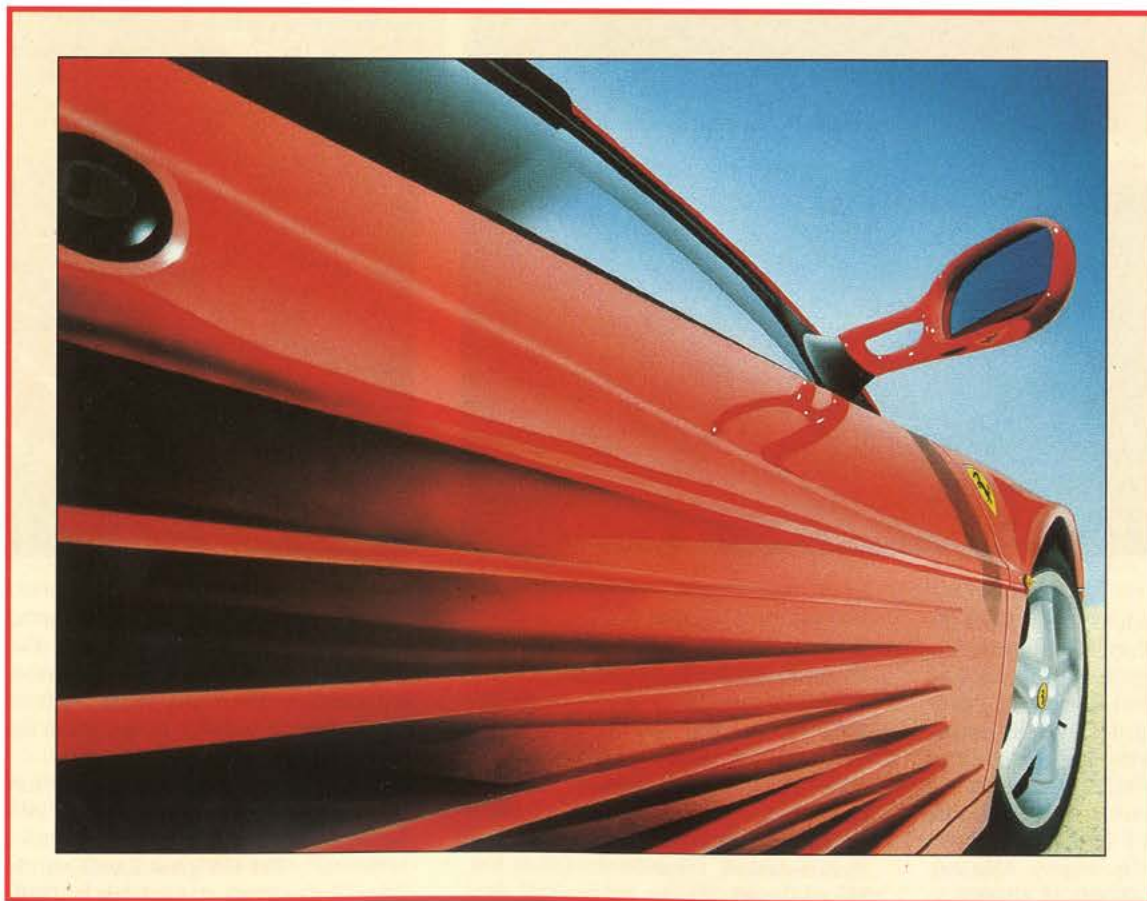


ART

LAC's Obsession

For many years now Laurent-André Chapuis, LAC to his friends, has been painting the world's most beautiful sportscars with meticulous, almost photographic precision.

by Arianna De Luca



A classic Chapuis highlights the evocative lines of this Ferrari 512 TR. Still not thirty years of age, the French painter is an able interpreter of period cars, which he cloaks with a surprising sense of modernity.

Laurent-André Chapuis is not inspired just by the thrill of speed, nor simply by a love of motorsport; he is fascinated by the automobile as an object in itself. His interest in streamlined bodywork is no mere enthusiasm but a passion, a passion that Chapuis himself defines as an

"obsession". Whatever it is, it lends his work incredible impact and an entirely special feel. In his curriculum vitae you will find no mention of art school or of drawing courses attended; he has no formal art training. All he has is an innate creative flair and his "obsession". But these two things have been enough to make Laurent-André Chapuis one of the world's most

sought-after and critically acclaimed automotive artists.

Born in Le Creusot, France, to a middle class family for whom the motor car was a handy means of transport and nothing more, right from infancy André began stimulating his own imagination by drawing all kinds of car bodies while he dreamed of finding a "job in the car business" when he grew up.

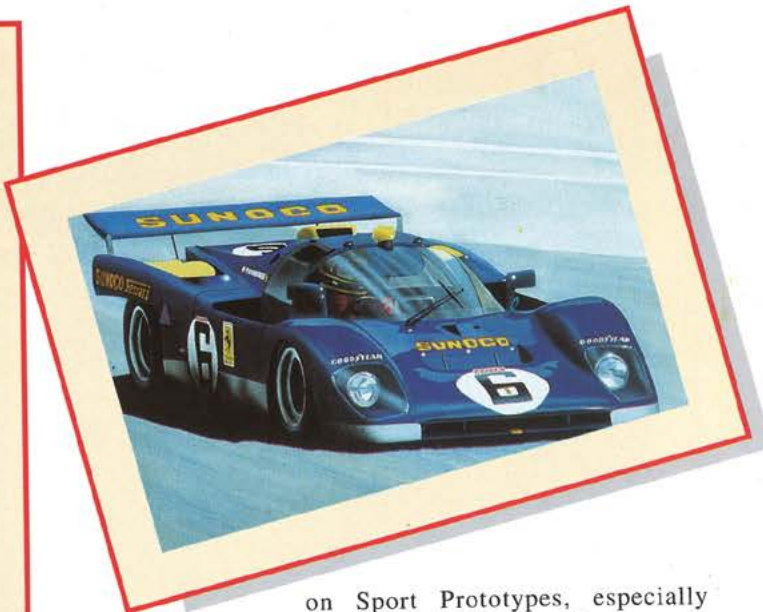
In time, Chapuis perfected his technique, abandoning the realms of the imagination and beginning to work on photos of cars that he would cut out from magazines.

It was no accident that the first car to win his affections was an experimental Ferrari: the Dino 206 SP.

The date was 1987, André was twenty-one and finally his love for cars was beginning to find its first artistic dimension.

The highly personal style favoured by LAC, which was how he signed all his paintings, began to develop very rapidly: his instinctive ability was beginning to blossom into a technical rigour, which was part of a precise creative process: «There's no place for sloppiness in my work, I always use the same technique: I paint exclusively from the photos I take at the track or at motor shows. This allows me to choose the point of view from which I want to make the portrait. Then, once I have completed the subject, I recreate the surrounding environment and finish off the car to hyper-realistic standards. It's not a new technique, but it's the one I prefer».

In his capacity as a professional painter, he tends to concentrate mainly



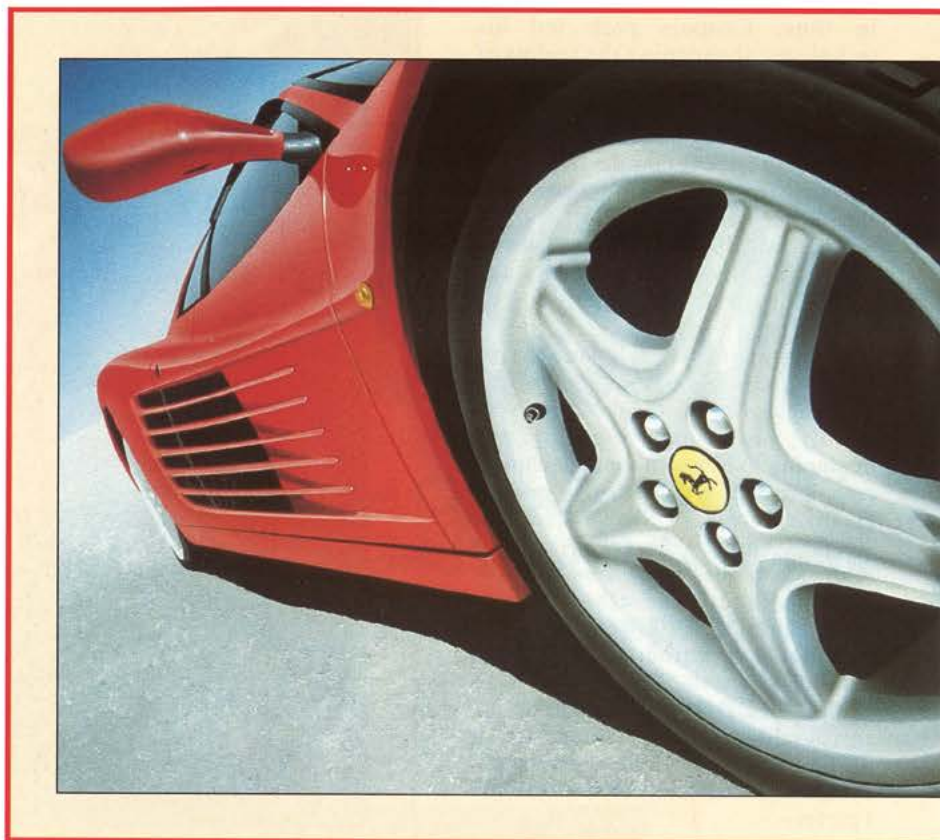
Captured by LAC's brush, the Ferrari pit stop has an almost dream-like quality, which does nothing to reduce the sense of dynamic activity conveyed by the scene. A great racing fan, a great deal of Chapuis's work is devoted to Ferraris and Porsches. Top right, a Dino single-seater and, above, the famous 512 M Sunoco.

on Sport Prototypes, especially Ferraris and Porsches. «I never saw these cars in their heyday, says Chapuis. All I can do is take a look at their past. The first time I saw all the cars that had won Le Mans was at the Passion auto exhibition. Since then, wherever they happen to be, I try very hard not to miss them. Anyone interested in Le Mans can hardly fail to be a fan of the cars from Maranello and Stuttgart».

But LAC is fascinated by cars other than sportscars. In fact he has a real weakness for the Citroen Traction, of which he possesses the model 11. ▶

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◀ While automotive artists are commonly talented photographers as well as painters, all of Chapuis's work is an unusual blend of various graphic skills. His paintings are always in acrylic on canvas, wood or paper, each one executed with the air-brush, that magical tool used by many professional illustrators, as well as conventional brushes: when, for example, he does the track with a stippling brush, he paints the bodywork with the air-brush, using a slim paintbrush is used to highlight the tiniest details. The effect obtained lends his paintings extraordinary depth. LAC's cars are faithful portraits of the originals executed with what can only be described as maniacal attention to detail. «It's true, confesses the artist with a touch of pride. Once, in June 1988, I amazed the driver of the Alfa-Jaguar barchetta at the Age d'Or event at Montlhéry: in portraying his car, I had also reproduced the throttle cable that, having broken during the race, had been temporarily repaired using the





cord from a track steward's whistle!».

There's no doubt about it, on looking at Chapuis's pictures, the eye is immediately drawn to the precision, the photographic clarity of line and the vividness of the colours. But, at the same time, all his cars are somehow brighter than the real thing, the light emitted by the background is always clearer than it is in reality, as if the

images had emerged from our most intense imaginings: blue sky, in credibly brilliant colours set against the diffused light of backgrounds that possess a hazy, dream-like quality. No word other than "obsession" is capable of describing the quasi-erotic attraction that Chapuis feels for the sinuous lines of a car body, for the highlights reflected in its smoothly rounded forms. It is an obsession that

finds expression in the "fetishistic" love for details portrayed in the closest of close-ups or in his penchant for painting cars from unusual angles: once taken out of their normal context, a wheel rim or a rear view mirror can acquire a fascinating and almost surreal life of their own, while a car portrayed in close-up generates a kind of distorting optical effect capable of imbuing "rigid" objects with a supple softness.

Today, at 29, Laurent-André Chapuis can already boast a good number of admirers and his reputation is growing throughout Europe, a fact also due to his interest in another, rather more "capitalistic" business.

Some years ago now LAC and his brother Hervé founded "Velo", a company specialized in the creation of logos and advertising illustrations. Naturally, this new business has not diminished his artistic stature, on the contrary, the last few years have witnessed numerous exhibitions of his work, including a series of annual shows at the Retromobile gallery in Paris, the permanent gallery at the Boutique Formula 1 in Montecarlo and

Opposite page, another unusual view of the 512 TR (above) and the 250 GTO (below). This page, above, the sleek lines of a barchetta; bottom, the 512 M Sunoco again and, right, Alesi with the 412 T1B: the picture is distinguishable from a photo only on close inspection.



an exhibition held on the occasion of the inauguration of the Ferrari garage opened in Lyon by the importer Charles Pozzi in 1990.

Again in Paris, this time in 1994, the Centre International de l'Automobile showed some works by LAC in the "Artist'Auto" exhibition, while, in Montecarlo, the Consortium International des Arts '94 awarded Laurent-André Chapuis the second prize for painting.