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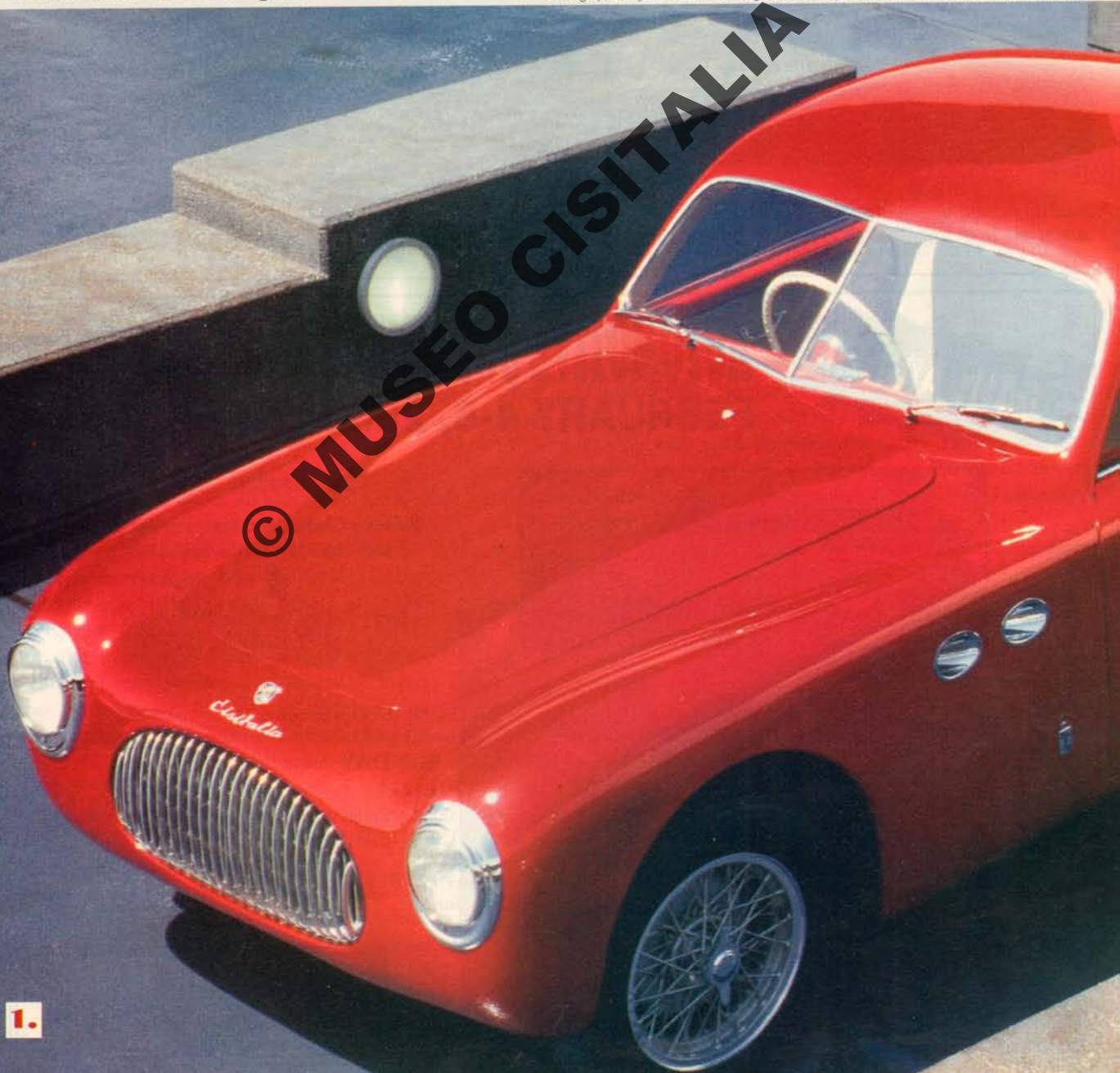
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# 1947 Cisitalia Type 202

*Text and Photos by Dennis Adler*

Photographed by Dennis Adler through the courtesy of Steve Tillack and the Petersen Museum.



1.



## The First Modern Sports Car



**T**he automobile was in his soul for so very long, his destiny, it seemed, was to become an automaker. For the better part of his life, his success took him in every direction but the one in which he so longed to go. In the end, wealthy Italian industrialist Piero Dusio sank his life's fortune into the dream of becoming an automaker, and he nearly succeeded. His greatest triumph came on the heels of insolvency, leaving behind a legacy that would forever link his name with the single most important sports car design of the 20th century, the Type 202 Cisitalia.

In the late 1930s, Dusio had managed to create an entire class of single seat race cars, known by the contraction for Consorzio Industriale Sportivo Italia, beautifully shortened to Cisitalia. (Italians are quite skillful at this: calling the enterprise by some endless string of clumsy words that abbreviate to one graceful, almost musical, term that no one ever forgets).

During World War II he planned to build and race cars, and when the dust settled in Italy, he set about the task with a talented Fiat engineer named Dante Giacosa, who designed a simple, Fiat-based race car which could be produced profitably in reasonable numbers. Dusio also hired former Fiat experimental engineer Dr. Giovanni Savonuzzi to put the car into production. The first example was tested by none other than the great Piero Taruffi, who Dusio also put on his payroll. By August 1946, Cisitalia SpA (the automotive division of Consorzio Industriale Sportivo Italia, which also manufactured sporting goods, bicycles, and textiles), had produced seven examples of the new Type D46 Monoposto.

The D46 Monoposto single-seaters used a multi-tubular

**1.** The Cisitalia 202, such as this beautiful 1948 model from the Caballerzia Collection, became the first modern sports car, establishing a school of design that would dictate the shape of European sports and GT coachwork for more than a decade.

**2.** Battista Pinin Farina (the family name was legally changed to Pininfarina in later years) was one of the first to use angled, split windscreens and extremely narrow A-pillars.

**3.** The graceful sweep of the Cisitalia's fender into the roofline is evident in this overhead view.



4. The dynamic lines of the Pinin Farina Cisitalia would become de rigueur on Ferrari and Alfa Romeo models of the late 1940s and early 1950s. This could as easily be the rear fenderline of a 212 Ferrari or Alfa 6C 2500.

5. Fastback roofline and wide backlight established a school of design that is practiced even to this day. It began here in 1947.

6. Piero Dusio's legacy is a car called Cisitalia, a short-lived marque that has endured for more than 50 years on the strength of a single design.

7. The Cisitalia interior was simple in design but elegantly rendered, accented by beautiful instrumentation and a purposeful arrangement of controls. All of the cars were righthand drive.

space frame, transverse leaf independent front suspension, torsion bar and coil rear, and a 3-speed gearbox coupled to a 1,089cc Fiat four-cylinder engine developing 62 horsepower. In their debut race, the Cisitalias took the first three places, and in 1947 racing legend Tazio Nuvolari drove a sports version of the Cisitalia to a second place finish in the Mille Miglia.

Orders for the D46 began to roll in, but by then Dusio was already running off on two other projects, development of a 1½ liter, 300-horsepower Grand Prix race car, and a production Cisitalia road car that would combine the sportiness of the racers with the comfort of a sedan. These were lofty plans for an unseasoned company, particularly given the tempestuous post-war European economy and a diminished market for sports and touring cars.

England, France, Germany, and Italy were still reeling from the destruction wrought by six years of war and the incalculable damage to their respective infrastructures. Italy, however, being a country motivated by its love of automobiles and motor-sports, was among the first to resume production following the war. Thus inspired, Senior Dusio was spending his fortune so rapidly in the postwar '40s he never noticed that his lucre had begun to vaporize.

He spent one million francs to ransom Dr. Ferdinand

Porsche from a French prison, for which the grateful genius repaid the favor by designing the scintillating four-wheel drive Cisitalia 12-cylinder Formula 1 Grand Prix car. Dusio's coffers were further drained by endless developmental costs for the D46 Monoposto, of which only 31 were sold, development of the 1947 and 1948 Cisitalia sports cars, and lastly, funding for the Formula 1 car designed by Dr. Porsche, which ultimately cost him more than 30 million lire to build.

By 1949, Consorzio Industriale Sportivo Italia ceased paying its bills, the GP car, after making its debut at the Turin Show in February, was shipped off to Argentina to elude creditors, and the lights went out in Turin. Dusio sold what was left and departed for Buenos Aires. What remained of the short-lived company was a handful of stunning Cisitalia 202 berlinettas and a 1949 spider. Several attempts by others to revive the marque in the 1950s would end in failure, leaving behind a trail of forgettable little cars unworthy of the Cisitalia name.

#### The First Modern Sports Car

For the Type 202, Savonuzzi did a preliminary layout at Dusio's request, however, it was Sergio Pinin Farina who finalized the architecture of the body and built the first two Cisitalia 202 coupes, one pale grey, the other metallic aquamarine. When the 202 appeared at the Villa d'Este Concours d'Elegance in

1947, this lovely creation rocked the automobile world both with the simplicity of its design and its fresh approach to sports car styling. Mind you, the sleek 1948 Jaguar XK-120, regaled as a modern sports car, was already outmoded in comparison to the year-older Cisitalia 202.

In Europe, the wide use of uni-body construction following World War II greatly diminished the demand and capacity for producing bespoke coachwork. Ferrari was one exception, still building cars in the manner of a decade before, delivering rolling chassis to local carrozzeria like Touring and Stabilimenti Farina.

Farina, which opened its doors in 1905, was one of the oldest body builders in Turin. From Farina came such talented designers as Mario Boano, Giovanni Michelotti, and of course, the youngest of the Farina brothers, Battista "Pinin" Farina. After leaving his brother Giovanni's company in 1930, Battista established Carrozzeria Pininfarina. From the late 1930s and well into the postwar era, the company produced bodies incorporating highly innovative features, such as angled windshields and horizontal radiator grilles. The Cisitalia 202 was the finest expression of Battista Farina's highly personal style, one that was both simple and functional in contrast to the then current French design idiom, which was to overstate every line of a vehicle with coachwork as complex as it was irrational.

Beginning in 1950, Pininfarina took the place of Stabilimenti Farina, which closed its doors after nearly half a century. Battista Farina and his son Sergio began working closely with Enzo Ferrari to design coachwork equal to the expectations of Ferrari owners, but it was the Cisitalia which established Pininfarina as Italy's premier atelier. Recalls Sergio Pininfarina, "[In 1947] my father designed the best car he ever did, the Cisitalia. This set the pace for the design of sports cars throughout the 1950s."

Indeed, it is virtually impossible to look at any European sports car built in the early postwar era and fail to see a resemblance to the Cisitalia. Among the cars influenced by the Pininfarina design were Fiat's own Otto Vu (8V) models, as well

as early postwar Alfa Romeos like the 6C 2500, and nearly all of Ferrari's early road cars, many of which were penned by the Pininfarina studio. "As I look at it today, the Cisitalia is still so simple, so well proportioned," observes Sergio Pininfarina. "It is a masterpiece, difficult to add anything to." It was to be the first genuine GT of the postwar era.

The granturismo movement within Italy, that of a body conceived as a single profile, rather than as a construct of separate panels (the traditional prewar design idiom of hood, fenders, body, and trunk, as separate pieces), began almost immediately after World War II, and it has since become customary to equate the greatest expression of this process with the Cisitalia Type 202. The sleek, envelope styling it exemplified gained momentum in the 1950s, particularly in the realm of high-performance sports car design, with smooth flowing bodies that satisfied both the eye of the customer and the ideals of the aerodynamic engineer.

The Cisitalia Granturismo Berlinettas produced in 1947 and 1948 were built atop simple Fiat 1100S mechanicals, but never mind the languid 4-cylinder inline monoblock engine beneath the hood, or the Italian automaker's ordinary underpinnings—it was the sweptback, hand-crafted steel body built over a bird-cage tubular frame that made the Cisitalia one of automotive history's most profound designs. Although the little Fiat engine developed a mere 50 horsepower, the aerodynamic lines of the Cisitalia allowed the car to cheat the wind and reach a top speed of 100 mph. Thus the Cisitalia became the symbol of the "enveloping body," a school of design which would be emulated throughout Europe for nearly two decades.

The significance of this car is perhaps best symbolized by its selection for the 1951 New York Museum of Modern Art exhibit "Eight Automobiles." It came to be regarded as the perfect example of sports car design. The first of its kind.

In 1972, Carrozzeria Pininfarina donated a 202 to MOMA's permanent collection, where the legendary Cisitalia now serves as an example of machine art.



The streamlined body of the Cisitalia blended hood, fenders, greenhouse, and rear deck into one continuous form. Nearly every Italian sports car designed in the early 1950s, in one way or another, emulated the Cisitalia's contours. This same school of design, in a later interpretation, led to the styling of the Porsche 911, a shape which has endured almost in its original profile for more than 35 years.