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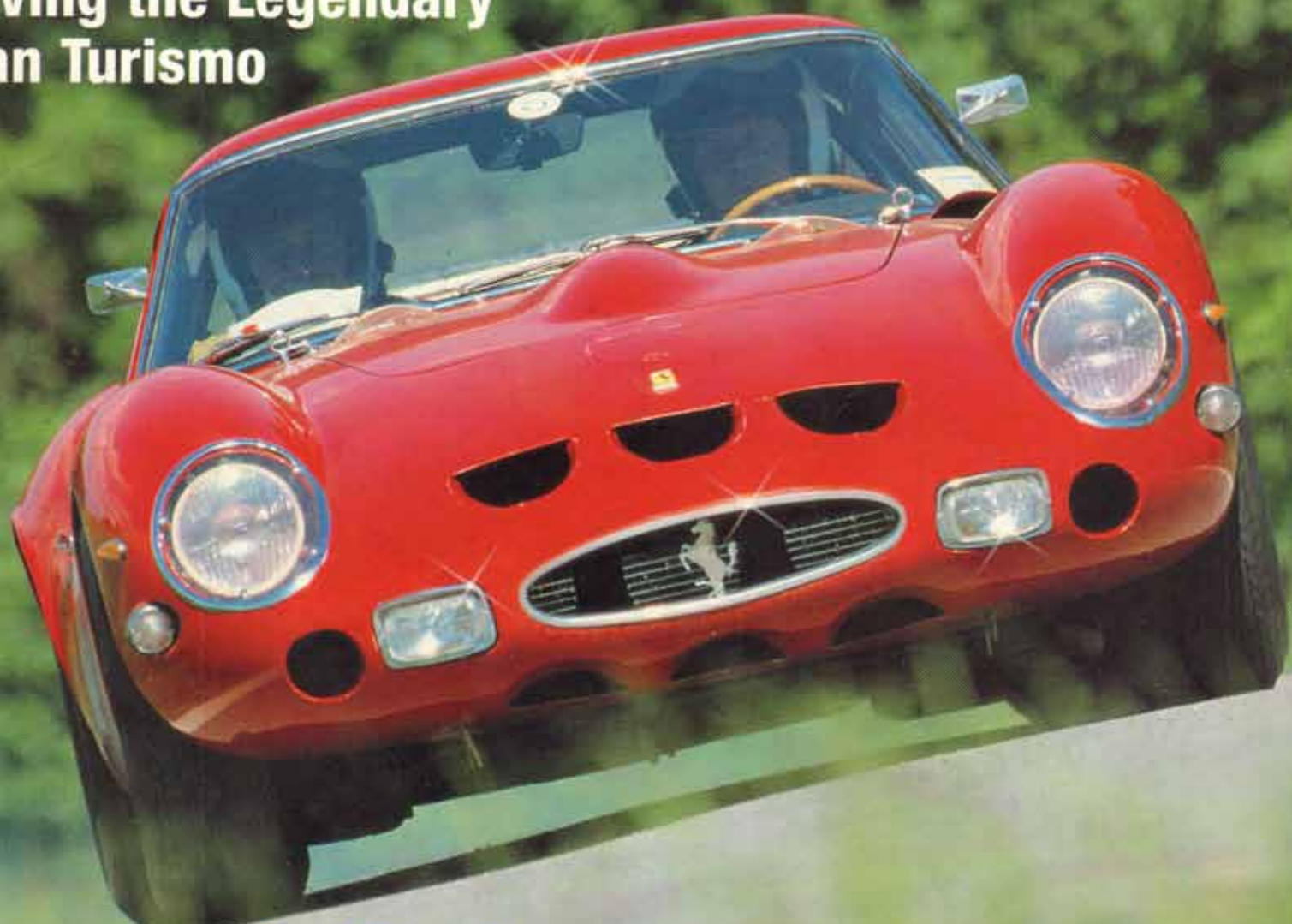
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# FERRARI 250 GTO

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**A**n Italian phrase that's been around for over 50 years is GT or Gran Turismo. Over the years these have probably become the most over-used letters in automotive history, but Italy is where they started. The old joke about being asked if you were present at your child's birth and replying with less than complimentary fervour regarding the conception is very relevant. Cisitalia was in on both occasions when the term was coined.

Even by the early 1950s very few people had heard of a Cisitalia let alone seen one, but when the New York Museum of Modern Art drew up a shortlist of cars that displayed 'Excellence as works of art', the top was a Cisitalia and it went on show.

The company was the brainchild of Piero Dusio who had started a business called CISI (Consorzio Industriale Sportiva Italia). He had been a soccer player before the War and the business specialised in sports goods. He had an idea that he wanted to get involved in car design and had gained experience of race driving, in an Alfa 8C, with Scuderia Torino - becoming Italian amateur champion in 1934.

**Cisitalia 202**

# The First Gran Turismo

*Story by Peter Collins  
Photography by Michael Ward*







FAR LEFT: A rare sight, the badge recognising the delightful work of Stabilimenti Farina. Of the 153 Cisitalia 202s built, about 100 were coupes like this one

BELOW LEFT: This 202DF coupe is one of only five made and is fitted with the unusual 2.5-litre marine engine by BPM. Most 202s had Fiat Millecento engines



“Encouraged, Dusio became bolder and adapted the frame of the D46 for a road car, which he called the 202”



His initial idea was that a single-seater racing car should be produced for everyman and so he came up with a one-make formula involving a relatively simple racer. This was for a cheap learning-curve series with the cars designed by Giovanni Savonuzzi utilising Fiat components: an 1100 engine and a light and strong tubular framework. The first appeared in 1946 and was type-numbered D46, for Dusio 1946. It debuted at the Valentino Park voiturette GP supporting race that year and won.

Dusio persuaded some Swiss backers to finance the building of replicas and a 16-car travelling circus was inaugurated at a race in Cairo. Cairo? There was no record then or now, of racing in Egypt and the whole series faltered before it had started. But the cars were £1,000 each and a number of customers were found. Ascari, Bonetto, Taruffi, Schell all used one, with Taruffi becoming champion of Italy.

Encouraged, Dusio became bolder and adapted the frame of the D46 for a road car, which he called the 202. The 760cc car had transverse leaf-spring front suspension and a live axle on semi-elliptics. Carlo Abarth had a hand in the tuning of the Fiat 1100 unit, pushing its power up from 32 to 60hp.

For the Mille Miglia in 1947, Tazio Nuvolari was supplied with a scantily-clad spider 202 and he put up a performance that has become a legend of motor racing. With only this little car he took on the factory-entered 2.9 closed Alfa Romeo of Clemente Biondetti and, in appalling weather, led the race. Tazio was very ill by this stage of his life and it is said that he kept his face in the air stream to gulp fresh air into his exhaust-fume-affected lungs. Over the twisty bits, the Mantuan held on to his position but the second half of the race used some autostradas. Power told and Biondetti closed in. At Bologna, the gap was nine minutes. Nuvolari was not ill he dared not get out of the car for fear of collapsing, and the weather was torrential icy rain. The little car succumbed to water in the electrics, forcing a delay to dry it out. Biondetti won but stated at the prize-giving that Tazio was the real winner although he was only second. Cisitalia took the glory and then on the open 202 aero-screened spider versions, with





remember it well. Inventions that had Scrabble, McDonalds and Israel. It was in, and car-makers had new technology to play with, so the hopes of these two Cisitalias might be. Some manufacturers of the period had multi-valve engines, cycle wings, and headlights. From an era when ease of use was part of the designer's brief, it makes a practical – if exceedingly expensive; rare enough to be very special at its yet not too expensive to run. To move, their venerable ages sneak past. Ironically, the faster we make the more we are restricted. In their

The steering is low-geared to avoid being too heavy at parking speeds. The sitting position is legs splayed and pedal action is typically primitive of the period. For a 1948 car, handling and roadholding are very good, helped no doubt by the Michelin XZX rubber. It cruises well at a gentle pace, especially with the top down in the Italian sun. Wonderful, but you need some period Raybans to match the 1940s kit.

The red car, the 202DF from 1952, weighs a little more at 900kg but with a 160bhp, 2.8-litre, four-cylinder motor is easier to drive – not because of the extra top end power that can take it to an optimistically claimed 134mph (216km/h) – but because of the torque. It also

has some very early Weber DCOE carbs and is one of only four or five built. The structure consists of a steel tube spaceframe and steel monocoque. Its two-seater alloy coachwork has plenty of boot capacity and looks beautiful in dark red with its big alloy fuel cap and blue interior; although the sitting

position has the pedals too close. The independent rear suspension with inboard rear brakes was quite a feature for half a century ago. The front suspension has a transverse leaf spring making up the top wishbones and is shod with 165/400 Pirelli Cinturatos. Rear suspension is de Dion with leaf springs. Steering is very low-geared to lighten the load, and the drum brakes eventually stop the car in a surprisingly straight line.

The Cisitalia 202s were advanced and ambitious cars for Italy's struggling post-War period, when utilitarianism was a high priority. **RG**

are beautiful, as is the lovely interior with knobs and amber key fob. The car feels rigid and gives a comfy if firm sitting position is okay, with the steering close. Gearbox synchromesh is only on 1st and 4th, necessitating a bit of footwork is required for toe-heeling motor running at low rpm when cold.

**“In their heyday the Cisitalias enjoyed empty roads. Accelerating and braking were things you only did at each end of a journey.”**



Designated 202SC for 'Sport Competizione', this lovely convertible has the early split windscreen design. Later cars had one-piece screens and a less complex radiator grille

small fins on the tail, became known as the Nuvolari Spider. The road-going 202 was clothed in a beautiful, contemporary coupe body by Pinin Farina, hence its inclusion in the New York exhibition. And we were able to try one.

Our featured coupes include one of 153 202s built, of which about 100 were closed cars and would normally be fitted with the Abarth breathed-upon Fiat 1100 unit. The other is even scarcer: lift the bonnet of this car and an extremely unusual unit is revealed. Chassis 189 has a 2.5-litre marine engine by BPM that develops 160bhp at 5,300rpm, endowing it with considerable extra performance. Only five of these versions, designated 202DF, were built. The first had been displayed at the 1952 Geneva Show and incorporated a four-speed gearbox with modified Lancia Aurelia de Dion rear suspension.

Performance versions of the 202 coupe were designed by Savonuzzi and featured advanced aerodynamics at the rear. The first car, though, a 'standard' 202, is an example of Pinin Farina styling that kick-started a whole generation. This is the car that brought the world the term GT, and the car shape that was soon to lead Pinin Farina to design the Lancia Aurelia GT. Hence it gave birth to virtually every other coupe thereafter.

For our third car we had to travel to Bassano town, where Luigi Bonfanti kindly enabled us to experience a 202 cabriolet. It is reckoned that about 34 of these open cars were made and although designed by Pinin Farina they were contracted out to Vignale and Farina for construction. Others were built by Castagna and Frua. The exquisite detailing of our cabriolet



would have allowed the original owner to display the car to full effect at events such as the Villa d'Este concours. The production period for the 202 was 1948 to 1952 and little was done to change the cars during this time except updating. The white car is an early example: chassis 089SC (Sport Competizione specification) with motor 211. Later cars received a one-piece windscreen, a less-complex grille and chromium bumpers.

So, little was done to change the lines of the 202 during its lifetime – nothing was really required – but huge problems had beset Dusio. He had an idea to build the most advanced Grand Prix car ever and, to help him, spent a large part of his fortune persuading the post-War Allies to let Dr Porsche out



of custody in France. Porsche was needed because the car was to have complex suspension, supercharging, and four-wheel drive. It proved to be a disaster, consuming Dusio's capital and forcing him to Argentina, where he started Autoar and actually got one GP car to run.

Meanwhile, back in Italy a Cisitalia sportscar, similar to the 202 but not as pretty, was introduced. This was the 303 DF, but the line was failing and only half-hearted attempts were made to keep it going. By 1961–65 the company name was attached to a Fiat 600-based coupe with 750/850 cc engines, but that was a dying breath.

Although the name faded away into general obscurity, nothing will ever be able to take away from Cisitalia the fact that it provided the conception and birth of Italy's claim to



ABOVE: A 202 Nuvolari complete with rear fins. BELOW: This coupe was spotted for sale in a showroom near Lake Como. Note the delicate door handles

