

VINTAGE CARS SHOW RACY PAST OF IRAN'S TOPPLED ROYALTY



A 1934 Mercedes-Benz 500K is displayed at the Iran Classic Cars Museum, on the western outskirts of Tehran. —AFP photos



A 1934 Mercedes-Benz 500K is displayed.



A 1930 Pierce Arrow Model A automobile is pictured.



Visitors look at a 1930's Pierce Arrow Model A.



Visitors are pictured at the Iran Classic Cars Museum.



A 1972 MPV automobile (center) - developed and built by the three famous German car manufactures Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Volkswagen.



Visitors look at 1956 Chrysler 300.



An Iran Classic Car Museum guard stands next to a 1974 Citroen SM (foreground).



Visitors look at a 1922 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost Model A.

Before they were ousted by the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran's royal family enjoyed a lavish lifestyle with a taste for fast cars quite unlike any ever built. Now, after half a century hidden away, the royal racers are back on show, with the Iran Historical Car Museum drawing in thousands since it opened to the public in recent weeks. "We consider that these cars are part of Iranian cultural heritage," the museum director Mohammed Faal said. "They belong to the people, not to the royal family."

It is run by the Islamic republic's Bonyad Mostazafan organization—"The Foundation of the Oppressed"—which manages the confiscated property of the toppled regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The line-up is staggering, and includes a car combining a unique engineering collaboration. In 1972, knowing the shah liked German engineering, Mercedes, Porsche and Volkswagen teamed up to build an unprecedented automobile. They created the "MPV Tehran", a bright orange painted single-seater, that was a "gift" to help crown prince Reza, who was then 12, learn how to drive. It has two keys. One, made of silver, limits the

powerful engine to a gentle 30 kilometers per hour (18 miles per hour). The other, in gold, allows the vehicle to speed at 170 kph. While the car hasn't raced since 1979, its sleek lines still inspire those who come to the museum.

Legal battle

Some 20,000 people have visited since its opening, more than the number of people who visit the national museum each month. "I really like this place, because it brings together some of the rare things that remained after the revolution," said Farzaneh, a 55-year-old pensioner. "These objects take us through our history," she added. Sprawling over more than a hectare (nearly three acres), the museum is located in an industrial zone west of Tehran, close to the country's automotive factories. So far, it houses 55 cars, two coaches and four motorcycles, one of which was once driven by Farah Diba, the last empress and widow of the shah.

But a hundred other vehicles are still in warehouses awaiting to be meticulously restored and put on show.

Another prize exhibit is a black Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, built in 1922. This car is notable not so much for its extravagant luxury, but because the Islamic republic kept hold of the historic gem after an epic battle with the exiled former monarchy. "Six months before the revolution, the car had been sent to Rolls-Royce for repairs," said Faal, the museum's director. "After the fall of the monarchy in 1979, the Pahlavi family demanded that the factory return it to them, claiming that it belonged to the dynasty."

It sparked a furious legal battle. But a British court ruled that, according to its documents, the vehicle belonged to the Iranian state and not the ex-royal family. "The car returned to Iran," Faal said.

Hitler's gift

The jewel of the museum is a 1930 Pierce-Arrow "Model A". At that time it was the most expensive car built in the United States—and was bought by Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. Its price tag was an eye-watering \$30,000, equivalent to one eighth of Iran's

state budget at the time, and came complete with a gold-plated bumper and headlights. The car, with the imperial crest fixed to the doors, was used by the shah during ceremonies including his marriage to his second wife Soraya and at the funeral of his father Reza. But when the shah was dethroned and exiled 42 years ago, the car remained.

"It doesn't matter who owned these cars, they belong to the Iranian nation, not to a particular king," Faal added, explaining why the decadent trappings of monarchy were displayed by a regime that despised the shah. "We love to admire the beauty of the car taking into account its history, and we appreciate the efforts of its manufacturers and designers." Another favorite for visitors is the 1934 Mercedes 500 K Autobahn Kurier, a gift from Adolf Hitler to Reza Shah. The car is the last of its kind: of the six built by the German company, five were destroyed during World War II. "Mercedes offered to buy it at a price we would set, because the firm was eager to have it in its museum," said Faal. "We refused." —AFP

Nearly 30 percent of UK birds endangered, report warns

Almost 30 percent of the UK's bird species including greenfinches and swifts are facing serious threat to survival due to factors including climate change, a report published yesterday warned. The "red" list of 70 birds considered most endangered was put together by a coalition of organizations the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) based on the observations of volunteers. The last such report was published in 2015. RSPB chief executive Beccy Speight said the report "is more evidence that the UK's wildlife is in freefall", and warned: "This really is the last chance saloon to halt and reverse the destruction of nature."

The number of bird species whose populations are in severe decline has almost doubled since the list was first compiled 25 years ago and has grown by three species since the last report. The red list already contained once common birds such as house sparrows and starlings and contains 11 new species this time, including greenfinches, swifts and housemartins. The criteria for inclusion include population decline and a reduction in the geographic area where the birds breed.

The latest fall in numbers concerns a broad range of birds with different habitats and feeding preferences, with

the report citing pressures including urbanization, changes to farmland management and invasive species. This includes insect-eating birds that arrive in the UK in summer months and migrate to sub-Saharan Africa for winter, such as swifts and housemartins.

The report suggested possible factors including a loss of swifts' traditional nesting sites in wooden eaves of old buildings, as well as climate change and droughts in Africa. Greenfinches, which often live in woods and farmland, went straight from the green to the red list after being hit by a parasite-induced disease. Waterbirds that spend the winter in the UK such as Bewick's swan also joined the red list, with pressures including shifting of wintering grounds northeast due to milder temperatures.

There were also several examples of recovering populations due to conservation efforts, with the white-tailed eagle moving from red to amber after the previously extinct birds were successfully reintroduced into Scotland. But the report warned that the UK red list is now so long that conservation groups may have to be more selective in targeting which birds to prioritize, "unless nature conservation action becomes bolder, takes place over a greater scale and is much better resourced". —AFP

New republic Barbados names 'Diamond' Rihanna national hero

As Barbados became the world's newest republic, its prime minister's first act was to officially declare the island's most famous citizen, Rihanna, a national hero. Barbados had already conferred the title of ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary on the billionaire multiple Grammy-winning singer and businesswoman in 2018 and tasked her with encouraging education and tourism.

The "Umbrella" songstress commanded "the imagination of the world through the pursuit of excellence with her creativity, her discipline, and above all else, her extraordinary commitment to the land of her birth," Prime Minister Mia Mottley told the assembled dignitaries at the "Pride of Nationhood" celebrations on Tuesday. "On behalf of a grateful nation, but an even prouder people, we therefore present to you the designee for national hero of Barbados, Ambassador Robyn Rihanna Fenty," Mottley said, inviting the singer up to stand alongside her.

"May you continue to shine like a diamond and bring honor to your nation by your



Rihanna Fenty (right) being conferred with the honor of Barbados 11th National Hero by President Dame Sandra Mason.

words, by your actions, and to do credit, wherever you shall go," she said, with a nod to the singer's hit "Diamonds." Mottley paid tribute to the humble origins of Rihanna, who was born in Saint Michael and raised in the capital Bridgetown. Rihanna, 33, grew up in a troubled home in Barbados and was propelled to fame after American producer Evan Rogers recognized her talents. The star parlayed her musical success into a make-up and fashion empire,

with earnings that now dwarf those of other megastars such as Madonna and Beyonce.

Forbes in August estimated she was worth \$1.7 billion, around \$1.4 billion of which comes from the value of her cosmetics company Fenty Beauty, a partnership with French fashion giant LVMH. Mottley said the government chose to honor Rihanna as the first national hero designated by the new republic as a "signal to the world." Rihanna joins a select group of 10 oth-



Rihanna Fenty speaks after becoming Barbados 11th National Hero. —AFP photos

er Barbadians including Garfield Sobers, regarded as one of the greatest cricketers of all time and the only other living national hero.

Sobers was also at the ceremony and hugged Rihanna. The title was conferred on her yesterday morning. Rihanna was among many nominations for national hero submitted by the people of Barbados and Mottley said others would be named by National Heroes Day next year. The independence ceremony was closed to the general public amid a pandemic curfew, which was relaxed to allow Barbadians to enjoy festivities including fireworks displays. The guest of honor was Britain's Prince Charles, who acknowledged the "appalling atrocity of slavery" the island suffered under colonial rule. —AFP