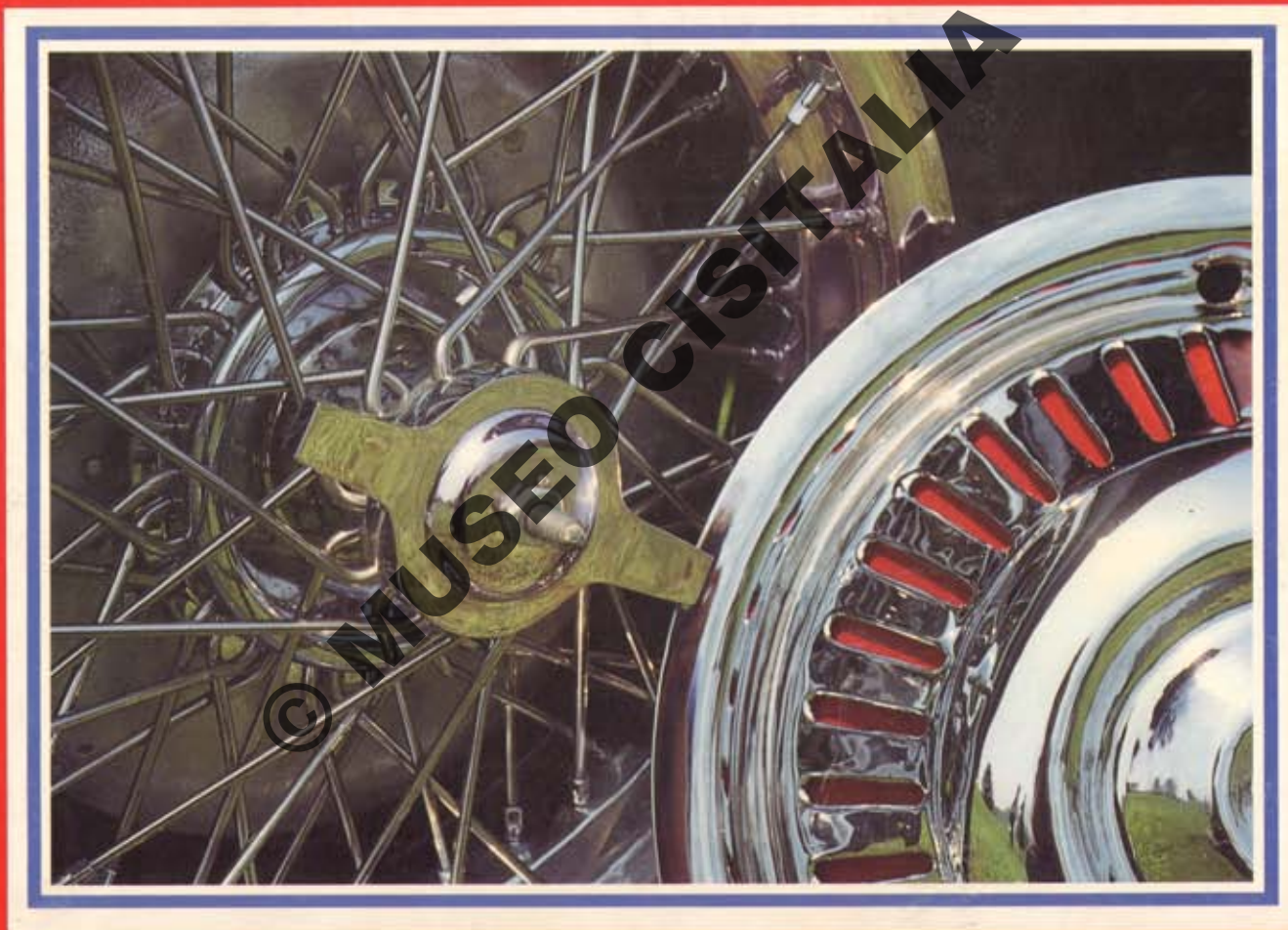


automobile

Quarterly



STANLEY I. AVIS



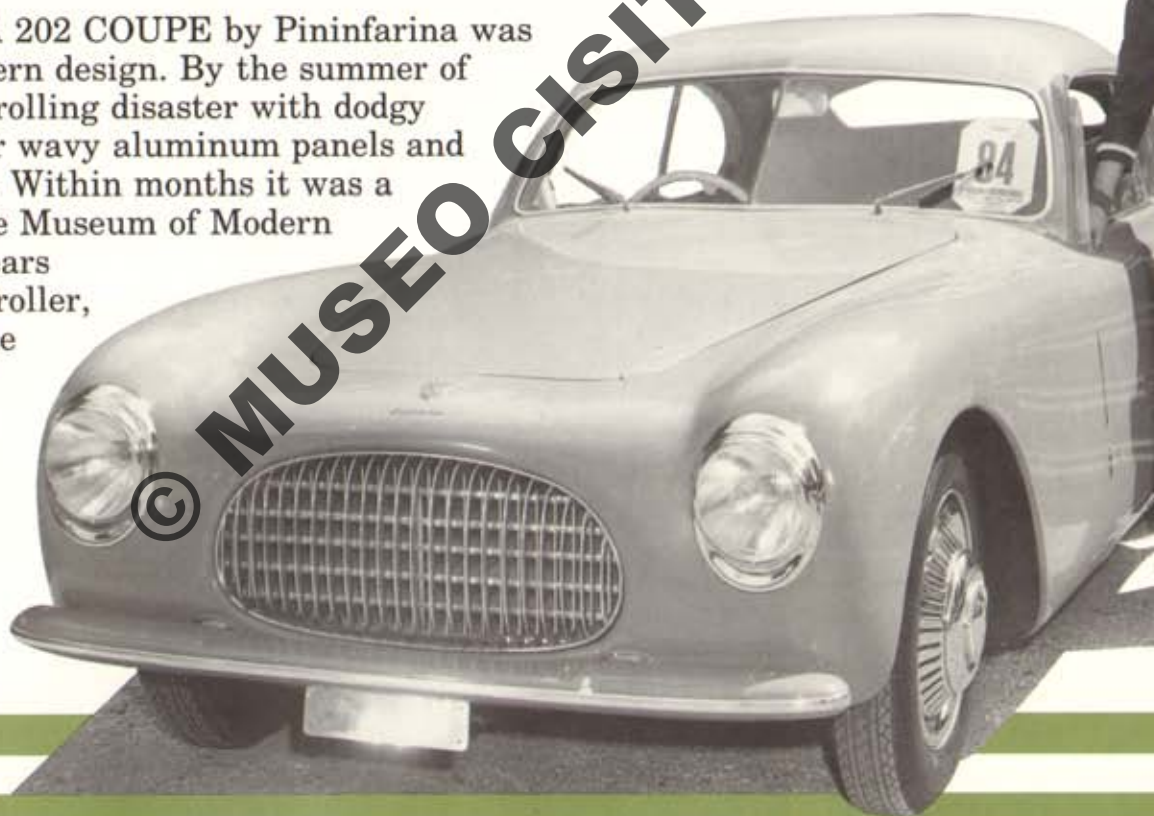
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modern

ART

1947 CISITALIA 202 COUPE

IN 1947 THIS CISITALIA 202 COUPE by Pininfarina was a coveted triumph of modern design. By the summer of 1951 it was a tired black rolling disaster with dodgy electrics, spotty paint over wavy aluminum panels and an exhausted little motor. Within months it was a gleaming showpiece in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Four years later it was a bare metal roller, perpetually waiting for the day it would again be a shining tribute to its creators. Finally, after another 35 years, it has been reborn as a polished showpiece, among the most coveted of postwar automobiles.



BY JONATHAN A. STEIN



RIOR TO WORLD WAR II there was no such thing as a Cisitalia automobile. But there was a conglomerate of that name (*Consorzio Industriale Sportivo Italia*) with extensive holdings in textiles, hotels, sporting goods and banking. It was controlled by wealthy industrialist and sportsman Piero Dusio

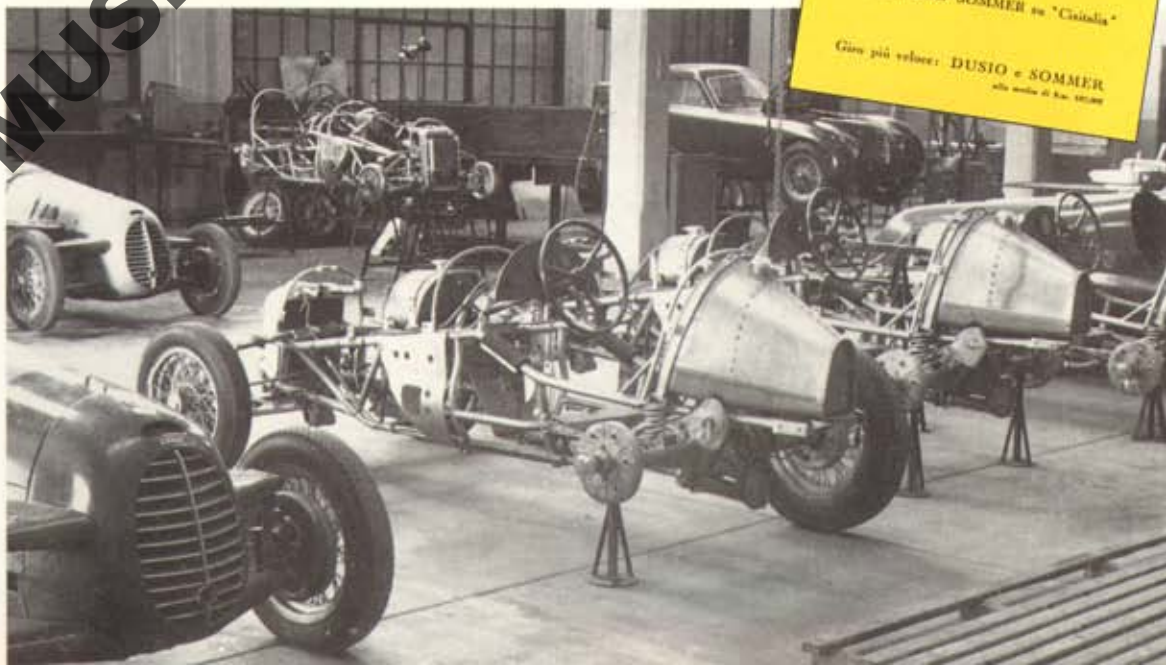
who had succeeded by working hard and playing with equal vigor. As Dusio's business successes multiplied throughout the late Thirties, he had the financial base to support his considerable skill as a race driver. Although Dusio achieved admirable results and was ranked as one of the top amateur drivers, according to Stanley Nowak (see *AQ*, vol. 8, no. 2), his true goal was to "win the great Italian races in a car of his own making." But, the accomplishment of this goal would have to wait until after the close of World War II.

Being a shrewd business strategist, Dusio brought in the finest talent available—Fiat engineers Dante Giacosa and Giovanni Savonuzzi—to create his cars and Piero Taruffi to manage the racing team. Later, when it was time to attack the Grand Prix circuits, Ferdinand Porsche and Robert Eberan von Eberhorst were employed. The first Cisitalia prototype 1100cc single seater was completed in the spring of 1946. Upon the model's official debut in the Coppa Brezzi, the little monoposto racers dominated the competition and the D.46 was successfully launched.

Not surprisingly, considering the past of the Giacosa and Savonuzzi team, many components of the new D.46 were Fiat-derived. The 1100cc overhead valve engine, which produced a modest 32 hp in stock Fiat form, was reworked to produce a reliable output of over 60 hp. The cylinder head was revised, as were the crankshaft, connecting rods and virtually all other engine components. To handle the critical cooling and lubrication needs of the highly-stressed power unit, as well as to reduce engine height, a dry sump oil system was fitted with an oil tank mounted in the cowl. The independent front suspension used Fiat transverse leaf springs and Fiat 1100 brakes were fitted. The three-speed preselector-type transmission was designed by Giacosa, and the rear axle was derived from that of the Fiat Topolino, secured by coil springs and flexible longitudinal arms. All these components were mounted in a strong tubular frame.

When it was time to develop a two-place sports car, the componentry and knowledge gained in the development of the D.46 provided the starting point, although a conventional four-speed transmission was used, along with a column-mounted gear lever. Most key components were carried over from the tiny single-seater and mounted on a full-width tubular frame. Savonuzzi penned a striking be-

The D.46 (below, with Victor Bonetto at Mantua in 1948) was Cisitalia's first model. A series of D.46s takes shape (bottom), with one of the early 202 coupes in the background.



finned coupe for the new chassis, as well as an open roadster sans the fins. According to Nowak, the very first chassis was bodied as a coupe by Carrozzeria Colli, thus providing the works with a development mule. Then a chassis was sent to Vignale, who honed the Savonuzzi design. Nowak notes that chassis number three was entrusted to Garelli, who designed and sculpted an open roadster which, when refined by Farina, became the definitive Spider Nuvolari—so named in honor of Nuvolari's epic second place finish in the 1947 Mille Miglia. But, it's the sixth chassis which is pivotal to this story. That chassis was the one sent to Pinin Farina in early 1947, not to emerge until that September.



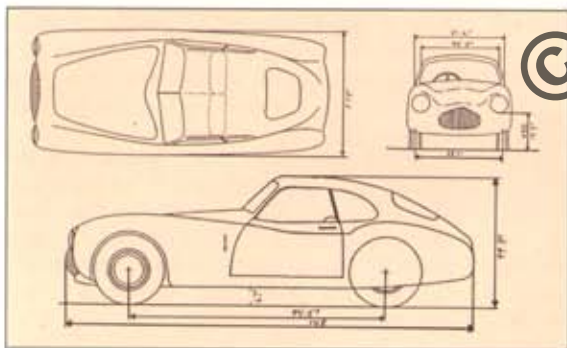
ON EXHIBIT

The resulting 202 Coupe changed the world of modern design, so much so that when the Museum of Modern Art in New York was preparing a 1951 exhibit to recognize automobile design, one of the Pinin Farina coupes was considered mandatory.

Curator of Architecture Arthur Drexler sought outside help to select and assemble the cars best suited for the first major museum exhibit of the automobile as an art form. The outside consultant came in the form of freelance auto writer and opera aficionado John Wheelock Freeman. Freeman helped establish the list of cars to be included in the show. Having seen one of the tiny Cisitalia coupes at Fergus Motors in Manhattan, Freeman knew that one simply had to be included when the exhibit opened.

After months of fruitless searching, Freeman was unable to find a patron with a Cisitalia 202 coupe to loan. Briggs Cunningham provided a Bentley, D. Cameron Peck made his prewar Mercedes available, and the MG TC came from John Fitch's Sports and Utility Motors. Underwriting support came from Ford, Studebaker and Willys-Overland—but still there was no Cisitalia. In desperation, Freeman took to scouring classified ads, until finally one Sunday morning, a small ad in *The New York Times* listed a 1947 Cisitalia in a suburb of Washington, D.C.

The Cisitalia coupe in Washington was car number 042. Although the museum refers to it as being built in 1949, the car was actually completed in October 1947. But by the time Freeman saw it in late 1950 or early 1951 it had experienced much wear and little care. Its owner was a naval officer who had brought the car with him when he returned from a post in Naples. Although the owner was away on duty, Freeman struck a deal with the man's wife,



Giovanni Savonuzzi's early ideas for a coupe design (above) inspired bodies by Vignale and Pinin Farina.



The Cisitalia 202 chassis was available with several bodies, including Farina's Spider Nuvolari (top), so named in honor of Nuvolari's second place in the Mille Miglia, and a Pinin Farina coupe (below).



who hated the car, and as Freeman remembers, was "glad to see the last of it." Unfortunately, nothing is known of the car before it arrived in the United States and all efforts to trace its early history have been fruitless.

Freeman may have bought the car, but he wasn't prepared for it to be in such "beat up" condition. The car did run, albeit badly and very loudly—the muffler was shot. Freeman admits that "being young and foolish" he decided to drive the car home. After arranging temporary insurance, Freeman headed for New York. The car was barely roadworthy, and soon both darkness and rain set in. When the car in front of him spun on the slick road, Freeman was shaken but continued on, eventually reaching Manhattan without further incident.

Back in New York, Freeman had limited time to prepare

the car for the exhibit. The tired dry sump Cisitalia engine was discarded, to be replaced by a Simca 1100, which was the French-licensed version of the Fiat engine on which the Cisitalia power unit had been based. The Simca engine featured a conventional lubrication system and offered roughly half the power of the Cisitalia motor—but it was readily available and a bolt-in swap was performed by Sports and Utility Motors. Brett Harte Hannaway, John Fitch's partner in the White Plains, New York, garage and dealership, also supervised the bodywork, which was performed by a company called V & J, also in Westchester County. The tired black paint was stripped, replacement bumpers were fabricated, and most dents were removed before the body was sprayed a light metallic blue. Freeman selected that color primarily because it had flattered the

beautiful lines of the only new Cisitalia coupe he had seen. During the course of the work, Freeman noted that the original craftsmanship left much to be desired.

By August 29, 1951, the refurbished Cisitalia was in the Museum of Modern Art's "8 Automobiles" exhibit, which ran until mid-November. By September, it was again for sale, as revealed by Freeman's ad in the *Sunday Times*.

The car may have been part of an exhibit at a major museum, but according to Freeman's brother Ned, "The car was a piece of junk. The work wasn't done well—it looked pretty, but didn't run that well." On the road, Ned Freeman recalls that the Cisitalia was "sheer misery" punctuated with countless rattles and squeaks. As a car dealer, he wouldn't have "had it on the lot."

After the exhibit ended, John Freeman faced reality. At a lanky six feet, three inches tall, he was extremely cramped in the tiny car, and in his own words, "the Cisitalia simply wasn't a car I could use to go to the grocery store." Nor could he see parking it on a Manhattan street to be "bashed by a Buick."

John Freeman recalls selling the car to Walt Hansgen (see *AQ*, vol. 27, no. 4) by way of brother Ned. However, neither Ned nor Hansgen's widow Bea recall any part of the transaction. But it is known that sometime in 1953 the Cisitalia found its way onto the showroom floor of Havell Motors in Morristown, New Jersey.



This Cisitalia catalog (above) featured color and black-and-white photos of 202 models and the D.46. In 1951, the Cisitalia (below) was restored for the 8 Automobiles exhibit; it still lacked bumpers.



FROM SHOWROOM TO GAS STATION

It was at Havell Motors that Randy Pearsall saw the Cisitalia, and he knew he just had to have it. Randy scraped up the necessary cash and traded his 1952 TD Mk II—the car that he and Hansgen had shared to a tenth place finish at Sebring. He and his sixteen-year-old friend Mark Sherman drove the MG from Randy's Tydol gas station in Westfield to Morristown and returned in the metallic blue Cisitalia.

Almost immediately Pearsall started work on the car with the goal of taking the Cisitalia racing. He learned that a Cisitalia engine, from Nuvolari Spyder 0145MM, was available for \$200. He dispatched part-time employee Don Murphy to pick the motor up at Tim Paulex's shop in West Haverstraw, New York. Murphy recalls loading the small engine into the trunk of Pearsall's 1948 Chevy.

Before long Pearsall also stripped the paint and interior, figuring that every pound would count on the race track. But like so many of Pearsall's plans, it remained just a dream. Fortunately, his plan to spray flocking over the entire interior also never materialized.

Within months of Pearsall's buying the car, it was a bare metal roller. Every morning Pearsall and a couple of the young motor heads (including Sherman, Murphy and Donald Gordon) who gathered out at his Tydol gas station would push the car out of one of the service bays. Then every night it would roll back into its stall. Somewhere along the line the Cisitalia engine was installed and the shock absorbers were removed, but that's where the progress ended. Any desire to drive the car on the road was thwarted by the New Jersey Department of Motor Vehicles, which refused to license a car with unapproved perspex (plastic) side and rear windows.

The rolling ritual went on into the late Fifties, when Pearsall towed the car to the Scotch Plains home of master panel-beater Emil Hoffman. By then, the car was covered with dents, especially in the rear where many pushers had left their imprints. Hoffman kept the car in his garage for about three years, using hammers and dollies to carefully work out the many "lean dents" which distorted the beautiful aluminum shape.

By 1962, Pearsall no longer had the gas station, and the partially assembled Cisitalia was an unwanted reminder of another uncompleted project. He agreed to sell it to college student Don Gordon, one of the Westfield boys who had gathered to talk about cars at the F.K. Hansgen and Son auto body shop or at Randy's filling station. Pearsall's



This tattered snapshot from 1962 shows the Cisitalia when it was Don Gordon's daily transportation.

incentive "to get rid of the car" was so great that Gordon recalls "Randy financed the purchase." Powered only by a rope from the car in front, Gordon flat-towed the car about 50 miles, from Westfield to Quakertown, New Jersey. Once there, he made and installed the first of many new head gaskets and cleaned out the braking system, carburetors and fuel tank. The car wasn't running, it was filthy and was home to a family of mice, but thanks to Hoffman's work, the body was absolutely straight, albeit in bare aluminum.

Once running, Gordon drove the car as often as he could for about six months, using it as his primary transportation to Trenton State College. But no matter what Gordon did, he was always blowing head gaskets, a problem that he readily admits could have been easily solved by "someone who knew what he was doing." Despite the lack of shock absorbers, Gordon found the car a "blast to drive." He wanted to install shocks, but couldn't find any that fit.

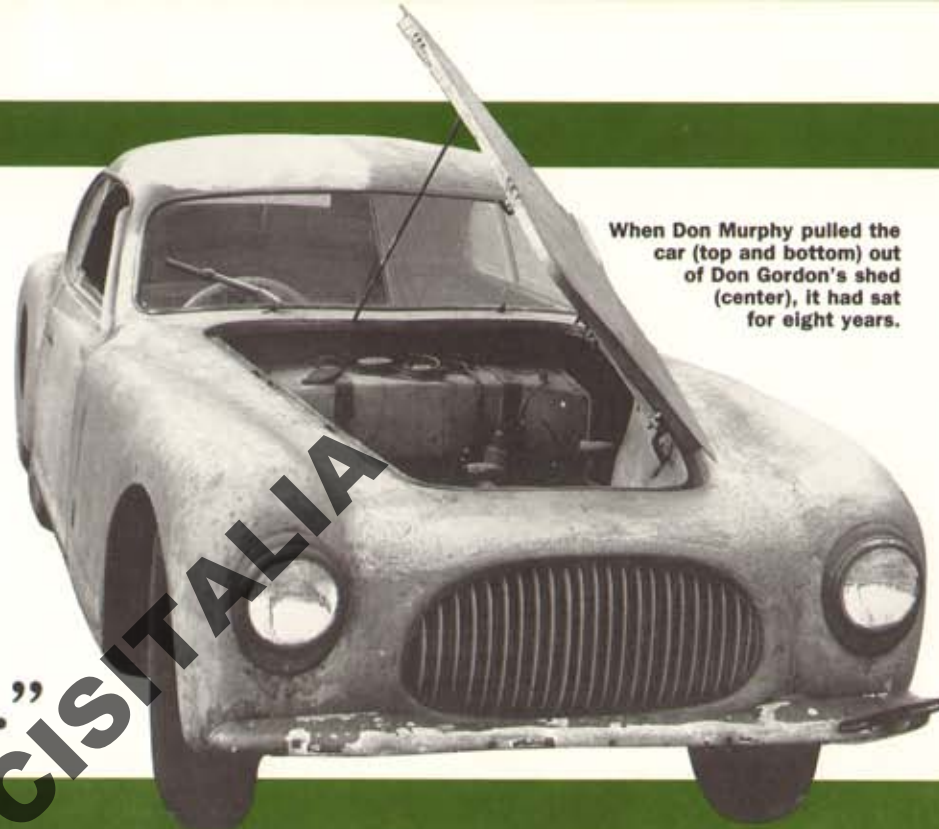
By 1963, thanks to its lack of a fan, the car had overheated yet again. This time, instead of simply blowing the head gasket, a job which Gordon had since mastered, the waterpump seized and sheared the drive pin in the nose of the camshaft. Gordon pulled the head to inspect the damage, and when he saw the big trouble he faced, he just left the head off and put the car away. When he got married and moved to nearby Pittstown, the car followed, spending the balance of the Sixties peeking out of an open shed and gathering dust. The car was in Pittstown so long, that it became a landmark whenever local residents would give directions . . . "turn at the old silver car."

And that's where the car still sat when Don Murphy and his young family drove out to Pittstown to go swimming one weekend in 1970. The moment he saw that dusty alloy car, he recognized it as Randy's. Banging on the door of the nearby house, he was amazed to see his old Westfield chum. After a short negotiation, Murphy owned the car he had dreamed of for over 15 years.

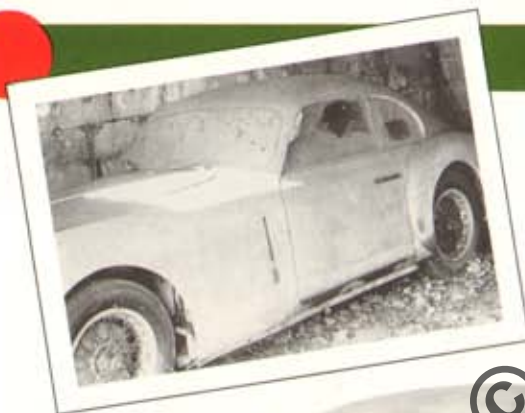
Ownership of the Cisitalia started with the tow home and a thorough cleaning of a car that had now been neglected for 16 years. Dust was inches deep over every-

The car was in Pittstown so long, that it became a landmark whenever local residents would give directions:

“turn at the old silver car.”



When Don Murphy pulled the car (top and bottom) out of Don Gordon's shed (center), it had sat for eight years.



thing, including the open cylinder bores. With a young daughter and a busy sales career, Murphy was away from home frequently. But he had the space to store the car and he could afford to wait. His travels also gave him the opportunity to gather the few missing parts, including the Cisitalia crest that had been stolen back in the Tydol days. One lucky day in 1974 or 1975, he found the crest, a cylinder head and a whole box of Cisitalia parts on Long Island. The price was high, but he managed a trade for some MG parts he already had. Like all the other pieces, he just put them away.

RESURRECTION



gradually, Murphy found the time to redo the braking system and other sub-assemblies, but the car was still a tired old non-runner. In the mid-Eighties Murphy rebuilt the engine, relying on his training as a mechanical engineer. All went smoothly until the aluminum body on one of the Weber carburetors disintegrated at the turn of a wrench. He finally uncovered a spare pair of Webers in Italy. Once they arrived—after a postal detour to the Phillipines—Murphy first fired up the old mill on Easter Sunday 1985. He recalls that it made a glorious sound—there was no exhaust system. But the turning point really came when Murphy made his last tuition payment in 1987. With the better part of a decade of tuition behind him, it was finally the Cisitalia's turn. In early 1989 with all components, trim and the engine removed, the rolling body was taken to Dieter's Garage in Aberdeen, Maryland. After long storage and many moves, the evidence of Hoffman's handiwork was



long gone, so the body was carefully straightened over a period of months. It was then primed and filled and sanded repeatedly until it was perfectly smooth. Using a two pack acrylic enamel, it was painted the blazing red color it wears today.

Meanwhile, Murphy was busy searching for appropriate fabrics to replace the corduroy originally used on the seats. Although Murphy didn't know the car's original color, he did know that the dashboard, seats and panels had started life maroon. But with the decision to paint the car red, he opted for a dark gray interior, finally uncovering the material he needed at a textile supplier in Massachusetts. The fabric, the original seats and panels, and new Wilton Wool carpeting were turned over to ECO Upholstry & Trim to be crafted into the Cisitalia's new interior.

Murphy also cut his own new plexiglass windows, discovering that he was missing the interior moldings that surround the windows. Gathering photos and papier maché patterns taken from another car, Murphy found English metal craftsman Tom Selby, who agreed to make replacement bezels. Selby also disassembled and restored the intricate covers for the beautiful Borrani wire wheels.

After six months in the paint shop, the Cisitalia arrived home in the summer of 1989. The final assembly involved reconnecting the wiring harness and installing the detailed engine. Murphy recalls the first drive of the partially completed car, chuckling when he thinks about the cheers from the neighbors along his quiet suburban street.



The little 1,100cc Cisitalia engine (above) pumped out over 60 bhp thanks to dual Webbers and careful tuning.



Murphy still recalls the first drive of the partially completed car, chuckling when he thinks about the cheers from the neighbors along his quiet suburban street.

I man & cars

One of my earliest recollections—I couldn't have been much older than three—is of trying to draw in crayon the rear view, with spare tire, of the family's Chevrolet two-door sedan. I was hooked on cars then, and things haven't changed much.

This typical American-boy fixation has left me some satisfaction and many expensive headaches over the years. My first car at age 20 was an Austin A-40, which had nice upholstery and a drive shaft shimmy over 50 mph. A year later, in 1949, I traded it toward an MG TC, and there were quite a few after that, each with days of glory and tales of woe. To prevent looking back, I avoided keeping any sort of orderly files—photos, service records and the like.

This marriage made in heaven between informed foresight and sheer carelessness has served me well, but once in a while it sparks regret, not on account of nostalgia, but because history cannot be served. Take the case of the Cisitalia I bought on desperate impulse in the summer of 1950. Who could have guessed the Cisitalia was such a rare bird as to occasion research 40 years later?

As a Yale student, I had been taken by friends in the School of Architecture to visit Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan. Learning that I was a car nut (as was he), Johnson invited me to help assemble an exhibition on automobile design (stubbornly dismissed as "styling" by the motoring press) at the Museum of Modern Art in the fall of 1951. The rest, as they say, is history—poorly recorded history.

Past events tend to acquire a rosy aura with hindsight, but it would be hard to forget the anxiety of tracking down cars for that Museum show. I flew to Chicago for the blessings and advice of D. Cameron Peck, who agreed to ship us his 1930 Mercedes SS. Another guru of car collecting, Briggs Cunningham,

loaned us an impeccable razor-edge Bentley, which he hadn't even told us he owned. To find a Cord, we were reduced to jotting down license numbers on the highway, and for the Cisitalia I had to volunteer as a buyer, following up a Sunday *Times* classified ad with a quick trip to the Washington, D.C., area.

The lady who sold me the Cisitalia, brought back from Italy in terrible condition (the car, not the lady) by her military husband, was delighted to see the last of it. Comparable delight flashed in the eyes of the Westchester body-shop artists, their names lost to memory, who covered its undulating form with patches of filler and metallic-blue paint, meanwhile fabricating bumpers from a photograph. Mechanically we contented ourselves with just getting the thing running.

When I drove the Cisitalia to the Museum—actually into it—the curator in charge of the show, Arthur Drexler, gasped at the sight. (Heart in mouth, I had also driven the Mercedes there.) And when the Bentley arrived from Connecticut, he pronounced it "truly worthy to stand beside the Cisitalia." This reception alone almost made the trip to Washington worth the grief and aggravation—almost.

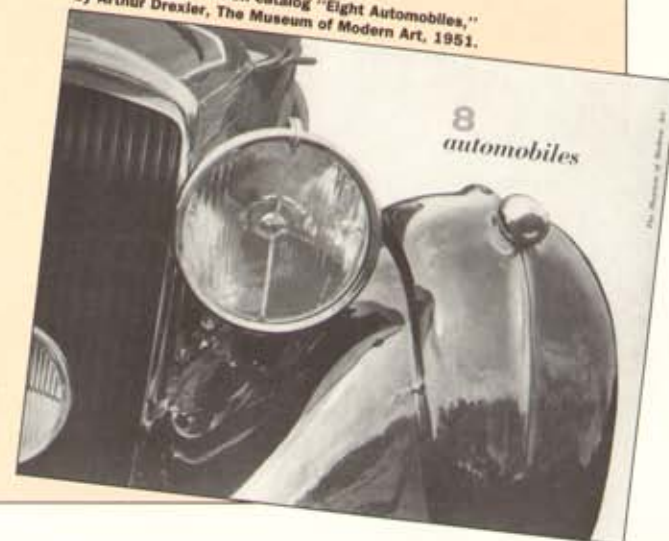
Later the Museum held another show, devoted to the influence of postwar Italian designers, and again I found myself working with Alexandre Georges, an architectural photographer as irrational as I about classical music and cars. Alex was probably the first person to take car pictures with an architectural camera, using both front and rear swings for parallax correction. We treated them as museum objects—an approach at odds with that of the motoring press which turned out to be a California clique. So after writing a few more times about cars, I gave up and sought honest employment writing for *Opera News*.

—John W. Freeman



John Freeman (left) consulted with the Museum of Modern Art on two automotive exhibits, working with photographer Alexandre Georges (right), who shot the cars for the *8 Automobiles* program (below).

Cover of the exhibition catalog "Eight Automobiles," by Arthur Drexler, The Museum of Modern Art, 1951.







In 1992 Murphy's Cisitalia (left) was displayed at the Baltimore Museum of Art (above).

Pressured by the impending Baltimore Concours in May 1991, Murphy managed to have the car 99 percent complete in time for the show, which also featured a Cisitalia Spider Nuvolari owned by Gary Ford. Although minor electrical and detail glitches held him back in the judging, Murphy was soon ready to attack the show circuit, winning awards that included a first place in his class at the New Hope Auto Show in 1991, Best Post-War Auto at the 1992 Burn Prevention Foundation Concours d' Elegance of the Eastern United States and the Most Aesthetic at the Milestone Car Society's meet in July 1992. In the midst of all the show activity, the car was back on display for several weeks in June 1992 at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Even after all these shows, to which it is trailered, the Murphy Cisitalia displays only 37,000 miles on its odometer—surely the legacy of a car which has spent almost 40 of its 46 years off the road.

The Cisitalia 202 coupe has long been recognized as one of the masterpieces of modern design—and one look is enough to explain why. Car number 042 is particularly important because it has probably introduced the remarkable and timeless Pininfarina design to more people than any other example of the marque. Of course, the red 202 coupe in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art is often mistakenly believed to be the original car from the "8 Automobiles" exhibit. This car, donated by Pininfarina in 1972, attracts many viewers during those rare times it's on display. However, it is only there because of the great critical acclaim earned by car number 042, which spends most of its time sitting quietly in a garage in a comfortable middle class neighborhood in a Baltimore suburb—about the last place you'd expect to find a museum piece fit for the finest collections in the world. But Don Murphy wouldn't have it any other way.⊗