The Bugatti "L'Or Blanc" - The fastest porcelain in the world makes U.S. debut in California at The Quail, A Motorsports Gatherings

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The security officer nods, the door opens. Amidst pure white walls bright spotlights illuminate a Bugatti Grand Sport that is placed in the centre of the spacious room. We have entered the hidden world of the Bugatti Design Studio. The team around Bugatti's Head of Design Achim Anscheidt works in a quiet and focused atmosphere as they walk around their latest object of desire. Several times they stop, take a step to the left and to the right; they bend down and up again, looking intensely at the Grand Sport from different angles. They analyze the reflections of light on the car's body before they step back for a moment to get an overall impression of their work. Thin blue lines flow over the bright white exterior of the fastest convertible in the world. It feels like visiting the atelier of an American pop-art artist.

The creation bears the name "L'Or Blanc". It represents an automobile that redefines the art of design. If you look at it through the eyes of a designer, you will recognize that it is the reflection of the studio lights on the body that attracts their interest. Positioned beneath a special light, the car is set in an ideal environment that provides an excellent image of the reflections. The studio light is reflected on the invisible edges between the

body shapes of the Grand Sport. In numerous stages each reflection line is translated by Bugatti's designers onto the car body that has been pre-painted in a vibrant white tone. They use a precision tape made of Japanese soft tissue that can be easily torn off by hand. It adheres perfectly to sulphur-containing plasticine. By stretching them to a certain degree, these tapes are "lined" in pieces up to five meters long across the whole exterior of the car. If the line does not fully meet the intention of the designers, they place a correction tape above the original line.

This process is repeated until the final line has the right tension and character. Between the styling steps, the team looks at the car from a distance to evaluate the relation of the stripes to the white spaces. This is also the best way to ensure that lines flow from one side of the body across the roof and the rear to the opposite side. Even the smallest imperfections are being revised meticulously, as the final target is to achieve unrivalled perfection. Finally, the lines stretch across the perfectly shaped Bugatti like a grid of light reflections. Over the course of several weeks the team of designers develops the final composition of dynamic bends and delicate lines that run over the automotive piece of art like the serpentines of the Italian Stelvio Pass. "The especially for this "L'Or Blanc" developed painting process ensures that both colors flow into one another without the tiniest structure in the surface - in the same way as the hand painted glazes of KPM's porcelain," explains Achim Anscheidt, this unique procedure in the automotive world.

In the next step, Bugatti's paint specialists dedicate themselves to the further completion of the masterpiece. Over the course of three weeks, each millimeter of the marked lines are being filled by hand with the characteristic blue color. In addition, the whole body receives five layers of clear lacquer. A varying and powerful gradient of the two colors is generated because the team had used a combination of tapes with different widths. While the blue lines dominate over the white spaces in the lower section of the convertible, the relation of colors inverts on the way to the roof so that the intense white appears even stronger. Twelve elements made of finest porcelain at the Berlin based manufactory complete the aesthetic approach of this special Grand Sport.

Let us change the location and visit the workshops of the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur in the heart of Berlin. Following a tradition of around 250 years, at this location more than 170 craftsmen and specialists produce precious items, as today's expression of porcelain art. Handmade plaster moulds are needed to craft the unique porcelain elements that appear in the exterior and interior of the "L'Or Blanc", and with a tremendous attention to detail; each mould is created and optimized in a several-week-long process at the research and development department. The team has to run a number of dedicated tests with the raw material to check the impact of the natural shrinkage of around 16% during firing and drying. Finally, the porcelain elements fit seamlessly to the Bugatti components.

"Porcelain is one of the strongest materials but the grade of quality depends significantly on the excellence of the manufacturing process. We had to assure that the inlays perfectly fit to the filler caps, it has been a challenge for us to exactly calculate the shrinkage of porcelain," explains Thomas Wenzel, Head of Design at KPM. The "L'Or Blanc" is the world's first automobile to be equipped with porcelain, and the development team

invested a lot of effort to guarantee that each item is capable of performing in every driving situation in the most powerful car on the market. Before their application to the car, the porcelain elements were extensively examined in regard to automotive safety and quality to optimally protect the passengers in case of an accident.

As part of the exterior design, porcelain is used for the inlays of the centre wheel badges, the fuel filler cap and the oil filler cap as well as the signature "EB" badge at the rear. Their shiny white surface blends in with the brilliant bright finish of the paint suggesting that the car would be coated with a thin layer of porcelain, too.

"At first, it seems to be an unusual idea to use porcelain in a car, especially in the world's fastest convertible," comments Dr. Stefan Brungs, Director of Sales and Marketing at Bugatti Automobiles. "But this is what Bugatti stands for: the realization of exceptional ideas whilst striving for the utmost in quality and aesthetics. This allows us to continue Ettore Bugatti's heritage, who himself loved to experiment with new materials."

Besides the signed porcelain inlays on the sides of the centre console, an intarsia made of finest porcelain is fixed to the rear panel between the seats. Similar to the exterior porcelain elements this item carries the relief of the famous elephant in an upright standing position that has been created by sculptor Rembrandt Bugatti. His brother Ettore had used the original draft to cast the radiator mascot for the Bugatti Royale. This elephant is a synonym for the brand still today. Embedded in the top of the centre console, there is a fine porcelain dish with edges finished in an exclusive diamond polishing - a technique that has been applied by the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur Berlin for the very first time. The precious dish can be removed and is part of a picnic set that was exclusively designed by KPM for the Bugatti car.

"The impulse for that partnership came from Rembrandt Bugatti's renowned elephant," tells Jörg Woltmann, owner of the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur Berlin (KPM) and car aficionado. "At the beginning, we wanted to integrate the sculpture in our product range, then we thought about the potential for a comprehensive service and finally the synthesis of ideas led us to this outstanding Grand Sport." Woltmann is enthusiastic about the "L'Or Blanc". "A number of superlatives are associated with porcelain from the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur Berlin: one says it has the most beautiful shapes and decors, it has the hardest weight and the whitest tone. Now, it is also the fastest porcelain."

The Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport "L'Or Blanc" presented in Berlin, is a one of a kind creation. Nevertheless, the partnership is supposed to be continued, and Bugatti's designers received a lot of inspiration from porcelain painting offering a variety of new opportunities for the design. The price of the Bugatti "L'Or Blanc" amounts to 1.65 Mio. EUR ($2.35 million).