

AutoWeek[®]

FIRST LOOK: **BMW Z8**



August 2, 1999 2.50 USA 3.50 Canada

#BXBDKY*****S-DIGIT 53142

#012210663 6#01AW 0802JA02 P96

|||||

TIM YOUNG

3625 ROOSEVELT RD

KENOSHA WI 53142-7231

TAKING CUES FROM ITS PAST, BMW UNVEILS ITS FUTURE



THE CAR

Ferrari 250 GTE 2+2

The underappreciated 3.0-liter?

BY BILL MCGUIRE

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a real Ferrari. Under those iconic, black crackle-finish valve covers with the signature Ferrari block script resides a 3.0-liter, 60-degree V12 by Ing. Giacchino Colombo. Three twin-throat Weber carburetors and a pair of Marelli distributors nourish the 12 hemispherical combustion chambers, via overhead cams and rollerized finger followers. It produces 240 horsepower and what *Sports Car Illustrated* in 1960 called "the most wonderful racket ever to reverberate in an eager enthusiast's ears."

Behind those beautiful, deep-dish Borrani wheels are Dunlop disc brakes, among the first fitted to all four wheels of a production car. The driver is swaddled in Connolly leather, entertained by large-face, Veglia chronographic instruments and a hardwood-rimmed, Nardi steering wheel. Any way you slice it, the 250 GTE comes out a classic, front-engine V12 Ferrari.

All the same, people are known to cut up these automobiles, throw away the Pininfarina bodies, and use the pieces to build replica cars. What's up with that?

With its stamped 2+2 bodywork, the 250 GTE was Ferrari's first real attempt at taking the company from limited runs of hand-built sports cars to the larger market for high-performance automobiles. The GTE was the first "mass-production" Ferrari, with about 950 copies built from '61 to '63. And that turns out to be the GTE's problem.

Although successful, this model never incited outright lust like the other 3.0-liter V12 Ferraris of its day: the SWB Berlinetta, Spyder California, the GTO. The GTE was so... common. Its production run was 10 times that of its glamorous siblings. Now the scarcer 3.0-liter cars can bring more than 10 times the price of the GTE on the collector market.

That huge price difference did not escape the notice of cunning minds in the Ferrari marketplace—especially back in

the big-boom days of the late 1980s—nor the attention of the skilled cadre of metalsmiths who reconstruct bodies for the rarer models. Tattier 250 GTEs have been rounded up, the original bodies discarded, and SWB, GTO and Spyder facsimile bodies built on their chassis and drivetrains to create "new" examples of the priceless V12, 3.0-liter Ferraris that are nearly indistinguishable from the real thing, especially from curbside. This is not to say that, underneath the body, a GTE has all the same genetic material of a Berlinetta or GTO.

With a few incredible exceptions, the intent is not to deceive buyers with these copies, so they aren't exactly fakes. The workmanship of these replicas is usually equivalent to the originals, so one can hardly lump them in with the kit cars, fiberglass "re-creations" and other crimes against history and good taste that the term "replica" brings to mind.

At their best, these rebodied cars hearken back to classic coachwork, when wealthy patrons commissioned new bodies for their Duesenbergs, Bugattis or Bentleys, to suit periodic changes in fashion or their own whims. In their defense, these modern coachbuilders say they use only terminally rusted or otherwise unsalvageable donor cars to create their "transformations," as they call them. So why should anyone object?

The only thing wrong with any of this is that the 250 GTE is an exceptional car in its own right. Yes, the engine was detuned

a tick—it makes 240 hp vs. the 280 claimed for the race-ready SWB—but it makes all the same glorious noise. The GTE's chassis is the long-wheelbase (LWB, 102.4-inch) version used in the PF coupe and LWB



THE 250 GTE 2+2 lacks the rareness and racing history of some of its siblings, yet shines in its own elegant, understated styling and in its engine's song.

Spyder, and is made of the same Italian oval tubing. The engine has been pushed forward almost eight inches, though, to accommodate the larger cabin. For those two compromises, necessary to create a genuine road car, the GTE has been branded as something less than a thoroughbred.

Such a distinction may have made sense in '63, but after decades of mid-engine V8 Ferraris built under the Fiat banner, the GTE 2+2 looks mighty authentic today. And fewer than 1000 examples built makes it pretty rare by most standards.

Then there is the Pininfarina 2+2 bodywork. That these bodies are being discarded in favor of replicas is certainly one statement about value. Here is another: The GTE is actually the clean and perfected realization of styling statements attempted in Pininfarina's earlier Ferrari road-going GTs, like the Superfast and America. It may lack the panache of a race-bred GTO, but when fairly compared to other 2+2s of its era, its understated elegance is a benchmark in early 1960s Italian industrial design. If you throw such an original away in favor of what will always be known as a simulation, one day the loss will be felt.

Two compromises necessary to create a road car have branded the GTE as less than a thoroughbred.