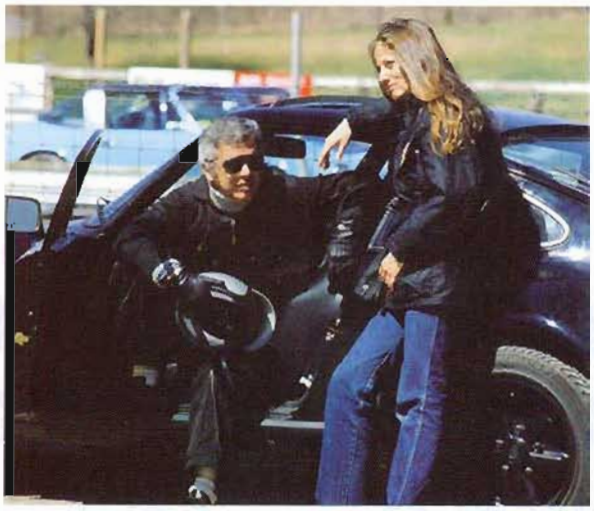
Was there a single car that made you look upon the automobile as more than a means to get from A to B?
For me, a car was always something special. It brought you somewhere else – the car was a way of entering another environment. Eating in the car, driving to the country, stopping at a restaurant, being on your way to somewhere – the car was part of my culture growing up, and as a young boy I never quite saw it as a status symbol so much as an escape.

What was the first great, interesting or collectors car that you purchased?
The first car I ever bought on my own savings was a 1961 Morgan. It was all white with red leather seats. It had a strap on the hood and the body construction was traditional '30s, which gave it a very rugged, utility look. To me, the Morgan was a great car that should never have its top up – true Morgan owners would go top-down in the coldest weather. What's so appealing about this car is the sport of driving and its ruggedness. Sort of like backpackers today, or the early four-wheel drivers, in that they'd put all their utility gear inside and take a ride somewhere in the middle of winter with the top down. So I entered the Morgan club as one of those guys, because that's how I saw myself.

Do you still own it?
I don't have that Morgan anymore. I had it when I got married, but I had to choose between that car and my wife, because we wanted to get an apartment and I couldn't afford a garage in Manhattan. I was also concerned that if the car broke down I wouldn't have the money to fix it. So I sold it to a friend of mine in Massachusetts. I went to this beautiful area where he lived and I left it with him, and then I rode the bus for about three hours to get back home. Looking back on it, I think I gave up that Morgan a little too early. I wasn't ready. So the first car I bought after I could afford a car again was another Morgan, a 1966 four-seater, which I still own today.

Do you have a favourite car in your current collection, either visually or in terms of how it drives?
Cars are like children; it's very hard to say that any one is my favourite. There are little things about each car that you come to love, whether it's the look, the steering wheel, the wire wheels, the way it drives, or even the way it drives differently when you put the top up. They all have identities; they all have

Left
Ralph Lauren celebrates on the catwalk. His designs have allowed him to buy the cars of his dreams.



Left
Ralph Lauren in his Porsche 911; and at Pebble Beach with his Bugatti Atlantic.

spirits and characteristics that are really endearing in some way. That's why I never like to sell my cars. Each one has come to represent a different part of my life. After I started my company, for example, I bought a 1971 Mercedes 3.5 convertible. It was the last hand built convertible they made. I was telling my son the other day that I was exactly his age when I bought that car. Here we are sitting in this car, driving along, and I was looking at my oldest son, who is now 32. That car has history, memories. I will never sell it.

What is it about a given automobile that makes you feel you have to have it?
As I started to buy cars, I didn't know I was building a collection. I just wanted the cars I was dreaming about. Once you drive a good one, it's like having a fever. My first legitimate speed car that had some real technology to it was a 1979 Porsche Turbo. After buying that one, I became very, very excited about cars. I drove other cars as well, and then at one point a friend of mine said, 'I'd like you to drive my Ferrari.' I said, 'Well, I really don't like Ferraris,' but I climbed inside and I absolutely fell in love with that car. Somewhere along the line I bought myself a Daytona Spyder, which is an amazing car. And that was the beginning of my Ferrari fever.

Tell me about the experience of driving older collectable cars.
They are all different. They have different sounds, they have different feels. There's a different feeling to the clutch. There's a different power. It's interesting, but you can drive a car one day and it will have a certain feel, and you drive the same car the next day and it won't feel the same. These cars have moods that change with the weather, or with the driver's own moods.

Do you notice particular distinctions in the way each of them rides, handles or sounds?
The sounds of cars are very distinctive. You can hear if one of the cylinders is fouled up or if the car isn't running right. You become attuned to the feel, the power, and the sound, because they all work together in an orchestrated way. Porsches, Ferraris, and Jaguars are all different, and the sounds they make are different, the shifting is different, the spirit of driving is totally different – yet they're all enjoyable, which is what makes it exciting.

> 'As I started to buy cars, I didn't know I was building a collection. I just wanted the cars I was dreaming about. And once you drive a good one, it's like having a fever'

What kind of driver are you?
I can't evaluate what kind of driver I am. I thought at one time that I'd be a race car driver, that I'd replace Paul Newman, but when I went to racing school I found that I wasn't as good as I'd thought. In fact, the first time I spun out, I wanted to quit – it was a little shocking. But I stayed with it. And the driving fever never quite went away. I don't like just going around and around doing laps – I really prefer driving on the road.

Does your family take any part in the creation or use of your car collection?
Everyone in my family enjoys the cars. My wife does not necessarily care to drive them herself, but she's really the one who pushes me to take drives and she loves the cars.

What made you decide to exhibit your cars in an art museum? Do you view great cars as art?
I've always seen cars as art. Moving art. While friends of mine were into paintings, I felt that the real beauty of owning a rare and magnificently designed car was the fact that you can use it. You can look at it, enjoy its visual qualities as with a painting, but you can also get inside and drive it – which means both enjoying the drive itself and going somewhere with it. How these cars are put together, the purposefulness with which they were created, every detail – the engine, the mechanics, the outside ornamentation – is very exciting. And on top of that you have the men who created the cars, Mr Porsche, Mr Bugatti, Mr Ferrari, and their backgrounds, their heritages, their histories, their reasons for driving and building them. I find it very stimulating.

The Ralph Lauren Collection cars will be exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA, from March 6 to July 3. For more details, see p28. The cars are also revealed in a new book, Speed, Style and Beauty, due out in April from MFA Publications (www.mfa-publications.org). It is written by Beverly Rae Kimes and Winston Goodfellow, and photographed by Michael Furman. The photographs of the cars are from the book; the interview is by Darcy Kuronen.