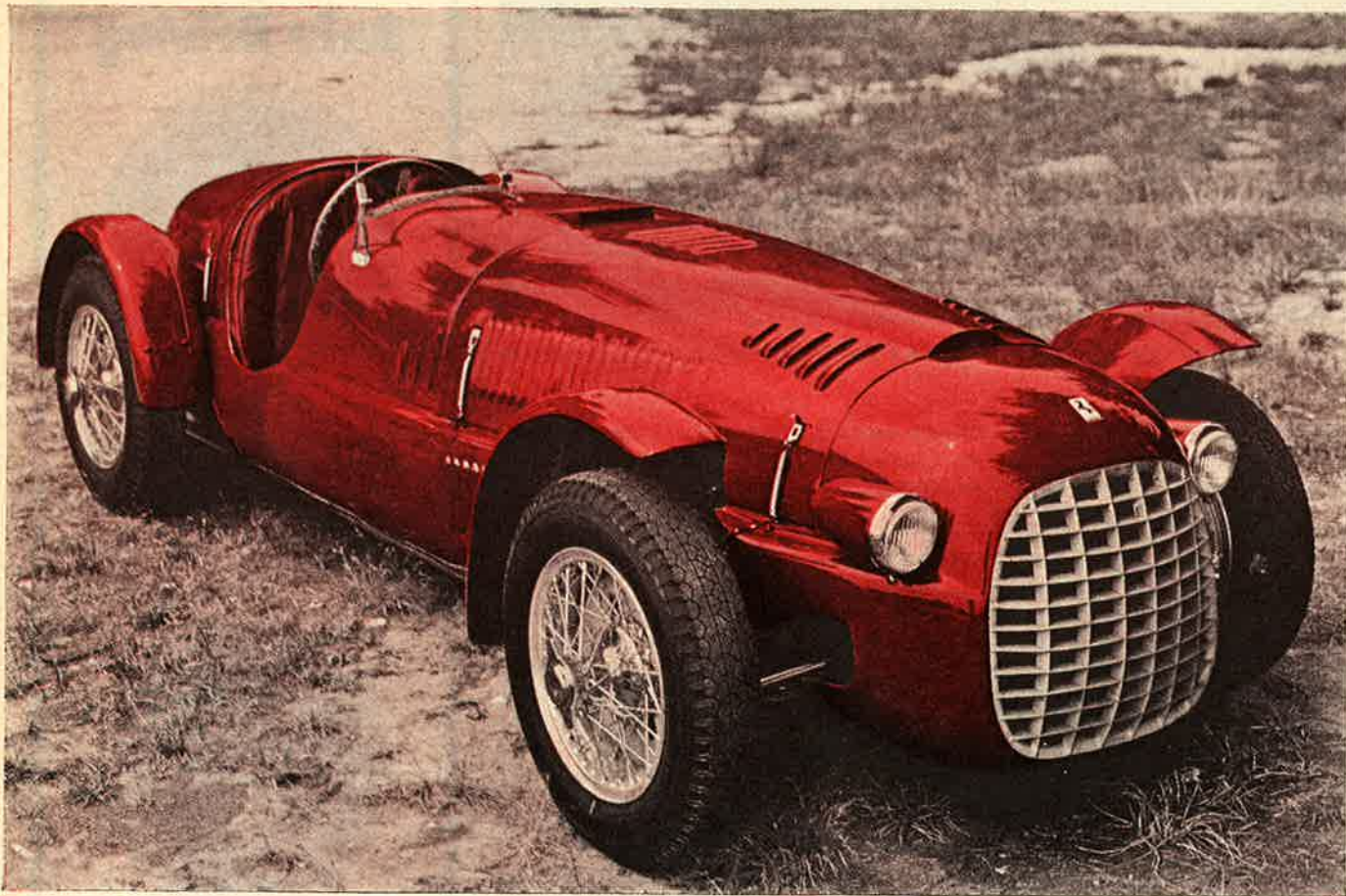


Ferrari 166 Spyder Corsa



The story of 004C, the oldest Ferrari still in existence

STORY & PHOTOS BY STANLEY NOWAK

IF YOU WERE at Bridgehampton on June 11, 1949 I know you'll remember Briggs Cunningham's cycle-fendered Type 166 2-liter Ferrari. It looked, sounded, smelled and ran like the fire-breathing Italian racing car we'd all dreamed of. This Ferrari, the first one in the U.S., arrived in New York from Italy less than a week before Bridgehampton and had already made its place in the record books having won the 12 Hours of Paris at Montlhery on Sept. 12, 1948 and established Class E (under 2 liter) speed records at Montlhery in Oct. 1948, driven on both occasions by Luigi Chinetti. Cunningham bought it "used" from Chinetti and immediately entered it at Bridgehampton where it was driven by George Rand. It led the main race for many laps until it was forced out with a broken oil line. Over the next few years it went on to win numerous races driven by Cunningham, George Rand, Sam Collier and Jim Kimberly. Briggs Cunningham never sold the car and it can now be seen at his museum in Costa Mesa, Calif.

I saw this car run at Bridgehampton and Watkins Glen in 1949 and 1950 and it never failed to impress me as the epitome of what a sports racing car should be. The cycle-

fendered, open-wheeled 2-seat bodywork with its "just-enough" cigar-like fuselage, racing windscreens, straight-through exhaust pipes, and the incredible sound of its 12-cyl engine, evoked all the romance of the Mille Miglia and the Targa Florio. It wasn't difficult to imagine this machine flashing by on the road between Rome and Livorno, the great Nuvolari, barely discernible behind the steering wheel, the hood over the engine already blown off, leading the 1948 Mille Miglia.

Time passed and over the years I bought and sold a number of unusual "vintage sports cars," the last of which was a 1931 MG Montlhery Midget which is now owned by Austin Clark's Long Island Automotive Museum. Through all of this I had not forgotten Briggs Cunningham's cycle-fendered Ferrari. Having worked for Auto-Europe, Inc. in Europe and the United States for over ten years, I had our staff members in London, Paris and Rome looking for unusual cars and, in particular, for a cycle-fendered Ferrari.

In England, John Wyer (now with Ford Advanced Vehicles), advised me that he and Dudley Folland of Monaco Motors, Ltd., had imported such a car into England in the

Spring of 1949, had campaigned it for two seasons, and had sold the car and the business to John Willment. A long article and a beautiful exposed-view drawing of the car appeared in the July 8, 1949 issue of *The Autocar*. I contacted Willment and discovered that he had rebodied it in England as a coupe and had apparently disposed of the original body. In any case, the car was not for sale.

So the search went on. About two years ago I wrote to old friend A. F. Loyens (32 bis Rue de la Montagne, Hamm, Luxembourg) who specializes in obtaining parts and cars for vintage car enthusiasts. I sent him a photo of Cunningham's Ferrari in case he might come across one. I had really given up hope that another existed. Almost two months later I received his charming reply:

Dear Stanley,

The most incredible things are happening sometimes!

Yesterday, I was in Paris and one of my relations showed me pictures of a car, if 'I might be interested.' I look at the pictures and it is exactly the type you indicated! This sure is luck . . .

Along with this letter came two small photos of the car and I was sure we had found one of the oldest Ferraris in the world! The owner, too, had some idea of the importance of the car and the price was rather high but there was no turning back and I bought it. This Ferrari is a Type 166C, 2-liter V-12, with engine and chassis number 004C.

After its arrival in New York I took it by trailer to Del's Auto Body in Locust Valley, Long Island, and took stock. Mechanically, the car was in very good condition but otherwise it was deteriorated and needed complete restoration. Del Mentnech (owner of Del's Auto Body and responsible for some of the best Bugatti restorations in the East) and I went over the car very carefully and it was obvious that a great deal of body work had to be done to bring the car back to its original condition. The estimates were staggering and it was apparent that I could not keep the car *and* restore it even if I did much of the work myself. I needed help and quickly.

Henry Austin Clark, Jr., who owns the Long Island Automotive Museum in Southampton, N.Y., knew of the car and was interested in knowing what I planned to do with it. I told him of my problems and he offered to take over the car while I supervised the restoration and researched its history. I felt certain that we had the world's oldest Ferrari but now I had to prove it.

To establish the history of 004C meant acquiring a thorough knowledge of the early history of Ferrari cars. I soon discovered that the best known reference books on the Ferrari are, unfortunately, rather incomplete, inaccurate and misleading, at least as far as very early Ferraris are con-

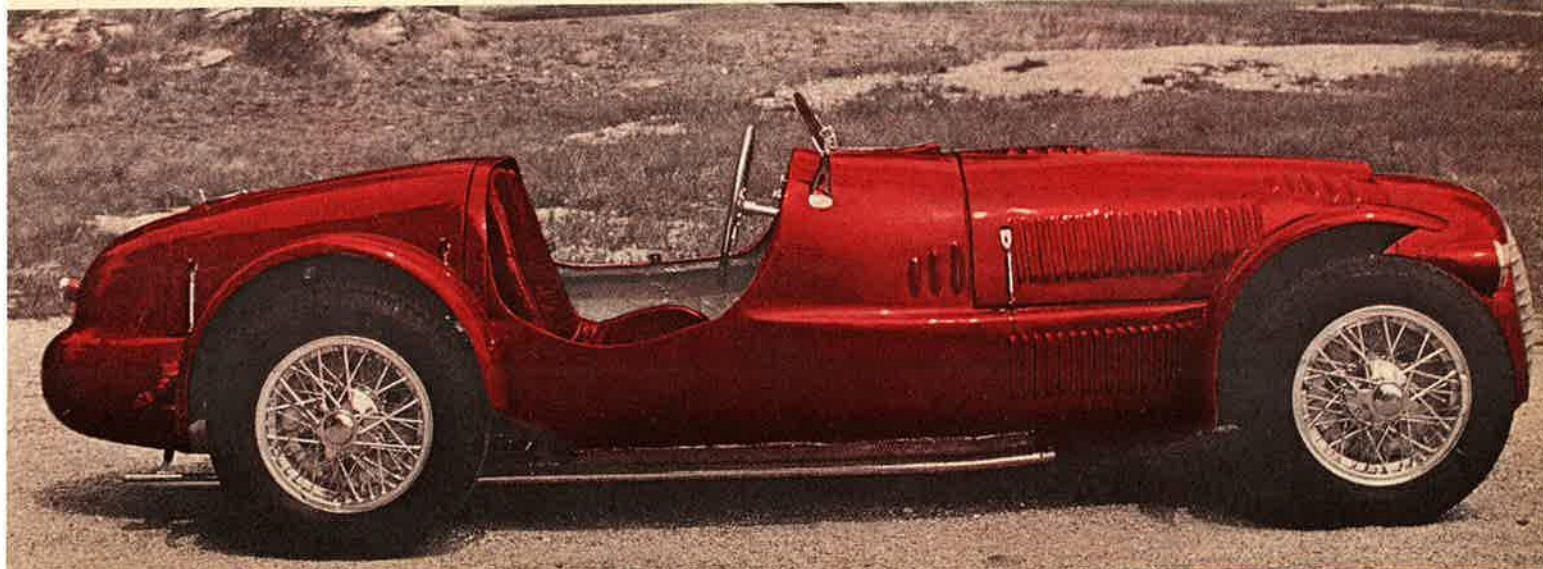
cerned. I turned to 1946 to 1949 reports in Italian magazines, including *Auto Italiana*, *Motor Italia* and *Inter Auto* (the latter no longer published). Correspondence began with the Ferrari factory and, slowly, the full story of the first Ferraris and 004C began to take shape.

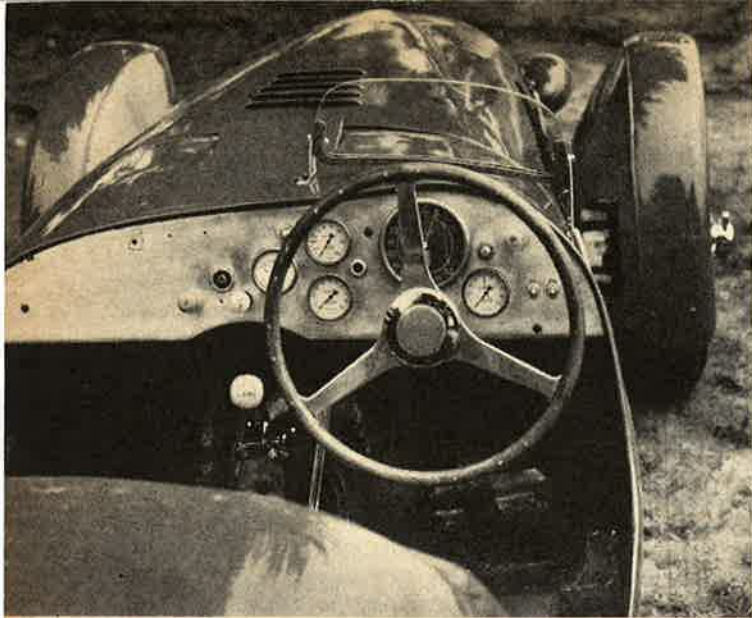
When Enzo Ferrari left Alfa Romeo in 1939, his departure was due to a disagreement with the management and Ferrari was obliged to agree not to use his own name in connection with cars for a period of four years. He formed a new company in Modena called Auto Avio Costruzioni and, along with Massimino and Nardi, built two cars for the 1940 Mille Miglia. They were 1.5-liter, in-line 8-cyl sports cars with full width roadster bodywork by Carrozzeria Touring and were called the "815." The story of the single remaining 815 begins on page 35 of this issue.

During World War II, Enzo Ferrari made machine tools and when war ended in Europe in 1945 he already had with him many of his staff from the Alfa Romeo days. Notably, there was Bazzi who had been with Ferrari since 1926 and who could be relied upon to make the engines work—in short, a great development engineer who is, in fact, still with Ferrari.

Ferrari had decided to build his own car under his own name and he called in Gioachino Colombo who had created the Type 158 Alfa Romeo Grand Prix car, to design the first Ferrari engine.

Maserati has four cylinders, Talbot has six, Alfa Romeo has eight, why not twelve then for Ferrari? Ferrari says he remembered the powerful, smooth V-12s of Packard, but in any event, it was a daring and farsighted choice. Aside from the number of cylinders, it was a simple design with a single camshaft on top of each bank, driven by a single length of chain. As originally conceived, it was a 1.5-liter sports car engine that could be tuned into a sports/racing car engine that could be tuned into a supercharged Grand Prix engine. While the timetable of development is not available, it is safe to assume that at least two of the sports car engines were on the dynamometer by Fall, 1946. The November/December 1946 issue of *Inter Auto* contained full details of the new Ferraris and two of them appeared for the first time in public for practice in the sports car races at Piacenza on May 11, 1947. Nino Farina crashed one car in practice and Franco Cortese retired in the race with a seized fuel pump (the early Ferraris used an aircraft-type centrifugal fuel pump driven off the front of the left camshaft). The factory advises that they built only three cars during 1947 and all started out as Type 125 1.5-liter sports cars. From the photographic evidence of the time it can be seen that one was a 2-seat, cycle-fendered car (usually driven by Nuvolari) and the other two were roadsters with full width bodywork thought to be by Car- ➤





Eight-thousand-rpm tachometer is flanked by water temperature, oil temperature, fuel level and oil pressure gauges. Shift knob is inscribed I-II-III-IV-V-RM (reverse).

Ferrari 166

rozzeria Touring. Toward the end of the summer of 1947 two of the engines were bored and stroked to 1900 cc and were renamed Type 159. The full racing record of all Ferraris for 1947 was:

FERRARI RACING RECORD, 1947

Date	Place	Type	Driver	Placed
May 11	Piacenza	125	Farina	non-starter
			Cortese	DNF
May 25	Rome (Caracalla)	125	Cortese	1st overall
June 1	Vercelli	125	Cortese	1st overall
June 5	Caracalla	125	Cortese	DNF
June 15	Vigevano	125	Cortese	1st overall
June 21-22	Mille Miglia	125	Cortese	DNF
June 29	Varese	125	Cortese	1st overall
July 6	Forli	125	Nuvolari	1st, sports car class
July 13	Parma	125	Nuvolari	1st, sports car class
		125	Cortese	2nd, sports car class
July 20	Florence	125	Righetti	3rd overall
		125	Cortese	DNF
August 15	Pescara	159	Cortese	2nd overall
August 24	Livorno	125	Nuvolari	DNF
Sept. 28	Modena	159	Cortese	Fastest lap, DNF
		125	Righetti	5th overall
October 12	Turin	159	Sommer	1st overall

Ferrari's first year of racing was finished and still the long-announced Grand Prix car had not appeared.

By Jan. 1948 the three 1947 engines were being bored and stroked again and the engine was up to just under two liters or 166 cc per cylinder and the famous Type 166 Ferrari was born. The old chassis were modified or replaced (the factory is not clear on this) and two were built with new cycle-fendered bodywork. The third car with full-width bodywork looked almost identical to the full-width cars that had run in 1947.

The first two Type 166 cars were 002C and 004C, with identical cycle-fendered bodywork. These were completed in Jan. and March 1948 and were the first Ferraris ever sold. Number 002C went to Gabriele Besana and 004C to his brother, Count Soave Besana. Almost immediately after taking delivery, Gabriele shipped his car to Argentina where he participated in the Temporada series of races. He did not do well but the car attracted much attention as it was the first Ferrari ever seen in South America. *Road & Track's* South American correspondent in the early '50s, Dr. Vicente Alvarez, remembers the car and its inexperienced driver well, and in going through his files, found two photographs he had taken of 002C in Buenos Aires in Feb. 1948. Shortly afterward, it was shipped back to Italy.

The first records of "our car," 004C, show that the engine was dynamometer tested on Feb. 12, 1948 and the car was then driven by Count Besana and Count Sterzi into 6th place overall in the Circuit of Sicily race on March 4. Count Besana must have been well satisfied with the car as he took delivery of it officially on March 17.

The results of the dyno test are not available but reports published at the time show that the engine developed 145 hp at 7500 rpm, not bad for under two liters in 1948. A complete list of the races entered by the Besana brothers has been compiled but, unfortunately, 002C and 004C were identical in appearance (characterized by an unusual rectangular grill) and it is impossible to be sure which car was driven in which race and we do not know that Gabriele always drove 002C and Soave always drove 004C. In any case, the overall record of both cars is impressive:

FERRARI 002C AND 004C

RACING RECORD

Date	Race	Driver	Position
March 4, 1948	Circuit of Sicily	S. Besana/Sterzi	6th
May 1-2, 1948	Mille Miglia	S. Besana	DNF
May 30, 1948	GP of Bari (F2)	C. Landi	1st
May 30, 1948	GP of Bari (F2)	S. Besana	DNF
June 12, 1948	Circuit of Mantua	S. Besana	6th
June 12, 1948	Circuit of Mantua	G. Besana	9th
July 11, 1948	Dolomite Cup	Besana/Besana	3rd
July 18, 1948	GP of France (F1)	S. Besana	DNF
Aug. 15, 1948	Circuit of Pescara	S. Besana	DNF
Sept. 19, 1948	Circuit of Posillipo	S. Besana	2nd
Sept. 19, 1948	Circuit of Posillipo	S. Besana	DNF
Sept. 26, 1948	GP of Florence (F1)	S. Besana	DNF
Sept. 26, 1948	GP of Florence (F1)	G. Besana	DNF
Oct. 24, 1948	Circuit of Garda (F1)	S. Besana	4th
Oct. 24, 1948	Circuit of Garda (F1)	G. Besana	DNF

A good record by two inexperienced private owners, but their only outright win was when they loaned one of the cars to Chico Landi, an experienced Brazilian driver, who won the Grand Prix of Bari, the first Grand Prix formula race ever won by a Ferrari. Most often the winners of these races were Ascari, Villorosi, Farina, Taruffi or Bracco, who were usually driving the latest factory-prepared Ferraris or Maseratis.

Early in 1949 Count Besana sold 004C and it is believed to have run in minor Italian sports car races over the next two years. It then completely disappeared, as famous vintage cars will do, and did not surface again until June 1952 when it was seen at the Reims sports car races driven by Madame Yvonne Simon. When Loyens found it in a Paris garage in 1964, the owner reported it had been driven last at Montlhery but could not name the driver or a specific date. Even more remarkable than its discovery was the fact that it was original and unmodified in every detail.

Ferraris 002C and 004C were the first of a series of cycle-fendered Ferraris made during 1948 and this model was called the "Spyder Corsa." Nine of these were built and only even numbers were used to identify the chassis and

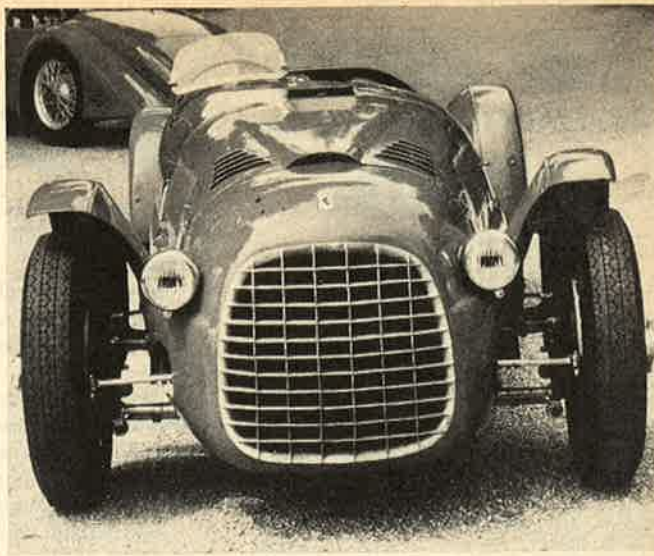
engines as these were considered lucky, and the odd numbers were reserved for the touring models which were introduced in the summer of 1948. After the first three or four Spyder Corsas were completed, the suffix "C" was dropped and "I" for Inter was used instead. The John Willment car is 010I and Briggs Cunningham's is 016I. The "C" for Corsa was then reserved exclusively for the Grand Prix cars being developed and on Sept. 5, 1948 the Ferrari 1.5-liter super-charged Grand Prix cars were seen and heard for the first time in the Italian Grand Prix at Valentino Park, Turin. The "Spyder Corsa" era had ended and the "Corsa" era had begun. No more cycle-fendered Ferraris were produced and the first 1949 model Ferrari sports/racing car began a new number series with Number 0002M—a Type 166 "Mille Miglia" with a full-width "Barchetta" roadster body by Carrozzeria Touring and now owned by Bill Harrah.

While the historical data was being unearthed, the restoration of 004C proceeded at a slow but steady pace. All body panels were removed and five gallons of paint remover, six wire brushes and weeks of weekend work brought forth about fifty pounds of Italian "filler" and a very rough aluminum body. At this point, the artisans at Del's Auto Body took over to make a rough, distorted, dented, aluminum body shell into smooth, straight pieces that looked as though they had been stamped out by a giant press. The hundreds of louvers, all of which had been badly dented, now look as though they had been made in a die. No filler! Just hundreds of hours of painstaking work.

While all this was going on the wheels were sent back to Borroni and Co. in Milan where they were rebuilt, chromed and polished and returned three months later looking like new.

The passenger's seat was missing so a new one was made following original photographs and the construction of the

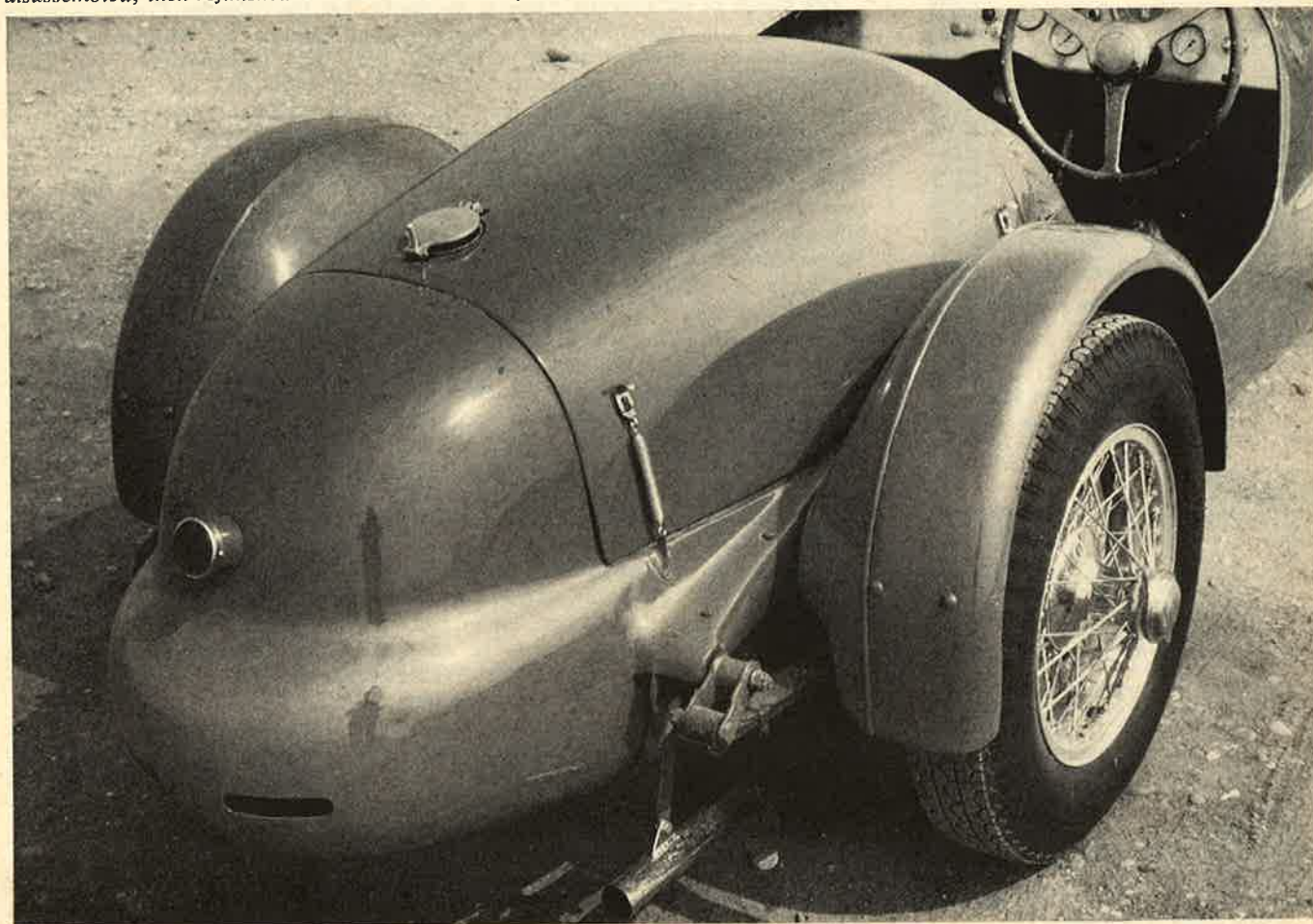
Bulbous tail, cooling slots and quick fasteners are characteristic of earliest Ferraris. This example, 004C, was completely disassembled, then refinished to better-than-new surfaces and painted. Sheet metal is expertly shaped over frame member.



Kinship with F1 Ferraris is apparent in this head-on view. Two-seaters ran in Grand Prix events minus fenders.

driver's seat; both were upholstered in specially tanned dark red leather by Ernest Gleisner Coachworks in New York City.

Mechanically, the car appeared to be in very good shape but everything was checked over by Bill Wonder's tuning shop (conveniently on the floor over Del's). New wheel bearings and brake hoses were installed, the three Weber carburetors rebuilt and the valve clearances set. Everywhere we looked we found signs of good maintenance, great attention to detail improvements and hand work beyond belief. ➤➤➤➔



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Ferrari 166

For example, every one of the twenty-four valve rockers was found to be fully machined on all sides—beautiful, light and encouraging to high revs and winning races.

Small, seemingly insoluble problems abounded and two of them were the broken headlight lenses and the missing taillight lens. A thorough search in New York and Italy failed to turn up any replacement lenses that would fit. Finally, the pieces of glass—and some were missing—were taken to a shop in New York that specializes in repairing broken Venetian glass and within ten days they delivered two whole original lenses looking like new! The taillight was more difficult but I felt certain that somewhere an existing taillight would be found that would fit. I was right but it turned out to be the rear reflector from an Alfa Romeo Giulietta with the rim and aluminum backing removed.

The payoff comes when a car is finished and shown for the first time. For 004C it came at the annual meeting of the Vintage Sports Car Club of America (they admit rare and unusual sports cars made through 1954) at Thompson Race Track in Connecticut. It was the first time we had really driven the car and, for me, it was the first time I had ever driven a Ferrari.

The handling is a joy: plenty of predictable oversteer with the old "Triple-A stance" the order of the day coming out of the turns. Hairy! But very safe. If you do get into trouble you just back off and steer out of it.

The gearbox is five speeds forward and reverse—strictly crash—so I started double-clutching up and down and I soon discovered that I could get faster, cleaner shifts by not double-clutching! But what's a Ferrari all about? It's that 12-cyl engine and it's the smoothest most turbine-like device imaginable. Those horsepower and torque curves must be straight lines—it just keeps that steady pressure in your back from a dead stop to over a hundred miles an hour. In most cars of this type, such as my old Frazer-Nash Le Mans Replica, you feel the power come in with a bang at about 4500 rpm and you know it's "on the cam" but not with the Ferrari. It's just there and *all* the time. The feeling of speed isn't there, but the speed is.

The rarest of all Ferraris, there is no doubt that the "Spyder Corsa" is worth preserving; it is unquestionably an important and valuable car. However, a major restoration of a postwar car is an unusual event and its acquisition by a major museum is even more unusual. It indicates the direction that car collecting must take if the important automobiles made just after World War II are to be preserved.

The Long Island Automotive Museum now has the 1948 Ferrari "Spyder Corsa" on display and other postwar classics are on display at Briggs Cunningham's Museum and at the Harrah Automobile Collection. It is a good start in the right direction but few private collectors are interested in these postwar cars as they are not officially recognized by the major old car clubs. Of the largest clubs, the Antique Automobile Club of America and the Classic Car Club of America, only the latter recognizes any postwar cars and they restrict this recognition to the 1947/48 Lincoln Continentals. Is a 1948 Ferrari any less a "classic" than a 1948 Lincoln Continental? It can be fairly argued that the 1948 Ferrari is even more of a classic as Ferrari coachwork of that period was entirely hand made and practically no two cars were alike. Recognition of the early postwar Ferraris by the large old car clubs would be a major step forward in encouraging the preservation of fine cars of the period, and they should also include Maserati, Cisitalia, OSCA, Talbot, Delahaye, Delage, Gordini, Bugatti, Frazer-Nash, Healey, HRG and MG.

At the present time, only the Ferrari Club of America and the Vintage Sports Car Club of America allow official participation of postwar Ferraris. The Vintage Sports Car Club of America allows all "rare and unusual" sports cars made before 1955 as may be decided by their Classification Committee. This is fine but, unfortunately, the VSCCA is only active in the Northeast and its activities are limited to vintage car racing at Lime Rock, Thompson, and Bridgehampton.

Perhaps a "20-year rule" could be adopted by the major clubs which would officially recognize 1948 cars in 1968. Whatever the solution, it is time these rare postwar cars have the official recognition they deserve.

Just recently, the owners of the Bridgehampton Race Track opened their traditional "Exhibition Run of Vintage Sports Cars" to postwar cars of the types that ran in the original Bridgehampton Road Races from 1949 to 1953. So, if you come out to Bridgehampton for the Double 500 in September, you will undoubtedly be treated to the sight and sound of the 1948 Ferrari "Spyder Corsa" No. 004C—the world's oldest Ferrari.

Better yet; come to the Long Island Automotive Museum in Southampton, New York and see 004C and over a hundred other fine old cars in Austin Clark's unusual collection.

