Elegance
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A famous winner of Italy's greatest motor race returns home to win Italy's greatest concours. Dale Drinnon **tells the story of the Mille Miglia Ferrari 166 that wowed the judges at this year's Villa d'Este**

Photography: Martyn Goddard

THE STYLISH GENTLEMAN deep in discussion in the hospitality suite on Sunday morning had the manner of someone who knew whereof he spoke. It was that confident, comfortable air of the insider, and when I realised his topic was what it takes to impress the jury at Villa d'Este, I leaned an ear a little closer. 'It is especially important to remember,' he was saying, 'that this is a concours d'elegance.'

He was of course absolutely correct; what he might have added to really drive the point home, however, was that elegance is a critical ingredient of the entire package, not just of the vehicle. And despite the latter-day popular tendency to confuse elegance with all sorts of other things, true elegance is like Enlightenment: it can't be bought or even inherited, but if you live properly and don't chase after it, it will sometimes find you of its own accord.

Those circumstances agreed, it's only natural that Jack Crouf and his Mille Miglia-winning blue Ferrari came away from the Sunday night awards dinner at the renowned BMW-sponsored Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este with Best of Show. Jack is a tall, slim Californian from Newport Beach who positively glows with the quiet dignity of the truly elegant. He is a former businessman and, although he never mentions this himself, a committed philanthropist who is especially active in educational giving. At age 19, he was navigating a B-17 out of Snetterton and by the end of his rotation had 33 »

combat missions to his credit, and a Distinguished Flying Cross with three clusters – he doesn't mention those to me, either.

What Jack does mention is his cars; he has about 50 now, including a recently acquired MG TC ('The first sports car I ever owned was a TC…'), and he doesn't fly, but he has restored a P51 Mustang and a P38 Lightning, too. His real passion, though, is the Mille Miglia; he has participated in 14 consecutive runnings of the modern edition, 12 as the driver, and when Ferrari 166 chassis 0026M, the 1950 winner, came up for sale, his collection already included the 340 America that took Villoresi and Cassani to victory in 1951.

'I wasn't really looking for this particular car,' he said as we and his wife Kingsley sat in the sun beside it that afternoon, watching the endless throng of admirers that swarmed over 0026M during the weekend of the concours. 'I was attracted to it because I liked the idea of having two Mille Miglia winners. And now I can't believe how beautiful it is; the more I look at it, the more beautiful it becomes.'

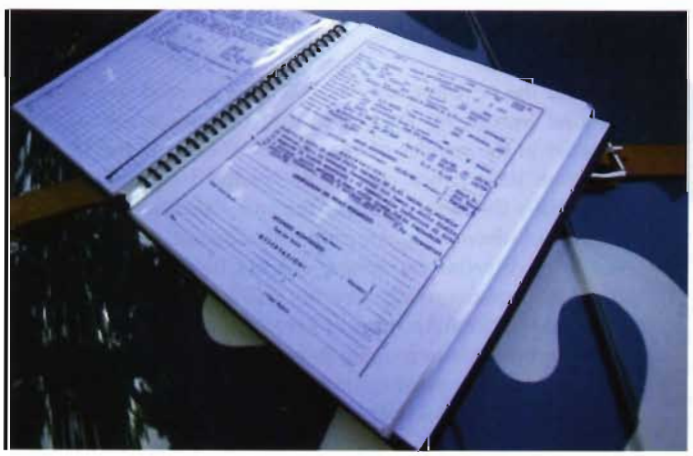
Just then, the rare break in the crowd appeared that Jack had been waiting for; he raised his camera and snapped yet another photograph, this one from the rear quarter along the graceful arch of the accent line running down the car's tapered flanks. 'That's it, that's the angle, isn't it? Beautiful…'

It is indeed a stunning machine, as well as quite rare: only six Ferrari 166MM Berlinettas were built by Carrozzeria Touring. More importantly at a concours tracing its origins to the 1920s golden age of the genre, it has history. This is not an 'ordinary' Ferrari Mille Miglia winner: this is the famous Giannino Marzotto double-breasted-suit winner.

Yes, Giannino Marzotto did win the 1950 Mille Miglia in a tailored suit and a silk tie, and yes, he was one of four racing brothers from the fabulously wealthy Marzotto family, a major textile manufacturing and apparel concern then and an even bigger one now – Hugo Boss is among its many holdings. Legend has it the family connection is why Giannino chose a 166 painted in *azzurro metallizzato*, by the way: the father, Count Gaetano Marzotto, tells the four brothers with a fondness for fast Ferraris, 'I don't want you racing those awful red cars anymore', and young Giannino complies, in his own way.

But there's more to the Giannino Marzotto story than the hackneyed image of a playboy racing driver. He was 22 years old in 1950 and nonetheless had the chutzpah (and the brains) to stand up to all-knowing Enzo Ferrari and tell him 'two litres isn't enough, I'll need more power to win the Mille Miglia'. Giannino's 166, already displayed at the Geneva Show in March 1950 and DNF'd at April's Giro di Sicilia by Alberto Ascari with the standard engine, was uprated to the new »

'JACK SNAPPED A PHOTO FROM THE REAR QUARTER, ALONG THE ACCENT LINE: "THAT'S IT, THAT'S THE ANGLE! BEAUTIFUL…" '



Above and right
Owner's 'bible' of researched material, hallmark of a Paul Russell restoration; hand-painted race numbers.

Above and left
Rear three-quarters angle shows delightful double-curvatures; engine is correctly fitted with just one carburettor.

'PHOTOS TAKEN FOR CARROZZERIA TOURING OF THE BRAND NEW 0026M PLAINLY SHOW THE CONTROVERSIAL CHROME WIRES'

2.3-litre Type 195 unit immediately afterwards, and on April 23 Marzotto proved his argument. It snowed and hailed in the mountains on that Mille Miglia and rained almost everywhere else, and four-time champion Biondetti had far more speed on tap with his works Jaguar, but Giannino Marzotto came home first – and by over five minutes.

In 1953, he and navigator Mario Crosara did it again, joining Nuvolari, Pintacuda and Campari as two-time Mille Miglia winners, and only Biondetti managed better than that. Those others, you might notice, were all professionals who had lengthy careers; Marzotto raced only briefly and for the pure pleasure of it, and when the call came to quit motor sport and assume the family business, he moved smoothly on to become equally adept in that arena.

The fortunes of his blue Ferrari post-1950 Mille Miglia were a little more convoluted. Enzo did some interesting sales agreements in those days, and 0026M appeared on several more occasions for Ferrari's sole benefit over the following months: first at the Torino Show, still in race numbers and Mille Miglia mud; later at Le Mans with Raymond Sommer and Dorino Serafini as a Luigi Chinetti entry (a DNF after 12 hours).

Giannino also raced it one last time that year, winning at Rome, and its final outing under the Marzotto banner was a victory for brother Umberto at the Coppa Gallenga hillclimb in October. In January 1951, Giannino sold 0026M to a cousin, by then a second-tier race car and finally registered for road use as well.

1950 Ferrari 166MM/195S Berlinetta Le Mans

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine
2341cc alloy V12, sohc, single Weber 36DCF carburettor

Power
130bhp @ 6000rpm (published)

Torque
160lb ft @ 6000rpm (as tested April 1950)

Transmission
Five-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

Suspension
Front: independent via double wishbones, transverse leaf spring, anti-roll bar, hydraulic dampers.
Rear: live axle, longitudinal leaf springs, hydraulic dampers

Brakes
Drums all round

Performance
0-60mph c10 sec
Top speed 120mph (est)

Over the next few seasons, 0026M was raced sporadically around Europe by the cousin and by subsequent owners, usually in the smaller events; in 1957 it came to the USA, as obsolete Italian race cars of the period frequently did, to essentially the same routine. After two American keepers, the second of whom bought it from a used car lot and treated it to a Chevy driveline transplant – as old Italian race cars with tired engines frequently received – 0026M arrived in 1965 to the hands of John Andrews of Riverside, California.

It stayed there for roughly 36 years. Or more properly, in his mother's garage, piled up under layers of dust, old magazines and assorted household detritus, Mr Andrews eventually constructing a wooden box around it for a modicum of protection. He also mercifully retrieved the original engine and transmission from US owner number two, in exchange for a paltry $200, thereby proving their respective hearts were in the right places, regardless of their wherewithal to undertake Ferrari restorations.

Chassis 0026M might have forever stayed The Lost Marzotto Ferrari had marque expert Michael Sheehan not rediscovered it in 2000 and related the story in a magazine article. Once it surfaced, however, things started happening. Thomas Meade, an American famous for moving to Italy in the '60s and working in the very thick of the exotic car trade (the Thomassima specials were his creations), purchased it from Andrews early in 2001; it soon went to an unnamed Swiss buyer who got as far on a restoration as partial disassembly. That's where Jack Croul joins the plotline; in March 2003 he

Spoilt for choice

IT'S TOUGH TO REJOIN the real world after three days of Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este. The setting beside delightful Lake Como has enchanted visitors since the poet Virgil bought his first package tour; the hospitality of sponsor BMW and of the Hotel Villa d'Este was perfect in the best Old European tradition – unobtrusive yet unfailing – and the quality of this year's entrants must have kept the concours jury debating over a bottle of Valtellina Superiore until the wee hours of the morning. Poor things.

Alongside the Trofeo BMW Group award for Best of Show by the jury, won by Jack Croul's Ferrari, the other top four finishers all had a decidedly swoopy note.

The Coppa d'Oro Villa d'Este awarded by participants' vote went to the 1938 Mercedes 540K Autobahnkurier Coupé, another Paul Russell restoration, (main image, right), entered by Arturo Keller; the Trofeo BMW Group Italia, by popular vote of the public on Sunday's display at Villa Erba, was won by the 1937 Figoni et Falaschi Delahaye 135M of Peter Mullin (far right, middle). Continuing the aerodynamic theme on a modern note, the 2008 Bugatti Veyron Fbg Hermès took the Design Award, also by public vote at Villa Erba.

The most satisfying Class Winner was probably Chris Hrabalek's fluorescent, in-your-face, matt orange 1970 Lancia Stratos prototype, to be featured in *Octane* soon, along with the Mention of Honour Ferrari 206S Dino Prototipo of James Glickenhaus (near right, bottom).

Meanwhile, the Attending Journalist's Personal Award goes to the engaging Dr Peter Heydon of Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. His ex-Geneva Show Bentley MkVI Worblaufen Drophead won no trophies, but he brought his car 5000 miles for the joy of being there and charmed all he met. In the People I'd Like to Have Dinner With Class, he's right at the head of the field. Isn't that what this is all about?

MICHEL ZUMBRUNN

MICHEL ZUMBRUNN

bought 0026M and commissioned Paul Russell and Company of Essex, Massachusetts, to complete the resto.

The car arrived that summer in boxes – 'not enough boxes' as Paul puts it; 'a lot of pieces were missing, although thankfully none of the major components or critical numbered pieces' – and a fair number of the incidentals would have to be chased or fabricated. That's obviously par for the course in the restoration game. In this instance, however, good Karma paid off all around: Paul's friend and regular Italian resource, the collector and historic racer Gabriele Artom, happens also to be good friends with Jack, and the Marzotto and Artom families go back for ages. There were times when Gabriele sent parts for Paul to reproduce by taking them off his own cars.

There was also the larger matter of researching and documenting the 'target' specifications for the restoration, especially difficult on competition machinery that sometimes changes during the course of an event, much less from one event to another. Which, one rather suspects, is the part of restoration that makes Paul the happiest; in another life he could have been a history professor or a forensic anthropologist.

Over the course of the three-year-plus project, he would unearth things like photos taken for Carrozzeria Touring of the brand new 0026M, plainly showing the controversial chrome wheels, and a test sheet for the single-carb version of the 195 engine marked 'for homologation Mille Miglia 1950 – G Marzotto'. Until then, questions existed as to whether the car ran with one Weber or three (and Paul being Paul, he had an example of each set-up ready just in case).

Likewise, a tiny smear of original colour found on the already-stripped bodyshell revealed that, while most Touring 166s were Le Mans blue, Giannino's 166 was actually metallic, and traces of the »

Above and right Few panels escaped some 'added lightness'; owner Jack Croul with his Villa d'Este winner.

'WHAT THE VILLA D'ESTE JUDGES WERE PRESENTED WITH IS AS CLOSE TO APRIL 23, 1950, AS HUMANS CAN GET'

interior flocking still trapped in crannies around the Superleggera tubing provided samples to match the fibre length and texture exactly. What the Villa d'Este judges, the participants and the public were presented with when they pressed around the Marzotto 166 that weekend, in short, is as close to April 23, 1950, as humans can get, right down to the brush strokes in the race numbers.

'You must be proud of the way the car turned out and the reception it's getting,' I said to Jack as he lowered his camera, 'and I'll bet you're looking forward to driving it in the Mille Miglia next month.' He checked the image on the tiny screen and smiled. 'Oh yeah, I'm very pleased, but I'm not driving this car in the Mille Miglia, I'm driving the 340; my brother Jim will be driving this car.'

Proof positive, I think you'll agree, that the Villa d'Este judges know true elegance when they see it.

Thanks to owner Jack Croul, to Gabriele Artom, and to Paul Russell and Company, Massachusetts, USA, www.paulrussell.com. Thanks also to BMW for hosting the magnificent event that is the Villa d'Este Concours. Best wishes to Gianning Marzotto, who was prevented by illness from attending this year's Villa d'Este.