

Marketplace

Christoph Grohe

The Rétromobile exhibition in Paris is a great opportunity to meet dealers we would not otherwise be able to get to know in person. One such person who advertises regularly in *The Automobile* and who was exhibiting at Rétromobile last month is the dealer Christoph Grohe. Based in Féchy, Switzerland, he is conveniently only 35km from Geneva.

As readers will know, *The Automobile* has a passion for untouched, unrestored cars, and this was what attracted us to Christoph's stand. Of the three cars on display, one was a rare and wonderfully original 1937 Renault Nerva Grand Sport cabriolet, a true Oily Rag car if ever there was one. One of only 22 constructed, it was considered to be a prestigious, stylish grand tourer in its day. It was powered by an eight-cylinder 5448cc 115cv engine and had been in the same Norwegian family since new and used primarily for touring around Europe. The only thing we thought that had been renewed during the 75 years of its use was the front bench seat squab, and that was probably out of necessity to stop the seat springs getting the upper hand.

As a contrast, next to the Renault on Christoph's stand was an immaculate 1947 Delage D6 cabriolet by Guilloré of Paris. An archetypal *Grand Routière*, it had a six-cylinder three-litre engine and was capable of 140km/h. It had been restored 25 years ago, but taking a close look it could have been yesterday.

Chatting to Christoph, he admitted first of all to having been "passionate about cars" all his life. At the age of 17 he bought his first, an MGA roadster which he dismantled and recommissioned. In the meantime he went into banking as a career. His next



The beautifully restored 1947 Delage D6 offered by Christoph Grohe at Rétromobile

project was an Aston Martin DB2 which needed tlc and not much more. He washed it thoroughly to rid it of mud and dust and polished, it. The car was transformed. That taught him, he says, the importance of leaving well alone.

In 1991 he left the banking world and became an old-car dealer to cure his enthusiasm. He started in his own garage, which had space for two cars. The business has grown steadily over the years to what it is now. Still just as enthusiastic today as he was 20-plus years ago when he started, Christoph prefers cars that are "Pre-1960, of all kinds except American cars and racing and competition ones". He says he follows his own taste and instinct, and makes his own marketing policies. This gives him his special niche in the old-car market.

He calls himself a "short-term

collector" and still likes to revitalise the cars he buys by cleaning and fettling them. He is in effect a one-man band, with a full-time helper. Sometimes he will do minimal work to a car because the buyer may wish to have a different coloured hood, for example. He always likes the car he has just discovered best – nearly as much as the one he is about to discover...

Sometimes, he says, his commercial hat takes over from his emotional one. He also likes "to sell dreams, be it a total restoration project or the perfect car". Most of the cars he sells are his own, although he does sometimes sell cars that he knows, or those of a well-known customer. He prefers to buy long-term family-owned cars that have been well maintained, have a low mileage, history and, if possible, even come with holiday

pictures as part of their heritage. An example of this is the Renault Nerva he has on offer at the moment. "I like cars like that," he says emphatically. When asked about the cost of his cars he answered "I am always realistic and reasonable in my pricing."

One can sum up Christoph's philosophies by translating his own words printed on the front of his brochure: "With passion I personally choose all the vehicles I sell, my criteria being rarity and quality. Some are in their original state or have been professionally restored, others are restoration projects. One can discover all my cars on www.christophgrohe.com

Christoph speaks very good English. His email address is info@christophgrohe.com or he can be reached by telephone on 00 41 218 07 35 65.

Gregor Hills

Below left Christoph Grohe on his stand at Rétromobile **Below centre** The 1937 Renault Nerva on tour before the war. It has been in the same Norwegian family from new **Below right** The unrestored Renault Nerva Grand Sport cabriolet as it is today

