



Ferrari
250 GT
Competizione Berlinetta

Did reality match the mystique?
BY TIM CONSIDINE » PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

"I'VE DIED AND GONE TO HEAVEN," IS ALL I COULD THINK. TREES FLEW PAST in a blur on either side of one of New Hampshire's forested back roads. I looked past the classic wooden Nardi wheel, through a short wraparound windshield and over the long, silver hood covering a screaming 12-cylinder Maranello masterpiece reaching full song. Six open stacks sucking air, chain-spun camshafts opening and closing 24 valves, hand-lapped transmission gears whining in harmony and barely muffled exhausts howling—a virtuoso mechanical symphony. And I was the conductor. Again.

The cause of my sensory overload was a one-of-a-kind Ferrari known officially as 250 GT Competizione Berlinetta, serial number 0425, now owned by Lee Herrington as part of the Herrington Catalog Collection. Oddly, I had first come across this spectacular automobile nearly a half century before.

As a callow youth of 19, my mind was unencumbered by much intellectual diversity. I was preoccupied with work (through luck more than talent, I'd achieved a measure of success as an actor), members of the opposite sex and, of course, fast cars. I actually owned a race car, a jewel-like Italian OSCA, but for driving around on the Southern California streets, I preferred the anonymity provided by a Corvair sedan. That is, until early in 1960. A friend called to say our pal Jess Haines had just taken delivery on some kind of old Ferrari show car.

Jess had "connections" in Europe and imported some really interesting cars, so I hopped in my Corvair and headed to Long Beach. As I arrived, he was just finishing drying the most strikingly beautiful road car I had ever seen. Like Dudley Moore, when he first caught sight of Bo Derek in the movie, *10*, I was dumbstruck by the perfection of this gleaming silver Ferrari, a one-off made four years before by Pinin Farina for the Geneva Auto Salon.

It was unmistakably the sinuous and muscular shape of a classic Tour de France Berlinetta, but somehow more formal, with crisper rear fenderlines and unique styling cues—frenched headlights and taillights, large chrome engine vents behind the front wheels, a row of louvers tapering down the sail panels of its elegant sloping roofline (copied slavishly on 1960s' Mustang fastbacks) and a distinctive chrome ring around its graceful if aggressive oval grille. It was a race car dressed for dinner.

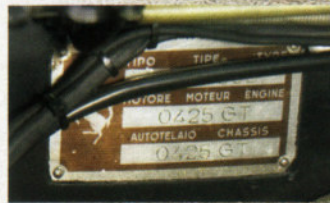
The TdF, or Tour de France Berlinetta, so named for its virtual domination of that grueling French endurance race beginning in 1956, was Ferrari's most successful GT car ever. More so, even, than the vaunted GTOs that followed. It couldn't have come at a better time for the Maranello company, which had been steamrolled on the track in 1954 and '55 by the all-conquering Mercedes-Benz cars.

By 1956, however, Ferrari's fortunes began to change. Obviously, Mercedes-Benz's withdrawal from Grand Prix and sports-prototype racing was helpful, but other circumstances lined up in the Italian company's favor. Fangio led Ferrari's Formula 1 team, strengthened by inherited Lancia V-8 racers. And, importantly, for the ever-more popular GT class, where 3-liter Mercedes-Benz

300SLs had dominated, Maranello found another arrow in the quiver. The original Colombo-designed V-12 was reaching maturity at 3 liters. It had already replaced the heavier Lampredi V-12 in Ferrari's new 250 GT Europa series. Batista "Pinin" Farina penned bodies for most of the Europas and, at Ferrari's bidding, began developing ideas for a lighter, more Spartan coupe version, one suitable for competition in the GT class, but still comfortable enough for the road.

The Turin maestro produced seven one-off prototypes, several of them derivative of his muscular 250 MM racing coupes, but three

» Vintage black-and-white photos show the 250 GT Competizione Berlinetta in its original configuration, with front and rear bumpers and the chrome grille surround. Without them, the way current owner Lee Herrington received 0425, the simple purity and elegance of Pinin Farina's coachwork is revealed. Below, the heart of 0425 and many other Ferraris, Gioacchino Colombo's legendary 3-liter V-12, fed by three twin-choke Weber carburetors.



PHOTOS COURTESY LEE HERRINGTON COLLECTION

in particular demonstrated themes and details that would come to define the classic TdF.

Two appeared at the Paris Salon in 1955, chassis numbers 0393 and 0403. The latter, on Carrozzeria Pinin Farina's stand, was noted most for its rounded rear fenders and the flying buttresses extending back from a shortened cab, much like those that would appear later on the Jaguar XJS Coupe. Both cars featured a thin chrome ring around the low oval grille and eight-panel side vents behind the front wheels, but 0393, built for Andre Dubonnet (of the aperitif family), introduced the overall shape, signature fastback with 14 sailplane louvers and near-horizontal top rear fenderlines that would come to characterize most TdFs. Two other features would prove less enduring, vent wings in the side windows and, in particular, odd Nash-Healey-like fins at the rear.

It all came together the following year, when Pinin Farina unveiled the

sumptuously appointed silver 0425 250 GT Competizione Berlinetta at the Geneva Salon. No wind wings, no fins and no flying buttresses, just a clean fastback accented by 14 louvers on each sailplane, and graceful, straight fenderlines extending back to frenched taillight clusters. With 16-in. Borrani wheels and even larger 10-panel side vents, all the visual elements of the future TdF were in place, as were the mechanicals.



The stunning aluminum body rode on a Type 508 Europa 250 GT chassis, with Ferrari's familiar parallel longitudinal oval tubes connected and reinforced by cross tubes, a steel front bulkhead and X-bracing. As in 250 MM racing berlinettas, the rear suspension employed a single semi-elliptic leaf spring on each side, trailing arms above and below the live axle and Houdaille lever shock absorbers. At the front, however, while upper and lower A-arms and Houdailles were retained, coil springs replaced a single transverse leaf spring. The wheelbase was 102.4 in. with front and rear tracks of 53.3 and 53.1 in., respectively. A Colombo Type 112 2953-cc sohc V-12 fueled by three 36 DCZ3 twin-choke Weber carburetors provided 230-plus horsepower through a 4-speed all-synchro gearbox.

Ferrari patron and favored customer Dr. Enrico Wax of spirits importer Wax & Vitale in Genoa bought 0425 for \$8480 in April 1956, right after the Geneva Salon, and kept it for a year before selling it to Prince Alessandro Ruspoli,

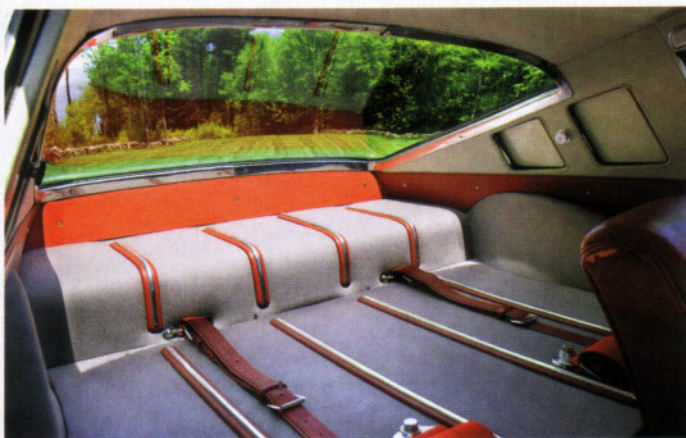
a wealthy and particularly colorful Italian nobleman known as the Playboy Prince for his *Dolce Vita* lifestyle. Either Ruspoli or the next owner, privateer Formula 1 racer Marchese Gerino Gerini, removed the chrome ring around the grille. Gerini sold the car to Italian actress Elena Giusti after seven months, and sometime in late 1959 or early 1960, 0425, with the grille surround back on, went to my friend Jess Haines in Long Beach. And to me.

I drove it home that very day in a dream state. Fierce V-12 power, out-of-this-world sounds, plush red upholstery with white piping all around, an airplane-like dash with nine white-on-black gauges, including a large Jaeger rally clock and an altimeter—all mine. I couldn't believe it. Neither could my very conservative Uncle Rodney, who agreed, if reluctantly, to front me the \$2000 I was to pay Jess, along with my Corvair.

"This is so unlike you, Tim," he said, "I'm surprised and a bit disappointed you'd ever do such a thing."

It was enough to give me an occasional pang of guilt—and doubt—on the way home. This was going to be my everyday car? I had no garage. Would I park it on the street? But then I'd put my foot down and roll into the full orchestra.

The truth is, it wore on me. Every time I drove the car I worried. I was glued to my apartment window when it was parked ex-

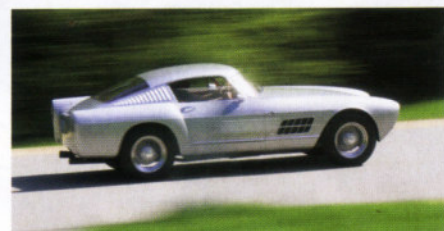
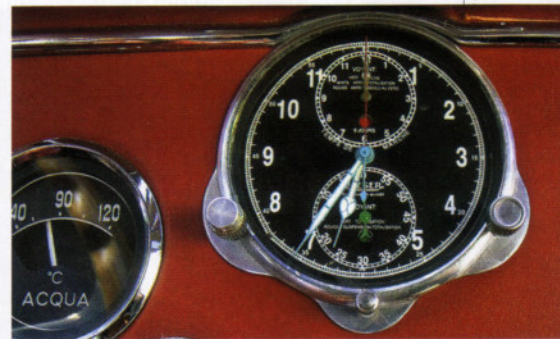


» But for an extra row of instruments added below for vintage racing, and red instead of white leather on the face of the dash, 0425's luxurious show-car interior is intact. Out of sight, on the glovebox door, is the altimeter—just the thing for Hills of Beverly.

posed to the street. During the day I would search relentlessly for "safe" parking places and when I returned, circle the car to inspect for damage. And the attention it always attracted was uncomfortable.

The one time I showed the car off was at the first Academy Awards I ever attended. It was a near disaster. In a high state of excitement, my girlfriend and I approached the Pantages Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard, only to be stopped by a policeman as Steve McQueen waved (he hung out at the same race shop) and pulled in line just in front of us in his recently acquired XKSS Jaguar. Carried away with the moment, McQueen and I sailed nose-to-tail between the spectators roped off on either side of the two-block-long approach to the theatre, madly blipping our throttles like it was the damn Mille Miglia.

Then, feeling 9 feet tall, I shot a cool wave to the crowd applauding our spectacular entrance, nonchalantly flipped the keys to Larry, my waiting roommate (no way was I going to let a parking attendant touch the Ferrari), and turned to make our way to



the door. Just as Larry pulled away, it hit me—I'd left the tickets on the dashboard.

So, there we were, adorned in tux and evening dress, in the mob at the entrance of the Academy Awards—with no tickets. Once again, my uncle came to the rescue, sort of. Nick, the doorman, knew me and, checking a chart in the office, led us to our seats. Although the theatre had long since been sold, those who still ran it had been hired by Uncle Rodney...Pantages. A week later, when I found a tiny scratch on the front bumper and went absolutely berserk, his wisdom—and reality—finally set in. Jess understood and was only too happy to take 0425 back.

Among those who came to look at the car was Ed Niles, an attorney, a Ferrari aficionado and, like Jess Haines, budding importer. While he never actually owned 0425, Niles would play a critical role in its history. Now 82, he well remembers the man who bought the car in 1961, Chester "Chet" Bolin.

"Yeah, he brought it to Ferrari Owners Club meetings for a while, but when it came time to pay his dues, he just dropped out."



Chet Bolin and 0425 went missing. For 25 years.

By 1986, vintage Ferrari prices had gone crazy. Ed Niles and many others were beating the bushes for cars that might be profitable. He remembered the beautiful silver Berlinetta and wondered if Bolin might still own it.

A search of telephone books, DMV and other records turned up nothing, so Niles hired a private detective, who came up with one Chester Bolin, living in a trailer park outside the desert town of Murietta, California. There was no phone number, so Niles and a friend headed out to the desert to see if they could find Bolin and the missing prototype.

"So we drive into this trailer park and, here, sitting out in front is the undeniable shape of the Ferrari under a canvas cover. The car hadn't moved in years. The headlight glass was deep purple from being out in the desert sun, the paint was faded and peeling and the upholstery was in tatters and all curling up, but the whole car was there."

Bolin had retired there and at some point, painted the Ferrari red. Niles didn't have the money to buy it himself, but he brokered a deal whereby his friend Walt McCune purchased the car for \$100,000—about 20 times what Bolin had paid a quarter of a century before.

McCune painted the car silver again and redid the interior in red leather, although without the original white piping and white face of the dashboard.

In 1989, Al and Stella Mohr and partner Paul Bates of Carmel Valley bought 0425 from McCune, showing it the same year at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, where it was awarded first in the class for vintage Ferrari GTs. Looking on with interest as the car went up the winners' ramp was future owner Bruce Lustman, but he would have to wait nine years, as the increasingly famous prototype was first sold to collector Hajime Tanaka, reportedly for in excess of \$1 million, and taken to Japan.

When Bruce Lustman finally did get 0425, in 1998, he undertook the kind of restoration he thought it deserved.

An avid vintage-car racer, Lustman also saw to the mechanics, sometimes even updating and, over time, improving, as with electronic ignition. New heads were made by Crosthwaite & Gardiner in England to replace the originals, which he

says were "butchered." Then disc brakes were fitted, a more robust ceramic clutch and telescopic Bilstein shocks in place of the Houdailles, changes that made 0425 a faster, better-handling and more enjoyable car to drive. Which Lustman did with great enthusiasm, competing in the 2000 Tour de France, the Mille Miglia Storica and later, the Colorado Grand.

Other changes were evident when owner Lee Herrington bought the car from Lustman in December 2006. "I have all the parts and pieces," says Herrington, "Bruce did a great job of documenting what he changed and preserving all the parts he took off."

Coincidentally, in 1998, Herrington had sent an agent to Japan to buy 0425 at the very moment it was at sea on the way to Lustman.

"Yeah, he was quicker on the draw than I was," laughs Herrington, who then flew out to Colorado to try to buy the car from Lustman. "He wouldn't sell, but he promised I'd get first opportunity if he ever did."

True to his word, Lustman called Herrington in December, saying he was getting crazy offers on the prototype from Europe and at these prices, he'd be foolish not to sell.

» At the 1956 Geneva Salon, Pinin Farina showed all the signature styling cues of future Tour de France Berlinettas in one show car: a low oval grille, the sloping fastback with parallel louvers on the sailplanes, frenched head- and taillights and large multi-panel side vents. The author found it every bit as beautiful—and remarkably modern—50 years later.



"So we had a brief negotiation, which he won, of course!" says Herrington, laughing, but after eight years—and seven figures—he has the car he's wanted since first seeing a picture in a book about Pinin Farina.

To Herrington, the 250 GT Competizione Berlinetta is not only an elegant example of the work of a true maestro, but also a historic piece of automotive or industrial art. His plan is to return the car to its original configuration and thereby accurately preserve and display this automotive landmark for the ages.

