Return To Rome

After winning the 1950 Mille Miglia, s/n 0026M slowly faded from the history books. Now, freshly restored, it's ready to take on the 1,000 Miles again.

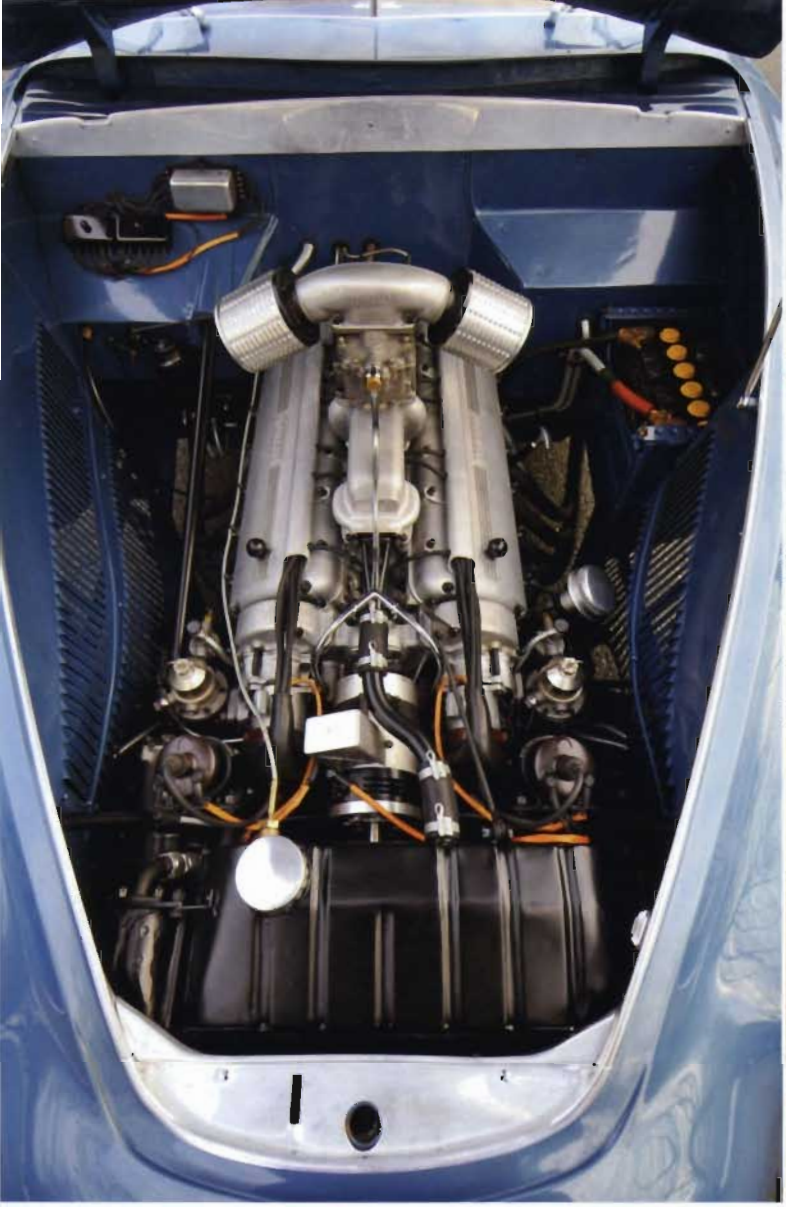
STORY BY KLAUS SCHNITZER PHOTOS BY KLAUS SCHNITZER UNLESS NOTED

This Ferrari 166 MM/195 S Berlinetta Le Mans (s/n 0026M) has seen glory, decline, indignity and resurrection during its long life. That life began in the fall of 1949, when its ladder-type chassis was mated with a *superleggera* body at Milan's Carrozzeria Touring.

S/n 0026's lovely hand-formed aluminum bodywork is a stunning combination of elegance and sportive purpose, all draped with delicate detailing. Consider the poetic chrome strip that wraps only three-quarters of the rear side windows, or the jewel-like, sculptural door handles. The compound curves surrounding the simple taillights look as if they were formed by the wind.

The interior reveals that this Ferrari was oriented towards competition, not street driving. The right-hand-drive steering wheel was standard for most race cars, as the majority of racetracks ran clockwise. Weight reduction was clearly a priority: Holes were drilled into the bodywork with abandon, the windows are plastic, there's no insulation or creature comforts. This helped to reduce the car's curb weight to 1,764 pounds, compared to around 2,125 for Touring's road-going 166 Berlinetta.

724



There's something else about the interior that makes people take a second and third look—it is completely flocked. If you're not familiar with the term, it is a process by which a surface is coated with a (usually) soft, fibrous covering; the most common automotive usage is inside the glove compartment. I've never seen flocking this extensive, but the car's restorer, Paul Russell, assures me it was originally there, for remnants were found in many hidden corners.

While the interior treatment is fascinating, it's neither this nor the bodywork's beauty that make this Ferrari so special. S/n 0026's claim to fame is that it won the 1950 Mille Miglia.

Count Giannino Marzotto, one of four amateur-racer sons of a wealthy textile manufacturer, ordered the car specifically to compete in the 17th Mille. "I took delivery of my Ferrari, a very elegant blue sports tourer, in the spring," he wrote in his book, *Red Arrows*. "I immediately went out to test it on the roads near Maranello, and was very disappointed when I returned to the factory: The car had nothing like the power I had expected."

S/n 0026's original motivating force was the famous Gioacchino Colombo-engineered all-aluminum 60° V12. In 166 guise, its bore was 60mm and its stroke was 58.8mm, for a total displacement of 1,995cc. A single overhead camshaft on each bank operated two valves per cylinder via finger followers and rocker arms. With one Weber 36 DCF twin-choke downdraft carburetor, the engine produced a claimed 125 hp at 7,000 rpm.

"My position was clear: There was no way I intended to buy a car which was so uncompetitive," Marzotto continued. "In the end, Enzo Ferrari called in Bazzi, the mythical Ferrari technician who had the last word on Ferrari engines. And with much candor, he immediately admitted he had 'strangled' my engine because it did not seem prudent to put a Ferrari with maximum power into the hands of a boy like me! The whole thing finished with laughter all round and Ferrari, perhaps to excuse himself, decided that my car would be prepared for the Mille Miglia."

Unbeknownst to Marzotto, the factory removed the 2-liter engine and installed a new Type 195 2.3-liter V12, also stamped 0026, which featured bore and stroke of 65 x 58.5mm, respectively. With 9.1:1 compression and the same Weber, the larger engine produced 140 bhp at 7,000 rpm. The single carburetor was chosen for reliability and, to some degree, fuel economy, which was very helpful in a 1,000-mile race. At the same time, Ferrari added an external fuel filler and a leather strap across the hood.

Marzotto collected his car the day before the race. The following morning, he took the start at Brescia at 7:24—hence the 724 race number—attired in a pinstriped double-breasted suit and tie. He held the overall lead at the first control, at Padua, but by Pescara, had lost it to the 3.3-liter Ferrari driven

by factory pilot Gigi Villoresi.

Before Rome, however, Villoresi's car retired, along with that of fellow factory professional Alberto Ascari. Juan Manuel Fangio's Alfa Romeo was then fastest over the Apennine mountains, but by the time Marzotto reached Rome, he was back in the lead, a position he held for the entire return leg to Brescia. Just after nine at night, Marzotto, navigator Marco Crosara and s/n 0026 crossed the finish line. It was Ferrari's third Mille Miglia win in as many starts; four more victories would follow before the event's cancellation in 1957.

"It was only after the race that I was told Ferrari had fitted a more powerful 2,340cc engine to my car, without me knowing anything about it," Marzotto wrote. "For this reason, [Enzo Ferrari] asked for and was given half of my prize money because I, even if I did not know it, had become a member of the Maranello works team."

In May 1950, s/n 0026 was displayed in its full glory—dirt, oil, bugs and scuffed flocking—at the 32nd Turin Motor Show. This was actually its second show appearance; in March, it had been displayed at Geneva. Similarly, the Mille had been the car's second race, as Ascari had driven it earlier in the year at the Giro di Sicilia, where it DNF'd.

After the Mille Miglia win, s/n 0026 was raced several times in 1950, including at Le Mans in June, though only once more by Marzotto. He sold the car to his cousin, Baron Domenico Rossi, in January 1951. Rossi raced the Ferrari once, then sold it to Giorgio Pimpinelli in '52. In '54, s/n 0026 changed hands again, going to car dealer Adolfo Macchieraldo. By 1957, it had arrived in Uplands, California, where it was raced by James Smith.

In 1960, after being advertised in *Road & Track* and spending some time sitting on a used-car lot, the Ferrari was bought by Californian Ron Formen. Formen, in the tradition of many hot-rodders, pulled the V12 and installed a Chevy V8 engine, transmission and rear axle.

Formen sold the Ferrari for $1,500 to John Andrews of Riverside in 1965. Andrews, who had the foresight to buy the original engine, transmission and accessories for an additional $200, owned the car for the next 35 years, most of which time s/n 0026 spent in his mother's garage, enclosed in a wooden crate that was covered in old newspapers and miscellaneous bits of furniture.

In 2001, Andrews sold the car to Thomas Meade of Montana. Meade soon passed it on to Dominik Ellenrieder of Switzerland, who started a restoration.

Then in March 2003, after numerous previous owners, several resprays (including red, black, yellow, green, orange and maroon) and a few engine swaps, s/n 0026 was bought by Jack Croul of Newport Beach, California. Croul commissioned Paul Russell & Co. of Essex, Massachusetts to do a ground-up restoration.

Russell & Co. is located north of Boston on the lovely Cape Ann peninsula, home to plenty of New England charm, some great driving roads, historic Gloucester (setting of *The Perfect Storm*), Rockport, salt marshes and the best clam chowder on the planet. The 30,000-square-foot shop is tucked away in a nondescript former heavy-equipment factory, but what it produces is magic. If you've been to a major concours d'elegance such as Pebble Beach, Amelia Island or Villa d'Este, chances are you've seen a Russell-restored car, perhaps a Gullwing Mercedes (the company has restored more than 50 of them), a Jaguar C- or D-Type, a Bugatti or a Ferrari.

One reaches the shop through a plain entrance into a small reception area, which, astonishingly, contains Ralph Lauren's spectacular 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic Coupe and 1933 Bugatti Type 59 Grand Prix Racer. I envy the receptionist for her daily view.

The atmosphere in the shop is very relaxed, with the experts going about their tasks in an unhurried fashion. Every corner has some interesting parts, from massive prewar Mercedes fenders to a bare frame on a rotisserie for sandblasting to exquisite, shiny mechanical parts in the clean room.

For a major restoration like s/n 0026's, the subject car is totally taken apart, the components carefully inventoried and photographed. The body is then stripped down to bare metal and turned over to Richard Docking, a maestro with English wheel and hammers. Under Docking's careful hands, old dented panels can be made to look like new, and vice versa. The latter, he says, is far more difficult, since he has to match the patina and the acquired marks and dents.

While the body is in surgery, the mechanical parts are disassembled, rebuilt, remachined, replicated, remanufactured and/or replaced. Whatever method is chosen, the goal is to be as historically accurate as possible.

S/n 0026 arrived from Switzerland as a shell with parts packed inside, a condition Russell described as a "deviled egg." The body had been stripped of paint, and some less-than-perfect attempts at body repairs had been started. It would have been much easier for the crew if the car had not already been taken apart.

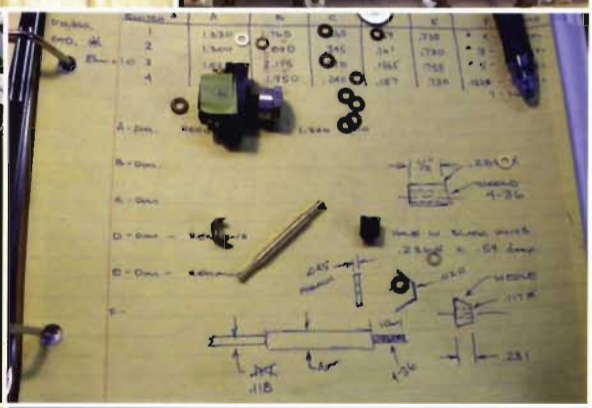
On the plus side, all the important pieces were present, including the correctly numbered chassis, engine block and cylinder heads. The body was mostly intact; only the grille area and the headlight buckets had been modified. There was no evidence of accident damage. The firewall had been replaced, perhaps during the Chevy engine transplant, but the original came in a box labeled, in crayon, "Coupe Ferrari Tipo Le Mans."

Surprisingly, after all these years, the original vinyl was still on the seats. And even after the numerous resprays, some of the original blue paint could be seen on the underside of the front fenders and the battery box. As you would imagine, extensive research is often required to determine the right color and quality of the paint, fabric and other upholstery materials, as well as a multitude of other arcane details.

When I first saw the car, it was only partially assembled, which provided an ideal opportunity to check out what normally lies underneath the aluminum skin. S/n 0026's chassis is welded from tubular steel. Its wheelbase measures 2,250mm, with 1,278mm front and 1,250mm rear tracks. Unequal-length A-arms, a transverse leaf spring, anti-roll bar and hydraulic Houdaille lever-action shocks make up the independent front suspension. The rear is a live axle located by

Getting s/n 0026's exterior into its current condition (above) was a laborious process (opposite). The car had to be stripped to its steel frame, then the frame and body were painstakingly restored.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY PAUL RUSSELL



a triangular bracket and semi-elliptical springs, with the same shocks as found at the front. Steering is by worm and sector.

Large aluminum drum brakes with leading shoes, iron liners and ventilation holes provide stopping power. These are surrounded by 15-inch Borrani center-lock wire wheels wearing 5.90 x 15 tires. The non-synchromesh five-speed transmission sits directly behind the engine.

Even with the major parts in hand, restoring s/n 0026 was not an easy undertaking. Cars constructed in Europe soon after World War II suffered from poor-quality metal components: Whatever was at hand could and would be used to make bodies and castings. Rust-proofing was minimal or, more often, nonexistent. Of course, in period nobody envisioned these cars would someday become multi-million-dollar collectibles; they weren't expected to last more than five or six years.

Touring's *superleggera* body—an aluminum shell over a frame of steel tubes—is a very sound concept, especially when compared to heavy, termite-prone wood understructures. But putting aluminum and steel together leads to galvanic corrosion, as paint applied over assembled components does not reach bare metal areas and the cloth-strip insulation between tubes and body deteriorates rapidly. These old bodies regularly blistered, rusted and turned to dust.

Thus, rebuilding s/n 0026's body structure was a serious challenge. The disassembly, repair, rust-proofing and painting required extensive experience and infinite patience. Luckily, Russell has the right craftsmen; his motto seems to be that if it's metal, it can be fixed or replaced.

The in-house artisans, asso-

Every component in the car was rebuilt, repaired, replaced or re-created, from the engine and inlet manifold to the flywheel and the grille to the brakes and the extensive interior flocking.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY PAUL RUSSELL

ciated suppliers, a network of Italian craftsmen and fellow Touring Berlinetta owners also helped to find or produce a new grille, flywheel, pressure plate, driveshaft, intake manifold, radiator, oil cooler, suspension springs, window moldings, glass, rear shock mounts, spare tire mount, exhaust headers, muffler system, knobs, levers, hardware, wiring harness…the list goes on. The ignition key was missing, too.

One of the most difficult tasks was re-creating that lost manifold. It is a three-part design, which is cast separately and then assembled and machined to fit perfectly within the engine's vee. Two six-port manifolds had to be joined with a flange, which mounts the single carburetor. That carburetor, in turn, is set up just like it was during the Mille Miglia, thanks to copies of the original factory test sheets.

Yet another challenge was how to correctly duplicate the extensive flocking. For example, when does one apply the flocking to the glue coat—when the coat is wet or semi-dry? How much glue? How much flocking? The process required a number of experiments before the correct sequence and amounts were perfected. So far, the flocking has proved to be very durable.

I was reunited with the fully restored s/n 0026 at the Cavallino Classic in January 2008. Sitting in the quite comfortable passenger seat (the correct vinyl wasn't available, so plain vinyl was embossed with a pattern to give it the proper grain), I'm surrounded by tan flocking, *superleggera* tubing and numerous holes drilled into the doors. The body-colored dash has an array of simple, readable instruments and knobs. The only luxury touch is the classic wood-rimmed steering wheel. It would be difficult to subtract anything from this automobile.

Russell fires up the V12, and a pleasant baritone rumble fills the cabin. This changes once we start off, as the engine's song is drowned out by the whine of the straight-cut gears. In addition to being loud, the transmission demands precision from the driver: Slow upshifts and double-clutch downshifts are necessary for smooth progress.

With 140 horsepower motivating only 1,764 pounds, the car's power to weight ratio is excellent, even by contemporary standards. S/n 0026 should be able to reach 60 mph in around 7 seconds, and cover the quarter mile in 15 seconds—heady numbers for the early 1950s. Numbers aside, the sensation of speed is intoxicating; there is no substitute for low weight. The only contemporary cars I have driven recently that provide this feeling are the Lotus Elise and Ariel Atom. Those machines aside, the automotive industry needs to join Weight Watchers.

S/n 0026's restoration was actually completed in July 2007, after which it was immediately shipped to the Pebble Beach concours, where it won the Mille Miglia trophy. Its next official appearance was at Cavallino; there, the very knowledgeable judges named it Best of Show Competition. The Ferrari also won Best of Show at The Palm Beach Cups at Mar-a-Lago.

This April, s/n 0026 is going home to Italy, where it will appear at the prestigious Villa d'Este concours on Lake Como. The following month, it will return to the Mille Miglia.

Owner Croul—retired businessman, philanthropist and major collector of historic automobiles—plans to drive the 166 MM/195 S Berlinetta in the 2008 Mille Miglia Storica. Perhaps he'll be joined by Giannino Marzotto, who at 80 years of age is still active in the event. It will be Croul's 15th Mille, and he's also bringing another Ferrari from his stable: s/n 0082A, the 1951 Mille Miglia-winning 340 America Berlinetta Vignale *["First Time's a Charm," FORZA #52]*. I can already hear the spectators cheering as the two Ferraris make their way from the starting ramp in Brescia. O