



Adrian Goding

Equal parts artist and craftsman, Adrian Goding looks at the automotive past through stained glass

WORDS Chris Bietzk

IT'S ALIVE!' exclaims Adrian Goding down the telephone. I have a vision of pitchfork-wielding neighbours gathering at his door in Cambridgeshire as Boris Karloff lurches about the living room, but the artist is in fact referring to his chosen medium, stained glass.

'It's like nothing else,' he says. 'Look at a panel in neutral daylight and again with sunlight streaming through it; the image is suddenly transformed. Sit down in front of a stained glass window first thing in the morning and you'll see it change, hour by hour.'

He's right: his Panhard piece (pictured right and overleaf) was displayed prominently at last year's International Conference on the History of Motorsport Technology, and as the sun travelled across the sky, many of the guests seemed transfixed by the shifting hues of the glass. Host Sir Jackie Stewart, that most colourful of characters, was occasionally in danger of being upstaged.

To stand in front of the 25sq ft panel, which is so specific depicts a 1902 Panhard et Levassor,

is to be reminded that there are some things that are just beyond most of us. If you take the apparently unfashionable view that an artist ought to possess a degree of technical skill, you will be delighted by Adrian's work. Tiny details are ingeniously rendered, and the lead lattice that holds the fragments of glass in place is terrifyingly intricate.

'The technical challenge is actually part of the fun. The Panhard and Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost pieces weigh close to 100kg each, and engineering them in such a way that they didn't just collapse on themselves was tricky. Each is composed of two separate sections, joined as seamlessly as possible, and there's steel hidden inside the leadwork to provide support.'

It's all so masterfully done that it comes as something of a surprise to learn that Adrian acquired his considerable expertise relatively late in life. He studied product design at university before embarking on a career in automotive robotics, which saw him work with Ford and Vauxhall among others, developing assembly lines. The automated wizardry of the →





Mk4 Escort assembly line was no doubt far more interesting than the car that eventually rolled off it, but Adrian grew sufficiently restless that one day he picked up a pamphlet advertising evening classes and enrolled on a course in stained glass window making.

A few months and many gold stars later, he began accepting paid work and was soon able to leave the car industry behind. These days the bills are paid by small private commissions, repair work and the regular maintenance of the leaded windows at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. 'On a given day I might be mending a window smashed by a football or restoring a pair of Art Deco glass doors; there's rarely a dull moment. But the fact is that I spend a great deal of my time fixing problems in other people's work, and at a certain point I decided I needed to take a bit of a break to create something of my own.'

In this instance 'a bit of a break' means 800-1000 hours, or four months in real terms – that's how long each of his automotive panels took to complete. Needless to say, when committing that sort of time to a single artwork, it is helpful if the subject matter is of interest, and Adrian is almost as fanatical about pre-war cars as he is about coloured glass. He is currently the proud owner of a 1925 MG Bullnose and a 1917 Studebaker. 'I bought the Studebaker on a trip to the US when I was 20. The engine was seized



Above
The 1902 four-cylinder, 16hp Panhard at Brooklands just before the start of World War One. Now this car has been reproduced in stained glass by Adrian Goding, the work taking nearly 1000 hours.

solid and it needed a lot of work. It was mad, really, but a bit of elbow grease and youthful enthusiasm goes a long way and the car was restored in fairly short order.'

The 1902 Panhard et Levassor was well-known to Adrian long before it occurred to him to make a study of it. It has been owned by the same family since 1967 and Adrian had always liked it. 'There's so much detail on display – lots of lovely brass and exposed engineering. It has an interesting history, too, having raced at Brooklands in the very last meeting before the

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outbreak of World War One. I knew it would make a good subject.'

The cutting pattern alone took 100 hours to produce, and there were occasionally moments – or weeks – of frustration. The headlamp lenses were redesigned and redesigned again until Adrian was happy with them, and he admits that midway through the process his wife began to ask whether he was ever going to finish the piece. 'The hardest thing, though, was sitting alone in the workshop for all that time. I grew tired of my own company very quickly!'

That did not prevent him from starting a second panel soon afterwards, this time immortalising the 1913 Alpine Trial-winning Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost. A century on from that famous victory, the ex-James Radley 'Alpine Eagle' is owned by John Kennedy, who provided a mountain of invaluable reference material and suggested that Adrian include the distinctive Rolle Pass in the background.

'The lead isn't soldered until all the glass has been cut and put in place, and the Ghost panel lay flat on a table, unlit, for so long that I began to question whether it was any good.' Pay a visit to Rolls-Royce and Bentley dealer P&A Wood, where the piece is currently on loan, and you'll quickly realise that Adrian ought never to have doubted himself – it attracts as many admiring glances as any of the metal in the showroom, and is a fitting tribute to the car that helped Rolls-Royce to cement its reputation for quality all those years ago.

Given the labour-intensive nature of his art, Adrian is considering his next project carefully, but he is not short of ideas, and his dedication to documenting the past is inspiring. 'I've been speaking to the RREC about producing a window to honour former club president Eric Barrass, and to the Imperial War Museum about a piece featuring a WW1-era biplane. And I'd love to do a Maserati 250F at the Monaco hairpin.' With a number of classic car owners also interested in commissioning a stained glass portrait of their pride and joy, it sounds like Adrian had better learn to enjoy his own company, and fast. 

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