Book Review – Schlumpf

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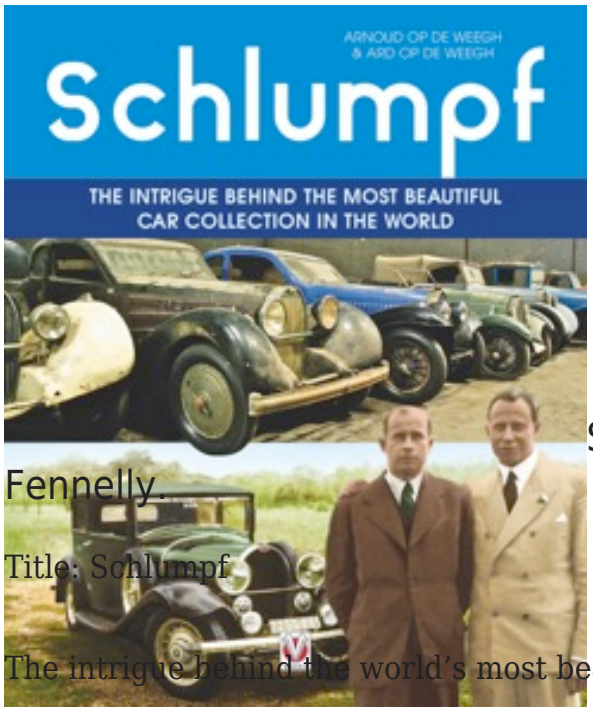

Schlumpf – a new book reviewed by Kieron Fennelly.

Title: Schlumpf

The intrigue behind the world's most beautiful car collection

Author: Arnoud & Ard op de Weegh

Published by: Veloce Publishers www.veloce.co.uk

160 pages; hardback

Price: £35 UK; $60 USA.

ISBN: 978-1-787113-09-1

The authors, Dutch father and son enthusiasts, set out to correct versions of the so-called

'Schlumpf affair' which blames the Schlumpf brothers for the confiscation and partial dispersal of probably the best assembly of collectors' car in the world. The Mulhouse textile magnates had by the 1970s assembled a vast collection of over 600 cars, mostly pre-war and largely Bugatti. When in 1974 their business collapsed, with the moral support of the French government the workforce took over the plant and also the collection. Swiss citizens, the Schlumpfs were forced to retreat over the border while the Schlumpf affair became a *cause célèbre* of the French left and the incoming Mitterrand government readily used it to portray the Schlumpfs as exploitative capitalists who built up their exotic garage at the expense of impoverished workers.

No one who has read about the cynical kidnapping and ransoming of Ferdinand Porsche in 1946 by the French will be very shocked by this. The real surprise is that the cover-up has persisted until the present day as our investigative Dutchmen discovered. To a large extent this is because of the numbers of cars which quietly disappeared from the collection when nominally it was in the hands of the French authorities and the implication that officials involved made comfortable back door commissions. The authors show that in 1976, the Schlumphs had agreed to sell part of their collection to Tom Wheatcroft, which, the op de Weeghs claim, would have enabled them at least to pay off their workers, and that Wheatcroft was even ready to pay out for the full collection. However, the transfer of currency was blocked by Paris and the deal fell through. Years later when the government finally recognised that legally it was obliged to compensate the Schlumpfs, its estimate of the collection's value was a tenth of that made by Christies.

VERDICT

It's an intriguing story which undoubtedly has had far less currency in Anglo Saxon countries than on the Continent, but the subject is more fitted to an extended magazine article as it fills out barely 50 pages. The rest of the book feels as if it has been added at the suggestion of the publisher and comprises general descriptions of some of the more famous cars which simply restate known facts. Much of the copious photography too is of indifferent quality, particularly the indoor shots which lack lighting, and the captions mostly impart little useful information. The authors' text too would sound rather more authoritative had

the book been translated by a native English speaker rather than reproduced in the authors' conversationally fluent, but sometimes slightly vague Dutch-English.