

## **Auto-emotive: Exclusive Interviews with Supercar Teams of the Electric Revolution at UK's Festival of Speed, Goodwood** by Chelsea Joy Arganbright

What a time of uncertainty and radical change we live in. Brexit, Covid, billionaires' investments in space tourism teasing out considerations of inhabiting Mars...and Europe's aggressive push towards EVs. Our landscape is shifting at speeds faster than we can comprehend, leaving many of us spinning in a brewing culture of divisiveness.

Jaguar, Bentley and Volvo are set to replace their petrol and diesel vehicles with EVs by 2030, with GM and Volkswagen issuing a statement to provide zero-emission cars before 2035. According to the UK government, any new petrol and diesel vehicles will be rendered unsaleable from 2030, accelerating electric and the few hydrogen vehicles on the market to the forefront. Fossil fuels will soon be as outdated as cassette players and paper maps.

The question is: are we ready for them? Surely the environment is, after almost 300 years of industrial pillaging. But we're not talking environment here. It's whether our mindsets are ready for them. My love of cars equals a passion for sustainability, but I must admit when driving past a BMW i3 on the M25, my body reflexively retracts. Relegating BMW's hitherto sexy design features to a Lego crossed with a playschool toy feels like a violation - a sentiment shared by a chunk of the brand's executive target market.

The i8 entices but with the £124k price tag, remains unattainable for even well-earning execs. EV bigshot Tesla's brand-affirming Model S, approachable Model 3 and SUV Models X and Y, though spelling out sexy, aren't seducing all petrol enthusiasts away from their gear-controlled, rumbling combustion engines. So how do we propel the image of cars which evoke heritage, style, freedom, status and power into the future?

I posed this question to supercar founders and teams at the Festival of Speed, a four-day celebration of motorsport dominating the scene since 1993. The event is a melting pot of clubs, well-respected brands, race car drivers and enamoured enthusiasts coming together for a common passion. Hosted on the grounds of the glamorous Goodwood Estate, the event features the iconic Hillclimb, showcasing performance cars old and new careening up the grounds to give onlookers a taste of their full-power potential. It's the largest event of its kind in the UK and a platform for debuting innovative new designs - one of which we got up close and personal with in an exclusive interview on its day of reveal.



*Figure 1 2021 Goodwood Festival of Speed Hillclimb  
(photo: Chelsea Arganbright)*

## **McMurtry “Spéirling” Hypercar**



*Figure 2 McMurtry “Spéirling” Hypercar (Permission to use by Jayson Fong and Goodwood Festival of Speed)*

From its curvaceous moulding to the flicked-out ‘side gills,’ the bespoke and pure electric Spéirling was revealed today after a top-secret, three-year labour of love by the team at McMurtry Automotive. Small and mighty like the team itself, everything from the menacingly sculpted fenders to the eye-catching gloss-matte finish draws one’s thoughts to none other than Batman. Thomas Yates, Managing Director at McMurtry, explains that it wasn’t the intention, and maybe because the Spéirling proves even more clever than the iconic Batmobile.

"Spéirling," or *thunderstorm* in Irish, rings true to its namesake and is a nod to its founder's Irish roots. The company however is based in Britain, where all design, engineering and build is completed. Dave Turton, McMurtry's Mechanical Design Engineer, explains billionaire inventor and founder Sir David McMurtry assigned his team the boundary-breaking task of engineering a "no rules" hypercar. Allegedly the fastest electric car yet, the 1.5 metre wide Spéirling rockets from 0-186 mph in under 9 seconds with a top speed of over 200 mph.



Figure 3 Side View of McMurtry "Spéirling" Hypercar (Permission to use by McMurtry Automotive)

Yates details, "We've stuck to safety rules and the highest motorsport standards. It's a matter of looking at technical regulations which haven't evolved as quickly as the electric industry has moved. We are driven to make the best possible track car."

Developed without the need for PR or sponsors, in the five years since the company's inception McMurtry has certainly kept the little beast sleeping, until now. Alex Summers, 2015 British Hillclimb Champion and McMurtry test driver elucidates, "The 60-kWh patented battery layout is very closely integrated into the chassis and sits either side of the driver and underneath their legs. Meanwhile, the powerful 80 hp fan system generates 500kg of downforce."

Turton expands upon the state-of-the-art fan system. "Conventional track and race cars rely on air speed over the car to make the wings produce downforce for increased cornering performance. The faster you go, the more grip you get but the drag force also increases rapidly, taking significant energy from your battery pack.



Figure 4 McMurtry "Spéirling" Hypercar with Chelsea pictured interviewing the team (Permission to use by McMurtry Automotive)

The downforce on demand system on this car is different, working like the inverse of a hovercraft, sucking the car to the tarmac by creating low pressure underneath. This gives full downforce independent of air speed, so the driver can enjoy maximum grip off the start line, in slow speed corners as well as high speed corners. It is sensational for spectators to witness.



Without wings, the external body can then have a very low drag shape and low frontal area, so the energy consumption at racing speeds is lower too. So, you can go faster and further."



Figure 5 Chelsea having a chat with Dave Turton, McMurtry Engineer, and Alex Summers, 2015 Hillclimb Champion & Test Driver

The by-product of the fan system happens to be what many petrol enthusiasts deeply feel is lacking in the electric car experience: *noise*. When I query Summers on his thoughts towards old school car enthusiasts' EV gripes, Summers says, "We have to accept the landscape of the future and make passion into sustainability, but without noise it's hard to convert

people." Luckily, Spéirling has no problem bringing this to the table with its powerful fans generating over 120 decibels of head-turning frequency. Closing the answer to my question, Summers indisputably remarks, "No one thinks a jet fighter doesn't sound cool."

At the Goodwood Festival of Speed, driving duties were shared between Alex Summers and Derek Bell MBE. Derek is a 5x LeMans 24 Hour winner, 3x Daytona 24 hour winner and twice world sports car champion. This is an exciting driver pairing aiding the future development of this electric speed machine. To follow their progress as they embark on an ambitious record breaking programme over the next 12 months: @mcmurtryautomotive on Instagram or visit [www.mcmurtry.com](http://www.mcmurtry.com).



Figure 6 Drivers Alex Summers and Derek Bell MBE (Permission to use by McMurtry Automotive)

Perusing the Aston Martin marquee, I get into friendly chat with Mike Harrington, long-time car enthusiast and proud owner of a 2014 Porsche Cayman (non-turbo!) He summarises in three words what so many combustion-lovers attest: "EVs have no soul." Harrington expands, "When you can feel the physical presence of the car, it's a reverberation you feel in your chest when you sit in the driver's seat. You can't get that with electric."

I catch up with Alan Sears who I got on with like a house on fire back at the London Classic Car Show a couple weeks back. Alan is the proud owner of a 1985 Lotus Turbo Esprit and self-proclaimed "serial joiner" of several car clubs, including the Lotus Driver's Club and Club Lotus. I ask him for his thoughts on EV conversion. Sears is doubtful. "Sustainable technology like this works in the short-term. I believe taxis and buses should go that way but how about time taken for charging? If we all switch to electric vehicles overnight, it's a matter of where the electricity comes from - how green is that right now? Also, most steel production requires coal so it's a shame Tesla made a steel car." These are serious questions that need to be considered, however what I'm interested in is fleshing out the personal, *emotional* experience. Raw emotion, after all, is the human chassis which all our choices form around - including which cars we invest in.



Figure 7 Goodwood Festival of Speed Snapshot (Photo by Chelsea Arganbright)

I ask Sears, who has had a long-term love affair with motorsport, how it feels for him in an EV. He pauses, and muses, "The internal combustion engine is a work of genius, especially older simpler engines, with the pieces of metal put together so cleverly. Visceral emotion is attached to these mechanical things." *Snap,*

*crackle, pop!* harmonics firing from the exhausts of performance vehicles create a specific emotional response. "Suck, squeeze, bang, blow," a phrase used in the aviation and auto industries since the '50's, describes in the most suggestive of layman's terms the complex process of the four-cylinder piston engine. These are replicas of our sensory connection.

"I felt a lack of instinctual thrill while witnessing EVs doing the Festival of Speed Hillclimb today - there's just no noise," Sears observes. "Manufacturers should create a system with sound effects emitted from inside the vehicle so it sounds like you're driving a Ferrari even if you're in a Jag iPace!"

Car companies have been working on just that as of late. Mercedes-AMG recently teamed up with my favourite rock band of the 2000's, Linkin Park, to help engineer the sounds emitted from their electric cars. This was a creative step for the company as a response to the incoming regulations around the necessity to provide noise alerts in EVs for the benefit of pedestrians. It's also crucial to create the visceral experience for drivers.

Sears presses, "It's important to feel *involved* when driving a vehicle." This is juxtaposed with the fact it feels most high-tech EVs are driving you. Many like Sears testify to the same feeling, believing the instinctive need for control and performance is lost in electric vehicles.

## Arash Hypercars



Figure 8 Arash "AF8 Falcon" (Permission to use by Arash Farboud)

Meandering over to the Supercar Paddock, I walk up to the brightest beam of a supercar at the festival. I press my glasses up my nose to read the unfamiliar black emblem, "Arash." The showcased AF8 Falcon is lemon yellow and screams flamboyance. Arash Farboud built his company two decades

ago as a start-up, creating made-to-order hypercars focusing on quality over quantity.

As we sit down for a chat, Farboud expounds, "We're at the limit of the petrol engine's power. With the complexities of the gear box, exhaust system, etc. it's simply easier to move to a new technology." He's right. The Industrial Revolution saw us moving from the steam engine to combustion, and a century on we need to think into the future.





Figure 9 Arash "Imperium" Electric Hypercar (Permission to use by Arash Farboud)

I ask Farboud about his challenges with transitioning into this sphere with his new electric prototype, the Imperium, comparable to a Le Mans Hypercar. Without pause, he serves back, "It's about not being like white goods. Also, eliciting the vibration and danger you experience in petrol cars. Those things add to the sexiness factor. So, there's a question mark in the next few years..." He finishes off with the same statement everyone seems to agree on, "People want a deeply visceral experience."

## Rimac



Figure 10 Rimac "Nevera" Photo by Chelsea A.

four. He boldly states, "The petrol companies can't beat this."

Miro Zrnčević, Test and Development Driver for the Croatian start-up Rimac, connects with me as we stand over the Nevera, the fastest accelerating production car yet. The interior is the most impressive I've seen at the festival, with Italian-made, carbon-neutral Alcantara trim, sumptuous leather and exposed carbon-fibre. Zrnčević explains the Nevera is made for comfort combined with pure driving pleasure and everything from the interior, exterior and complete technology is made in-house. It's a game-changer as it eats up  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile in under nine seconds and accelerates 0-100 mph in less than

When I query Zrnčević on the consistently affirmed instinctual need for drivers to experience a real petrol engine, he replies, "It's such a quiet ride and so fast, only the wind noise and AC compression can be heard." He goes on to educate me on a fascinating fact. "When you get out of a petrol supercar, it's exhausting because our whole body is stimulated. Since in the Nevera there is no NVH (noise, vibration and harshness), the body system isn't stressed." This is a brilliant point, as the sensation of being in a supercar for any length of time can feel like stepping out of a rollercoaster. EVs can tick the physiological wellbeing box.

## **McLaren**

After my ten-hour meet and greet at the Festival of Speed, I wander over to the McLaren marquee. The sleek Artura is featured, McLaren's brand new, mass production V6 Hybrid. Steve, who works in Test & Development, discusses "domain-based architecture" meaning each person involved with the creation of the car carries an in-depth knowledge within the particular realm of their expertise. In other words, every aspect of the car's development has been skilfully considered.

Steve jokes that the Artura can be driven down to the supermarket as much as used on the track. I'd personally love to rock up to M&S in a McLaren. My final question of the day elicits an answer which wraps it all up perfectly. I ask Steve how we shift the overwhelmingly doubtful perceptions of the EV revolution and his answer is simple, as the best answers are. He remarks that the first land speed records were broken by electric vehicles.

Steve is right. Charles Jeantaud's first car, built in 1881, was powered by electricity and beat the record at 39 mph. Heading into the turn of the century, electric cars also broke the following five land speed records. Then came steam, combustion and most recently, turbojet and turbofan.

140 years on, with supercar innovators bringing in powerful EVs like the Spéirling and Nevera, maybe we'll find it's not as much about easing into innovation to placate the sceptics and petrol-heads, but unabashedly forging ahead and changing mindsets through recontextualising the visceral, emotive driving experience. If the Jeantaud Duc was the starting line for a new era, perhaps it's time to come back full circle. It's how revolutions work, after all.



*Chelsea Joy Arganbright was formerly the only full-time Tesla chauffeur in Sydney, spent her early years sleeping in the pop-up top of a 1986 Westfalia Camper van as her mother whisked her through Mexico and Central America, and learnt to drive manual at 11 years old by her patient grandfather on a frontage road in Santa Ynez Valley, California which she'll never forget. Her passion for contextualising sustainability around psychology and sensory experience developed into a University of Melbourne master's thesis on designing communities for nature-integrated wellness.*

