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MOTORING CLASSICS



FERRARI 250

Ferrari 250

The '250' simply represents cylinder size, but Ferrari's range of V12s have star quality, from the first Mille Miglia to the last Lusso

Words: David Lillywhite Photography: Michel Zumbrunn



If ever there was a line-up of models that managed to be both highly evocative and deeply confusing, it's those from the prancing horse with '250' in their designation. So here we bring ten landmark models, from the first to wear the '250' moniker, through GTO to the last-of-the-line Lusso. We've kept away from the out-and-out racers, like the 250 Testa Rossa and the 250LM (more on those in a later issue), but brought together examples of all the major road cars, an amazing feat achieved in the Zurich studio of Michel Zumbunn.

This is a range that encompasses a staggering variety of body styles, built by masters of coachbuilding such as Vignale,

Pinin Farina and Zagato. There are clear links between the models, but chassis changed, wheelbases altered and levels of trim varied enormously. Surprisingly, given that the cars are named '250' by the cubic capacity of one cylinder of their 3-litre V12s, there are even two different engines used in the range.

Ferrari 250s, more than any other line-up, are associated with greatness. Some represented firsts in Ferrari history, others have achieved legendary status through race victories or simple beauty. Curiously, few actually show great innovation, but that doesn't stop a 250 of some sort featuring in most people's lists of their most desirable cars. ▶





250 Mille Miglia

In the early 1950s, the decade-old Ferrari company was a constructor of competition machinery, with a small sideline in road cars, and already establishing a reputation for race track domination – Formula One and le mans victories had been chalked up in 1948 and '49 respectively.

To deal with the variety of race disciplines being attacked, the company had developed two engines, the original Gioacchino Colombo-designed 'short-block' V12 and the later, larger-capacity, Aurelio Lampredi 'long-block' V12. Gradually the smaller engine was enlarged from its original 1.5-litres capacity (as used in the first Ferrari, the 125 Corsa), through 159, 166, 212 and 225 (2.7-litre) designations. Meanwhile, the large, torquey Lampredi engines, as used in the Ferrari 340 at 4.1-litres for example, were gaining a reputation for troublesome behaviour; not so much due to shortcomings in the engine designer but because their high torque output was breaking transmissions.

The answer was to enlarge the Colombo engine once more, to 3-litres, and to change the design from siamesed inlet

ports and individual ports (this gave the engine a new lease of life and set it up for use in the following 250s).

Using this smaller engine in the lighter chassis of the previous smaller-engined cars resulted in the very first 250, a Vignale-bodied coupe that was initially named the 250S. This is the car that Ferrari entered in the 1952 Mille Miglia, driven by Giovanni Bracco who, legend has it, chained-smoked and brandy-swigged his way to a heroic win. The result was so important that Ferrari named all 32 subsequent versions of the 250S as 250 Mille Miglias.

Some of the 32 of these cars were subsequently produced, some as Berlinettas built by Pinnin Farina (plus two from Vignale), others as open-top Spiders. The chassis were typical of Ferraris of the time, with oval tubing, a transverse leaf spring at the front, leaf springs at the back and Houdaille lever-arm dampers all round. A new four-speed gear box was developed too, in place of the difficult five-speed



'Pully here 3-4 deck fyufxuyfuyfx
yfxuyxfxuyxfuyxxfyfuyfxuyfu
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250 Europa

It might not be one of the better known 250s, but really the Europa is the true start of the model line, because it was the first of the Gran Turismos, aimed at fast cross-country touring, and introduced in 1953. Surprisingly, though, it used the Lampredi V12, which was a good racing engine but not as suitable for road use as the other V12 engine in the Ferrari stable, the Aurelio Colombo-designed 'short block'.

The way this came about is simple, if a little illogical in hindsight: Ferrari had built its first real road car, the 166, in 1947, based around a 2.4m wheelbase tubular chassis and the 2-litre Colombo V12. It was truly a thoroughbred, an expensive, sometimes troublesome machine that nonetheless rewarded those who could match its abilities. Over the following years, the engine was enlarged to give the 195 (2.3-litre), and the 212 (2.5-litre), while the bodies were supplied by a baffling array of coachbuilders. The chassis remained virtually unchanged, although wheelbases changed, with two versions of the 212 built, the Inter and the Export the latter with a shorter wheelbase.

When the time came for the next capacity hike, the option to stretch the Lampredi engine still further seemed too risky compared with shrinking the Colombo engine to 3-litre, which was already doing sterling service in the 4.1-litre 340 and 342 models. The result was the shortlived 250 Export and the more popular 250 Europa.

Although the duo of Michelotti and Vignale styled the first Paris Salon Europa, it was Pinin Farina that dominated Europa production. The basic, long-serving chassis continued, now stretched to 2.8m (2.4m for the Export) and, with the addition of a better appointed interior, with extra soundproofing, weight was a good 20% higher than on previous road cars. The pay-off, though, was that the Europa was by far the easiest Ferrari to live with so far and capable of over 135mph and 0-60mph in less than eight seconds.

However, it was clear that Ferrari customers needed a little less in the way of thoroughbred behaviour from their Grand Tourers, and the Europa was phased out within ??? by the similarly named but otherwise quite different GT Europa.



'The pay-off was that the Europa was by far the easiest Ferrari so far to live with, and capable of 135mph and 0-60mph in under 8 seconds' ▶



250 GT

The 250 Europa set up Ferrari as a maker of serious, upmarket grand tourers – but the quality of the ride, the standard of the trim and the reliability of the all-alloy Colombo engine left a lot to be desired.

That engine, with its removable cylinder heads, was far better suited to racing than road use. So, for 1955 the car was massively revised, using the 3-litre Lampredi engine (with one-piece cylinder block and heads) of the 250 Mille Miglia, and independent front coil spring suspension instead of Ferrari's traditional transverse leaf set-up. The shorter engine allowed a reduction in the wheelbase, back to 2.6m.

The new car, although similarly named as the 250 GT Europa, was a massive improvement and even faster than the Europa, achieving 140mph. After ?? had been made, the Europa tag was dropped, and the model known simply as 250GT. But there's little simple about the range of styles that the 250GT was available as...

Ferrari had settled on Pinin Farina as its coachbuilder of choice by this time so, predictably, of the 28 GT Europas built, 27

were from Pinin Farina. The other car was a one-off special by Vignale for Princess Liliane de Rethy of Belgium.

There were also seven lightweight GT Europa 'Berlinettas' built in alloy by Pinin Farina – and three of these cars had an unusual rear wing treatment with a very prominent kick-up line from sill to sail panel (see the Tour de France for an example of how it looked).

For the 250 GT, Pinin Farina once again got the ball rolling, continuing the distinctive rear wing styling of the previous three GT Europa Berlinettas. But the company was struggling to keep up, its workshops packed and order books overflowing, so work was farmed out to local Carrozzeria Boana, where 250 GTs (with flush rear wing styling) were produced until mid-1957.

Then Mario-Felice Boano left to become chief stylist at Fiat, and his business partner Luciano Polla was joined by Boano's son-in-law Ezio Ellena. The company's name was changed to Carrozzeria Ellena but production of 250 GTs continued unhindered for another 12

months, virtually identical except for a almost undetectably higher roofline for better headroom.

Now this period of 250 GTs are known as Boano and Ellena models, with the former company's cars called 'low roof' and the latter, unsurprisingly as 'high roof'.

Pininfarina, meanwhile, had been building a new factory (and losing the space between the two halves of its name) to enable production of the 250 GT to return 'home'. To mark the change, a new design was launched with clean, notchback styling, 2600mm wheelbase, the best appointed interior so far and performance of 150mph and 6.7 seconds for 0-60. This is the model you see above.

The 250 GT Pininfarina, or PF, as it became known, was launched in 1958 (gaining disc brakes a year later) and went on to sell an amazing 353 examples.

'It was massively revised, using the 3-litre Lampredi V12 of the 250 Mille Miglia and coil springs instead of Ferrari's traditional transverse leaf'



250 GT Cabriolet

Usually when we think of road-going 250s, we think of muscular, coupé styling. But there were several versions of lithe, sexy open-top 250s built too, which started with a one-off convertible from the Boano era.

Once Pininfarina was back on the 250 scene, an open-top version was quickly produced. They started with four prototypes, each featuring unique body and interior treatments based around the usual 250 mechanicals.

The first of these was chassis number 0655 GT, which was built for Ferrari racing ace Peter Collins. It featured a cut-down driver's door, a crackle-black dashboard and unusually styling creases in the wings. The windscreen did without a chromed top rail and Collins later specified Dunlop disc brakes and alloy wheels (Borrani wire wheels had always been a 250 staple).

Another of the prototypes was built with a cut-down windscreen and a faired driver's headrest (like a D-type's). The third was built for the 1957 Paris Salon and the fourth was sold to the Aga Khan.

But these four cars were just experiments ahead of a run of 36 open-top

250s, now known as Series 1 Cabriolets.

The kicked-up rear wings of the earlier coupes remained, perfectly suiting the svelte styling but the headlights were equipped with gorgeous perspex cowls on all but the very last of the Series 1s.

Meanwhile, though, the California Spider had been introduced (see page ??), based heavily on the competition variant of the 250. In its beautiful but no-nonsense form, there was no place for flashy headlight cowls, and yet it was more expensive than the Series 1 Cabriolet. The solution was unfortunate in many ways, for the Cabriolet was revised with more sober styling – and no headlight cowls. This was the Series 2 Cabriolet.

To compensate, the Series 2 was made more practical, with a more comfortable, accommodating interior and improved boot space for grand touring. It was first shown at the 1959 Paris Salon but production didn't start until 1960, lasting until 1962.

The Series 2 was a better car to drive than the first Cabriolet – but the Series 1 shown here is easily the best looking.



'Another of the prototypes was built with a cut-down screen, and a faired headrest, like a D-type'



250 Tour de France

Trading on the success of the 250 GT, Ferrari produced a handful of lightweight, tuned Competizione versions. They used Pinin Farina-designed bodies built by Scaglietti in alloy, and entered them into International GT racing. Quite a turn-around from previous policies of producing road cars merely to finance the racing...

In 1956, the prestigious Tour de France was dominated by 250 GT Competizioni, with one winning in the hands of de Portago and third place being taken by the very car that had been displayed at the 1955 Paris Salon.

This success prompted Ferrari to name subsequent Competizioni with the Tour de France moniker. Initially they followed the style of the 250 Mille Miglia (some with Plexiglass cowled headlights), based around the 2600mm wheelbase chassis with drum brakes, front coil spring suspension and a leaf sprung axle at the rear. Power outputs initially varied between 230 and 240bhp.

Some of these early cars used plastic sliding side windows, others had wind-up glass, and all eight Scaglietti-built cars of the Series I Tour de France received

varying numbers of vents in the rear sail panel behind the side windows. Inside, appointments were basic.

For 1957, a Series II was introduced, which featured 14 vents in the sail panels, an extended nose, bonnet scoop (supplying air into a carburettor surround pan) and heavily re-profiled rear wings. Customers could specify a Testa Rossa specification engine, with lightweight pistons and con-rods and six oversize downdraught Weber carburettors.

Over the following years, until 1959, Ferrari continued to evolve the Tour de France. The Series III brought headlights set further back in the wings and covered by Plexiglass covers, rear wings with prominent fins and a three-vent sail panel. The Series IV moved to a single vent and power output crept up to between 240 and 260bhp, while the Series V (pictured) lost the headlight cowls.

All this for fewer than 100 cars, even including the handful of Zagato-built models. And yet, the Tour de France is now known as the finest long-wheelbase Ferrari GT that was ever produced.



'All this for fewer than 100 cars. And yet, the Tour de France is now known as the finest long-wheelbase Ferrari GT that was ever produced'



250 California

It's the late-1950s, and Ferrari's 250 GT Tour de France is beginning its now-legendary domination of GT class competition. There's a drop-top version of the 250 on the way but, in California, dealer Jon von Neumann (of Ferrari Representatives of Hollywood) has an idea that just won't go away. He wants Ferrari to build a convertible version of the Tour de France. Crucially, North American Ferrari importer Luigi Chinetti backs his idea.

Of course, the result is the 250 GT California Spider, a more focussed, more hard-core drop-top than the GT Spider Pininfarina. Compare this California with the Cabriolet on page 77, and you'll see they look similar, but the California was not just built by Scaglietti of Modena (which produced many of the Pininfarina designs), but designed by Scaglietti too.

It was initially based around a 2600mm wheelbase chassis and equipped with a 240bhp engine, and in this form was given its formal debut in late 1958. Customers could specify all the options that buyers of a Tour de France were offered – from race-spec camshafts to full Competizione

set-ups – plus the additional extra of an elegant glassfibre hardtop. Some Californias were fitted with cowed headlights, some were left uncovered, but what's now known as the long-wheelbase California (pictured) continued until 1960.

In tandem with California production, though, Ferrari was developing a new short-wheelbase chassis. This would lead to the replacement for the Tour de France, referred to as the 250 GT SWB (see the next page) and, unsurprisingly, the new 2400mm chassis finds its way to the California Spyder.

This ushered in a new era of Californias, which tended to appear to sit lower, with a more aggressive stance. Like the long-wheelbase Californias, the SWBs were built with both open and closed headlights, so the best way to differentiate is to count the vents behind the front wheelarch – a LWB should have three, while an SWB has only two.

Fittingly, the highest-specification 250 GT California ever built was ordered by Luigi Chinetti for the 1960 Le Mans. With 280bhp it was as quick as a tin-top SWB.



'In California, Jon von Neumann has an idea that just won't go away. He wants Ferrari to build a convertible version of the 250 Tour de France' ►



250 SWB

Ferrari's lightweight GTs were always known as Berlinettas which, between 1956 and '59 were well represented by the all-conquering Tour de France models. But in the last days of the Tour de France 250s, seven 'Interim' Berlinettas were produced to a new, more modern style.

These Interim cars performed well in racing throughout 1959, but they were replaced by a new model that looked near-identical but that would go on to even greater success and admiration; that model was the 250 GT SWB, the last three letters standing for short wheelbase.

The SWB was based on a new chassis of 2400mm wheelbase, 200mm shorter than before. Pininfarina (renamed from Pinin Farina around this time) simply chopped out the extra length from the middle of the Interim's body, losing the quarter windows and producing what is arguably the car with the finest combination of good looks and muscular aggression ever seen.

Between late 1959 and early 1963 the SWB was produced in two forms, the Competizione and the Lusso (or 'street' specification). As the former, it was built

by Scaglietti in aluminium, with a (usually) 275bhp engine, a strengthened version of the usual four-speed gearbox, bucket seats and sliding side windows.

The Lusso, not to be confused with the later 1962-64 Lusso featured on p84, was produced in steel except for an aluminium bonnet, doors and bootlid and was more opulently equipped inside. With a lower compression ratio and smaller carburetors, a Lusso engine typically produced 240bhp. Specifications were often mixed around, though, so steel-bodied cars came with competition engines and vice versa.

But for Ferrari to be sure of winning the coveted International GT Championship, a batch of 21 special SWBs was produced for 1961. These were the SEFAC Hot Rods with smaller diameter chassis tubing for reduced weight, ultra-thin aluminium panelling and an engine equipped with Testa Rossa cylinder heads and bucket-sized carburetors for 285-295bhp.

These cars were good for 160mph, and won at Spa, Mille Miglia, Monza, Le Mans (GT class), Riverside and Tour de France. And yes, Ferrari won the GT Championship.



'Pininfarina simply chopped out the extra length and produced a car with the finest combination of looks and aggression ever seen'



250 GTE

If anything demonstrates Ferrari's changing attitude towards commerciality, as well as the public's acceptance of Ferrari as a serious manufacturer of road cars, it's the 250 GTE. This was the first of the marque to be equipped with anything in the way of rear seats, other than a few special order 195s, 212s, 340s and 342s.

The car was a commercial success too, with more than 950 GTEs sold between 1960 and '63 – the profits were usefully put towards the increasingly high-budget Ferrari race team.

The GTE kept to the 2600mm wheelbase of the 250 GT and the Tour de France. Instead, the cabin was made more roomy by moving the engine forward in the chassis by 200mm and widening the track of the front and rear wheels.

Engine output was an impressive 240bhp at 7000rpm, which took the GTE from zero to 60mph in just over seven seconds, with a top speed of almost 140mph; not bad for a four-seater.

Rear seats aside, the GTE represents the archetypal spec for a 1960s Ferrari: Pininfarina steel body with aluminium

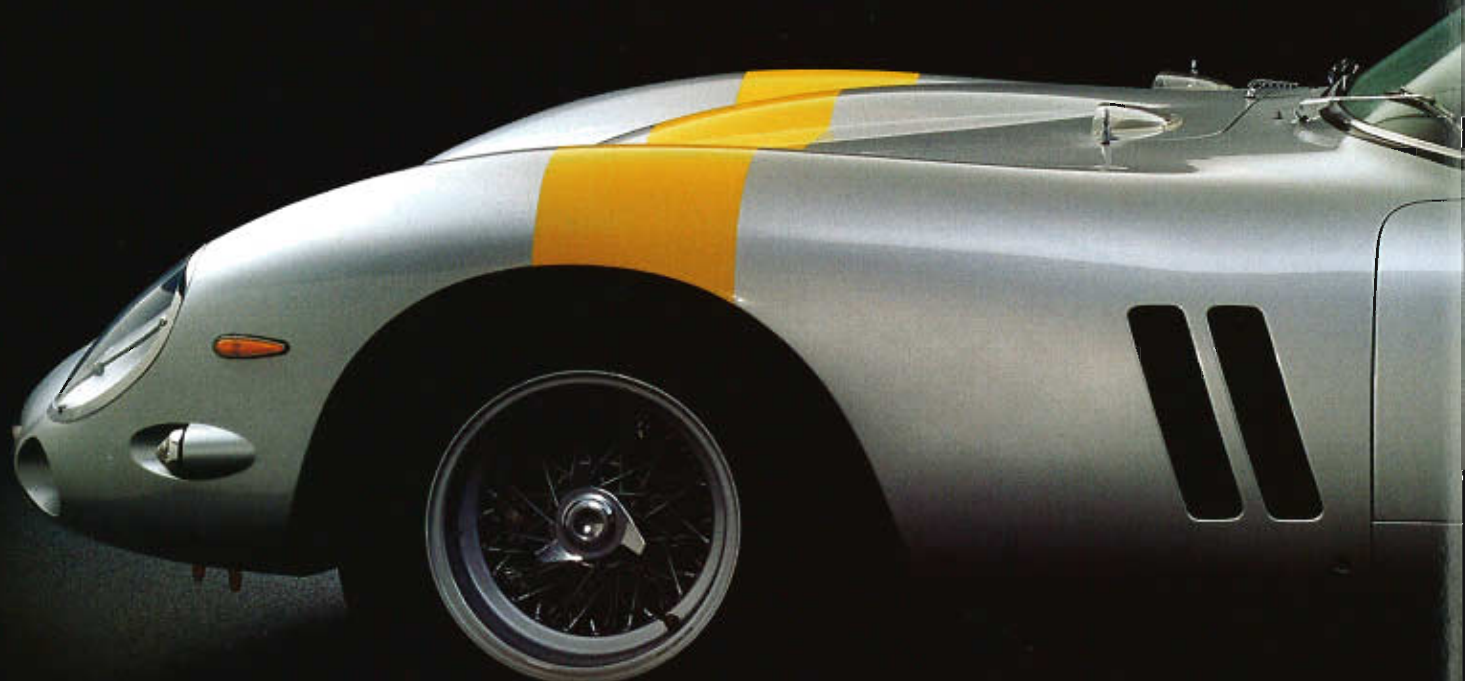
bonnet, doors and boot, disc brakes, Nardi steering wheel, leather-covered seats and transmission tunnel, chrome-rimmed Veglia instruments and Borrani wire wheels. It pushes all the right buttons...

It was revealed as a new model at the 1960 Le Mans 24 Hours where a prototype GTE was used as a course car, before being officially launched five months later at the Paris Salon, Ferrari's favourite show. Little changed during the car's first two and a half years, even when the Series II was launched (the main update was to the dash), but for the 1963 Series III a number of changes were phased in, some of them during Series II production. The rear leaf springs were changed for more responsive coils, the rear wings reprofiled, rear lights changed and the driving lamps moved from the grille to directly under the headlights.

During production, an overdrive operating on fourth gear was also introduced and this, with the disc brakes and suspension improvements made the GTE the most useable 250 thus far. Now it's one of the most affordable of the range.



'The car was a commercial success, with the profits usefully put towards the increasingly high-budget Ferrari race team' ▶



250 GTO

In a line-up of iconic, highly collectible and astonishingly capable machines, the GTO is the version of the 250 that stands above the rest. It's the 250 that most aficionados think of first, the 250 that's deservedly at the top of every wish list.

As successor to the great 250 SWB Competizione (and the SEFAC Hot-Rods in particular), the GTO was aimed fair and square at the important GT championship. The 'O' of GTO stands for 'Omologato' (homologation), an ironic (in hindsight) nod to the FIA's qualifying rules – these stated that 100 cars had to be built for homologation to be granted.

Ferrari got around these rules by convincing the FIA that the GTO was really a slightly modified 250 SWB. In many ways, that was true, although within the terms of FIA rules it was stretching the truth.

At least the evolution was there to see, though. The chassis of the GTO was little different from the SWB's, despite some extra bracing around damper and engine mounts and various other minor mods to stiffen the chassis. The engine, too, was the same Colombo V12 built to Testa

Rossa specifications as used in the SWB Competizione. But larger valves and higher lift brought power up to around 300bhp (later, one of two 4-litre GTOs would produce a stunning 390bhp).

With a new five-speed gearbox, the GTO was capable of over 170mph, and the acceleration was as vivid as five seconds from 0 to 60mph.

But the biggest difference of all between the GTO and its SWB predecessor was its bodywork. Despite the dominance of Pininfarina designs throughout the 250 range (and indeed all Ferraris of the era), the GTO was styled by Giotto Bizzarrini. He worked closely with experts at the university in Milan, using their wind tunnel to reduce drag produced by the new body.

The cowl headlamps and low front all helped the low-drag cause, while weight was pared to a minimum with thin aluminium panelling, Plexiglas side windows and rear screen and a stripped-bare interior. Bizzarrini had done a superb job, but fell foul of Enzo Ferrari's famous cull of top employees and was sacked in November 1961. This left 25-year-old Mauro

Forghieri in charge of the GTO project.

Forghieri didn't quite get the GTO ready for the first race of the next season, at Daytona in February 1962, but the SWB/GTO development mule, driven by Stirling Moss, finished first in the GT class and fourth overall. When the genuine GTO was ready, Phil Hill and Oliver Gendebien finished first in class and second overall at Sebring, and the wins kept on coming; Ferrari won the GT manufacturers' championship with GTOs in 1962 and '63.

For 1964, the GTO's body shape was revised to reduce drag still further. The '64 car was shorter, wider and lower, with more vents around the body, a flatter rear deck and a less curvy front end. Some prefer it, others feel the original was best. The changes worked, though, for Ferrari won the championship once again.

In all, 37 250 GTOs were built between late 1961 and early '64, three of which were to 1964 specification. Now the GTO is known as the car to have fetched the highest ever price at auction (£6 million in 1990) but it's best to think of it as one of the greatest GT cars ever built.



'The GTO was styled by Giotto Bizzarrini. He worked closely with experts at the university in Milan, using their wind tunnel to reduce drag on the new body'





250 GT Lusso

Take the bare bones of a 250 GTO and re-clothe it in an elegant body of more civilised intention, and the result is the 250 Lusso – often said to be the best-looking 250 ever produced.

The Lusso is an incredible machine, with similar levels of comfort and performance to the 250 SWB. Chassis were to the same design as the GTO's, but the engine was placed slightly further forward to aid cabin space. Pininfarina penned the style, introducing a simple Kamm tail with neat circular rear lights and a wonderfully simple front end with a tiny bumper and separate overriders.

Lusso engines were generally ordered with outputs of 240bhp, which was enough to give performance figures of 150mph and a sub-seven second 0-60. Coil springs and disc brakes all-round were by then the 250 norm, but the interior of the Lusso set a new standard for the range. The bucket seats were trimmed in high-quality leather, as was the transmission tunnel and the doors, while the luggage area behind the seats was trimmed in vinyl with leather straps. The dashboard was also leather-

trimmed, but the real point of interest there is its unique Pininfarina styling, with a large speedometer and matching revcounter mounted in the centre cocooned in sweeping cowls, and the five minor instruments ahead of the driver, visible through the aluminium spokes of the gorgeous Nardi steering wheel.

There were 362 Lussos produced, 23 of which were right-hand-drive.

As the last 250 road car to be introduced, the Lusso represents the results of ten years of development, which took the Ferrari GT from being a sometimes temperamental, haphazardly produced road-racer to a sophisticated, predictable (in the best sense of the word), high-performance grand tourer.

Funny, though, that in all those years, the outright performance didn't change significantly and the sense of style and character never diminished. That's why all 250s are, and always will be, so special.

Thanks to Ferrari specialist Paul Baber (www.250swb.com), Justin Platt of THRE, all the car owners, Lukas Hlivi and photographer Michel Zumbrunn.



'...a significant step forward in comfort from the 250 SWB 'Lusso' and yet only a small step down from the performance of a GTO'