

Rancho Cielo Students Take Center Stage at 75th Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance

By Adam Joseph, Rancho Cielo

Most people come to Monterey Car Week to celebrate automotive history. At Rancho Cielo, students are learning to preserve it.

This year, two recent graduates, Max Perez and Aaron Correa, helped do just that at the 75th annual Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. At the same time, current students gained insight into the classic car restoration industry through a series of related activities at Rancho Cielo and across the Monterey Peninsula.

The first was on Aug. 12; Rancho Cielo hosted its second Classic Car Education Day, bringing students face-to-face with leaders in the collector-car world. James Mitchell, founder of Pendine, a car collection management service based in England, and Giles Crickmay, director of Frank Dale, a specialty Rolls-Royce and Bentley dealer also based in England, spoke to a group of Rancho Cielo students and staff, as well as local community members and classic car enthusiasts.

The Piston Foundation, a nonprofit that supports young people who are interested in pursuing careers in the collector car industry, also joined Education Day. Foundation President Jeff Mason discussed the organization's scholarship program and efforts to build pathways for the next generation of skilled technicians.

"The future of the classic car world depends on having skilled people to preserve, maintain and restore these cars," Mason said. "We're proud to support Rancho Cielo students as they take their first steps toward careers in the industry."

A Rare Gem

That same day—one of the world's most unique historic vehicles, a pre-war 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom

II Continental—arrived on campus. Students had the extraordinary opportunity to work alongside master detailers and repair specialists, learning how to detail the vehicle for the Concours d'Elegance.

The Rolls-Royce belongs to Rancho Cielo Board Member Bill Hayward, a businessman and philanthropist who acquired the rare automobile and had it restored to its original condition. He entered it in the Concours with Rancho Cielo in mind.

Hayward has a history of investing in Rancho Cielo students. In 2023, he helped construction students design, build and exhibit a fully sustainable home for the Orange County Sustainability Decathlon.

Rancho Cielo won the competition outright, beating top engineering programs from colleges and universities worldwide. He believed that a Pebble Beach acceptance would offer students another once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and he was right.

Perez and Correa were selected to help Hayward present the Rolls-Royce to judges at the Concours because of the talents they demonstrated while in the classic car program and genuine interest in the industry.

They learned about the rare car inside and out, from its storied ownership history to why professionals wear thin-soled shoes to better feel how an engine is running.

More Milestones

On Aug. 13, at the Ferrari Owners Club Northern California Region's 4th Annual Concours Carmel, over 150 Ferrari owners gathered in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Some of the world's most renowned experts judged the cars, while Rancho Cielo students shadowed the judges and learned about the judging process up close. The students then selected their

favorite cars and presented owners with one-of-a-kind trophies, including rose sculptures they had welded themselves.

At the Pebble Beach Concours Forums, Rancho Cielo students and instructors heard experts from across the industry speak. They even rubbed elbows with one of the automotive world's biggest names, Jay Leno. He participated in a forum celebrating the automotive industry's living history.

The Big Show

Also on Thursday, Perez and Correa joined Hayward and his family in the 1934 Rolls-Royce for the Pebble Beach Tour d'Elegance, traveling along the 17-Mile Drive and the Monterey coastline. Hayward wanted the two young men to experience this aspect of the Concours because he, too, had dreamed of such an opportunity since he was around their age.

During the 2026 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, the graduates stood alongside the automotive masterpiece on the show field and helped Hayward present it to the judges. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—thousands apply, and only about 200 are selected to participate. The two young men gained real insight into the process and what a competition like this can feel like for participants.

Hayward and his family were ready when the news was finally announced: The Phantom II placed third in the Rolls-Royce pre-war class. They rode the car to the stage to receive the award, but soon after returning to their spot on the show field, the real triumph came. Hayward was notified that the car had received a special second award: the coveted Montagu of Beaulieu Trophy, which recognized it as the most significant automobile

of British origin at the Concours d'Elegance.

Looking Ahead

Exposure to these life-changing opportunities, which may seem unattainable at first, even for well-resourced individuals, is embedded in Rancho Cielo's mission and everyday work. The nonprofit has always evolved its programming to meet the community's needs, leading to the development of its Classic Car Restoration program, first as a track within its Auto & Diesel Repair program in 2023 and then as a dedicated program in 2025.

Activities across the Peninsula during Car Week, the partnership with the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and champions like Hayward showed Rancho Cielo students and the two graduates that real pathways exist for young people to enter the classic car industry, which needs up-and-coming technicians more than ever.

Believed to be the nation's only high school Classic Car Restoration program, Rancho Cielo is working to change that by introducing students—many from communities with limited economic opportunity—to a highly specialized industry and helping to keep the craft alive.

"The future of the classic-car world depends on having skilled people capable of maintaining and restoring these remarkable automobiles," Hayward said, echoing a sentiment shared by industry leaders and Rancho Cielo instructors. 🌿

Learn more about Rancho Cielo and its Classic Car Restoration Program at ranchocieloyc.org. You can also experience and support its programs and students in action at Rancho Cielo's Culinary Round Up on March 21, 2027, at the Portola Hotel & Spa at Monterey Bay. Tickets on sale soon at ranchocieloyc.org. Tiffany Harbrecht contributed to this article.