

# BARCETTA...A MYTH

By Carlo Felice Bianchi Anderloni  
Registro Internazionale Touring Superleggera newsletter  
April 1998  
*Translated by Francesco Gandolfi*

I like to think that on Enzo Ferrari and on the Ferrari motor cars, more has been written than on all the other automobile manufacturers together. I should therefore be terrorized to add other lines on the same issue. I am however encouraged by the thought that whenever I spoke of Ferrari I did it with good knowledge of the issue, since my relationship with the Commendatore has been an important part, even if small, of my life as coachwork designer and builder.

I am certainly in the position to tell things that I lived and that other people only know by rumour. I assure you that I will not take advantage of the situation to bother you. First of all I wish however to say that, having already written on the Barchetta before, some of our members who will read these memoirs of mine will see things already known to them, but "Repeitia iuvant". I apologize sincerely, but I wish to point out that, if I changed anything, I would not tell the truth anymore.

I should start the peculiar history of the Barchetta by explaining the origin of the name, never used before for an automobile. Name that, even if first used after the presentation of the prototype at the Turin Motor Show in 1948, certainly had been floating in the air of the technical department at Touring Superleggera since we started working on the car, but more on this later...

I wish to say first of all that, seeing the importance of its parentage, Ferrari the father, Touring Superleggera the mother, then to be born the car had to be absolutely different from all the other spiders which had come before it. We had to create a new style which was to give to the newly born at Ferrari a personality of its own, so that it would have not be reminiscent of any other racing car already in production. A glance would have been enough to recognize it.

You can imagine how worried we were when the car was being conceived: had we made a mistake we would have lost Ferrari's trust in Touring, based on the technical and aesthetical achievements that our coachworks had guaranteed to him since the times of Alfa Corse and Scuderia Ferrari. It was a fascinating task also for us, since we had to win our bet to succeed in personalizing the looks of the Ferrari, which until then had been rather anonymous.

I have previously described with the same words which follow the barchetta's peculiarities, which made a revolution in the established rules of coachworks for sportscars, which are normally wide below and narrow at the top, running near to the ground.

The Barchetta had the maximum width above mid height of the sides, was tapered towards the lower part like the sides of a gozze (fishermen's boats of the Genoa era) and apparently set high from the ground.

Such an unusual look made those who saw the car for the first time rather perplexed. You can imagine the reaction of the journalists who saw it the night before the opening of the Car Show. At the time there were no "Press Days", as it happens today, which give the press and V.I.P.'s the chance to see the new cars a couple of days in advance.

The journalists, as I was saying, were perplexed and uncertain as to how to call this new appearance. The greatest of them, Ing. Giovanni Canestrini, broke the spell and in his article on the "Gazzetta dello Sport" newspaper called it "baffling", since it could not be compared with anything which had come before in automotive history. Canestrini wrote that the car did not remind him of a spider, it was rather like a small boat, a "Barchetta". The name Barchetta, merry and pleasant, did not leave this model.

Once can ask how sportscars were called, prior to the introduction of the Ferrari Barchetta. Certainly they were very beautiful, enough to mention Bugattis and Salmsons in France, Alfa Romeos and OM's in Italy, the imposing Mercedes in Germany and the very personal American cars. There were all kinds, but they were not Barchettas. Their coachwork had continuous evolution to become always more functional, more suited for their racing use and more comfortable, but they were not Barchettas.

They had names of great fantasy: Torpedo, Spider, Tank, "Siluro", Pontoon, "Ala Spessa", "Bateau", "Skiff", names more or less born to recall the looks of the cars who bore them, which were not called, and were not, Barchettas. The name that lasted for the longest time among racing cars, which at the end survived just for the most sporty and, such as MG's and Morgans, was Spider.

Why did this name disappear for racing cars? For a simple reason: the Barchetta had been born!

I challenge you to find, today, a meeting of "Spiders", while it will not be a problem to find a meeting of "Barchettas". Today motor cars of all kinds, if open and vaguely sporty, are called Barchetta, even if born when the "barchetta" still was in Jupiter's arms. Power of a name!

How did the contacts with Ferrari, to choose the model and to establish all the details of what was to become the Barchetta, occur? Frankly it was not difficult to reach an agreement, because of the liens existing between the Commendatore and Avv. Bianchi Anderloni, that had started when Ferrari managed the Scuderia Ferrari and then the Alfa Corse.

Alfa Romeo enjoyed years of racing glory when their cars became almost unbeatable in the most important racing events, thanks to Ferrari's technical and organizational talent. Well, most of those cars had coachwork by Touring, with which Ferrari always had an excellent relationship. Further, when Ferrari left his position with Alfa Romeo and became car manufacturer on his own, he entered in the 1940 1000 Mille Miglia with his new 815 Auto Avio Costruzioni, with coachwork by Touring. It is rather obvious that, with these precedents, it was Touring that had to be the builder of the bodies for the cars which finally bore the Prancing Horse on the hood.

I am so lucky to still have the original 1/10 scale model that was shown to Ferrari to have his

final approval. Today, fifty years afterwards, it is not in optimal condition, it got old by taking part in shows and exhibitions, but I wish to keep it this way, original and absolutely not restored. I have recently hosted an American enthusiast [Paul Russell], who came from Boston to my home, to see the original color that he wanted to use for a Barchetta that he is restoring.

New and odd information, unknown to many. It was not the Barchetta who put us in touch with Ferrari again, it was the berlinetta. We spent several hours discussing the various internal dimensions and to check them on many cars of the time. Generally we drove from Modena to Maranello. I remember that finally one day Ferrari took my father and me on his Lancia Ardea and told us: this is the car that I use for my needs and I think that the internal dimensions are optimal for the car that you will build for me. If they suit me, big and tall as I am, they will suit everybody.

We accepted the compromise and started immediately working on the design, trying all possible ways to save space, starting from the seats which had a minimal length, thanks to materials which were new in 1948: Pirelli Cord ribbons and foam rubber, instead of classical springs and horsehair.

Only a few remember this car, that very regrettably my father could not see, having passed away before it was first introduced, which was at the 1948 Turin Car Show, together with the Barchetta. The Berlinetta was exhibited at the Touring stand, roomy and full of other very nice cars, the Barchetta at the Ferrari one, small and on the side, very different from those that will become the Ferrari's rule in following years. The stand was unpretentious but it immediately became the attraction point of all the Show, the one which exhibited a model that will become, it was immediately felt, a myth of automotive sport.

The Barchetta was red, with interior in hazelnut beige leather. The Berlinetta was metallic blue, with the interior in blue corduroy and grey-blue leather. The red color of the Barchetta had been exclusively studied for this model and it remained such for all the official Barchettas. It was a bright red that, with a light metallization, vaguely tended to pink. My model is the best evidence of color.

Now let's go back to the Barchetta. It is not to be forgotten that, in order to build such a car, so new and balanced in all its peculiarities, it was essential to have a continuous and tight cooperation with the designers of the mechanical components. Gioachino Colombo is to be credited with having understood our needs as stylist since he was himself very sensitive to art. What can be imagined to be more harmonious than his twelve cylinders? Colombo was always ready to look into all our requests and to solve the problem of obtaining a better result, a nice line, and he was the greatest help for us. I wish to remember a passage of his memories on the coachwork for the Barchetta.

Colombo says: "Together with my friend Carlo Felice Bianchi Anderloni and with his assistants of the Carrozzeria Touring of Milan we spent many hours, in the late Spring and at the beginning of the Summer, to reach a final point on the coachwork for the new Ferrari 155 MM.

From the knowledge of the famed Milanese coachbuilder and with contribution of my technical background with motor cars: the very famous Barchetta Touring. The final model was approved on the 6th of July, 1948, consecrated in Touring's drawing No. 1275.”

The buyers of the Barchetta fell into two categories: those who bought it for a sporty and racing usage and those who bought it for the pleasure to have something nice, and it is of interest to point out that the differences between the racing and the “lusso” cars were really minimal. They were limited in the majority of instances to using English leather instead of imitation product, to more powerful headlights (Marchall), to the typical trimming around the cockpit and from a color different from red, sometimes even black, or bicolor, metallic blue, dark metallic green, hornet-like, like the one built for young Gianni Agnelli.

The Barchetta did not need frills to look more beautiful, already marvelous it was, without make up. As years went by Barchettas went into the category of collectible cars but their (new) owners kept remaining divided into two categories, those who liked to compete with the stopwatch and others with the jury of concours d’elegance.

In this issue of the Newssheet and the Registro Touring, pictures of cars contending in both types of competition, then and today.

The Barchetta model, originally built on Ferrari 166MM chassis, was used with slight modification for a period of five years, from 1948 to 1952, on cars with different wheelbase lengths and of capacity; the following table shows in an almost certain way all the Barchettas built by Touring:

Type	166MM	212 Export	225S	275S	340AM
Capacity cc	1995	2562	2715	3322	4101
Wheelbase mm	2200	2250	2250	2250	2420
Production no.	25	7	1	2	5

To close this memory on the Barchetta I wish to remember the recent statements, that I would call love statements, of two persons who knew the Barchetta really well: Dr. Franco Gozzi, who was next to Ferrari for a long period of time, and Avvocato Gianni Agnelli, who in his young years owned the bicolor Barchetta which today is so successful at each outing.

Gozzi writes, in the Ferrari World magazine: “ From the Ferrari 125S, founder of the family, came the mythic Barchetta which in its various mechanical versions went from success to success, winning races such as the Giro di Sicilia, the Mille Miglia, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, conquering a large number of enthusiastic customers.

The Spider version, with coachwork by Touring and introduced at the Turin Car Show in 1948, caused surprise for its soft and flowing lines, with the wings not anymore remote but built into the sides, and the central cockpit, shaped like a bath tub. It had a 12 cylinder engine with 130

horsepower. It could look like a bathtub and as such it was immediately nicknamed Barchetta, but when racing it was unbeatable and this was enough to make its unusual shape liked and fashionable. ”

Avvocato Agnelli, interviewed by Gianni Rogliatti in his souvenir of the Barchetta with chassis No. 0064 M, that he owned, said: “The motor car in those days was still an adventurous thing and sometimes one knew when he started but was not sure to make it to the destination. The appearance of the Ferrari with Barchetta coachwork by Touring on the market immediately hit me. I was used to driving Bugattis, considered to be a great great sportscar, but the Ferrari was completely different, a new generation of motor cars.

I ordered one and I personally asked for the bicolor paint, which was a novelty. I remember very well that car, my first Ferrari: it was light and agile, easy to drive and it gave that unforgettable feeling of the air flowing around your body when you drove fast. The chest was out of the car and the sound of the engine was fantastic since there was almost no silencing. As a matter of fact there was also no top, no matter whether soft or of another kind, so that the car was to be used only with good weather.”

I think that, after so authoritative witnesses, there is nothing that I can add.

Carlo Felice Bianchi Anderloni  
Registro Internazionale Touring Superleggera newsletter  
April 1998  
*Translated by Francesco Gandolfi*