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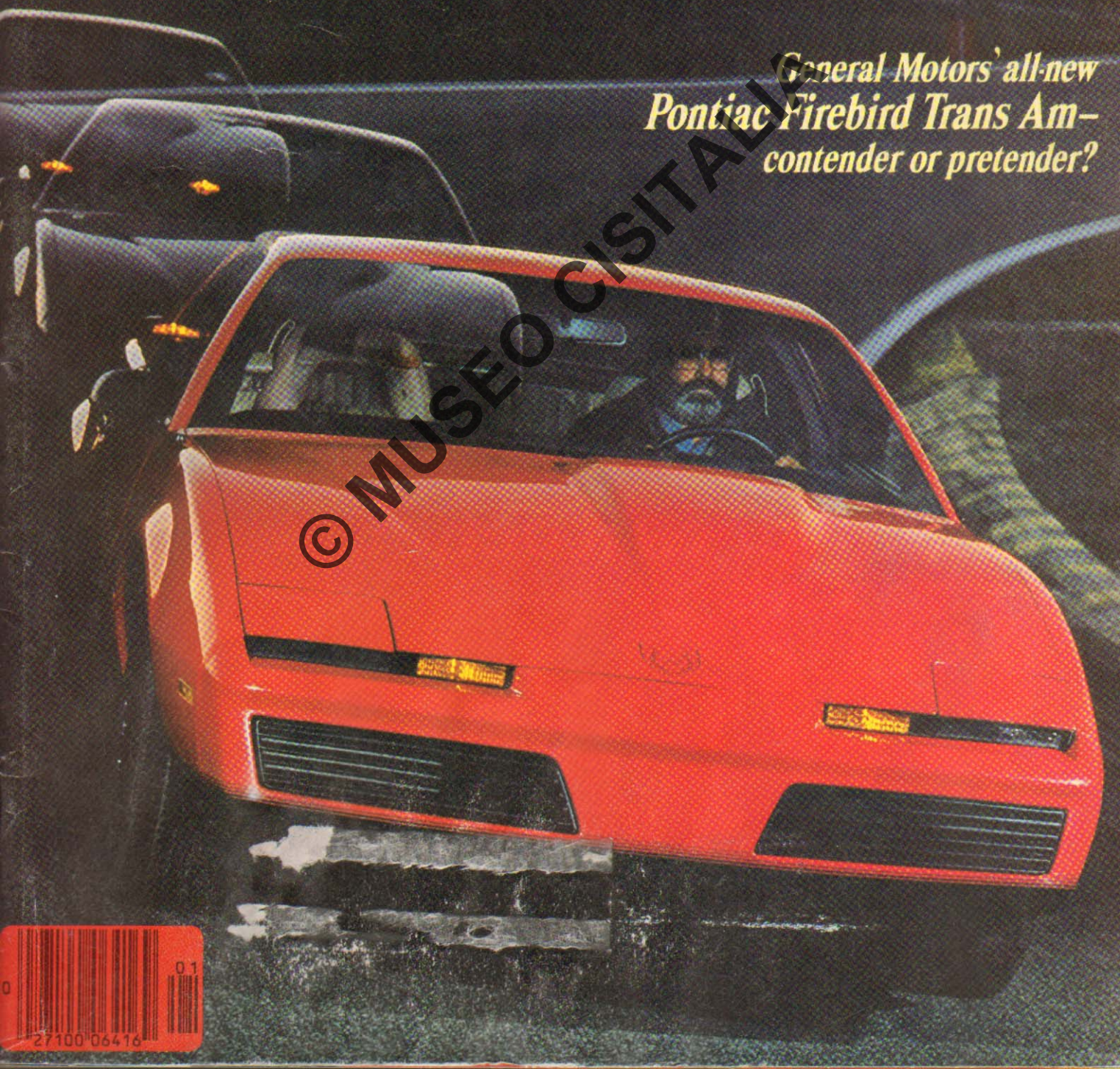

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Salon CISITALIA 202 COUPE GRAN SPORT

Savonuzzi's inspiration, Pinin Farina's refinement

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

PHOTOS BY BILL WARNER

IN 1944, WHEN the *Wehrmacht* was retreating northward from the Allied armies, almost every Italian engineer who was not a Fascist had two designs on his drawing board. One was a slow-moving military project to show to the Germans when they made an inspection. The other, a set of plans that surfaced immediately after the departure of the German group, was for *dopoguerra*—a postwar motorscooter, airliner or automobile. Dr Dante Giacosa, creator of the Fiat 500 *Topolino* before the war, was no exception. In a villa on the outskirts of Torino, provided for him by Piero Dusio, Giacosa was hard at work on the first Cisitalia.

This car, the well-known D46 (for Dusio 1946, the year of its appearance), was a simple yet highly refined single-seat racing car, powered by a development of the Fiat 1100 engine with twice the original unit's 32 bhp. Dusio, a former soccer star and amateur racing driver who was as much an entrepreneur as a successful businessman, saw clearly that Italy wanted nothing more than to return to the business of living, and that for many Italians living meant racing. What was more exciting than *la corsa,* watching Achille Varzi drive a *monoposto* on the streets of Torino, or Tazio Nuvolari a sports car in the Mille Miglia?

Cisitalia had been Dusio's name for his prewar sporting goods company (Compagnia Industriale Sportivo Italia) and now the melodious word was used for his new automotive enterprise. Like Enzo Ferrari, Dusio was a skilled organizer of available talent. He secured the services of Piero Taruffi as his test driver and development engineer (Taruffi was the prototype for all such drivers, absolutely essential to any racing team today), and Nuvolari as his star. The former ensured that Cisitalia machinery would be successful, the latter that it would become famous.

But the man most responsible for the very character of the Cisitalia automobile was the brilliant engineer, Giovanni Savonuzzi, hired by Dusio in August 1945, after Giacosa had returned to Fiat. The slim, elegant young Dr Savonuzzi would work for Cisitalia just 26 months (departing in October 1947 when Dusio insisted on compromising the already successful sports car program in order to proceed with the incredibly expensive and ultimately disastrous T.360 Grand Prix project). Savonuzzi was trained as an engineer, and had just come from the experimental engine department at Fiat Aviazione, but he was to make an indelible mark in the field of *carrozzeria*, inspiring no less a master than Battista Pinin Farina to produce one of the most significant examples of body styling in automotive history.

The design, the Cisitalia 202 coupe Gran Sport, was probably more responsible for establishing Italian prestige in the industrial world than any other single product. It was recognized as a momentous achievement at its first appearance in September 1946 and has not lost its historical position, nor its direct esthetic appeal, in the 35 years since. It does not matter that the foundations for the concept—a single metal skin stretched efficiently around a compact, invisible but clearly implied mechanical package—had already been laid by Pinin Farina, Savio and Touring Superleggera with their aerodynamic competition berlinettas on Lancia, Fiat, Alfa Romeo and BMW chassis during the years 1937–1940. The Cisitalia, although still a Gran Turismo machine, was a refinement of these early studies, a passenger car that made the strongest statement for all future automotive form.

Savonuzzi put the finishing touches to Giacosa's *monoposto* design, carefully organized the Cisitalia workshops at Corso Peschiera 251 in Torino, and started work on a 2-seat sports version of the little 1100. The D46 (of which about 40 were built during 1946–1948) had already shown handling qualities superior to those of larger, more powerful Grand Prix cars, and it was obvious that the design need only be widened to produce similar results in the sports category. Giacosa's greatest contribution had been the lightweight tubular frame, the first spaceframe used in a racing car. Savonuzzi had no trouble redesigning the frame for the sports car, which also had the same suspension layout as the last D46 *monoposti* (transverse leaf spring and A-arms in front, live axle with semi-elliptic leaf springs in back), but his greatest concern was the bodywork.

In contrast to his employer's impulsiveness, Savonuzzi's habits were deliberate and methodical. It is all the more remarkable that such an esthetically pleasing shape should result from this discipline; as a technician, he was concerned with the aerodynamics, but as a gifted designer—in the fullest sense of the word—he instinctively regarded *carrozzeria* as an art. Designated 202 CMM (Coupe Mille Miglia) as a berlinetta and 202 SMM in spyder form, Savonuzzi's 2-seat sports cars were simple yet elegant. The elliptical grille was inspired, Savonuzzi acknowledged, by that of the 1939 Mercedes-Benz W154/M163 Grand Prix car; this shape defined the hood contour as it swept to the rear, and the fenders were the smoothest possible forms running full length over the wheels. On the spyder the rear fenders had relatively conservative fins but on the second and third of the competition berlinettas the tailfins were taller and exotically curved. (The first berlinetta, built in a hurry from Savonuzzi's sketches by Rocco Motto and nicknamed *Cassone* [big box], was a somewhat slab-sided car much resembling the 1938 Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B Le Mans berlinetta by Touring. It is not significant in the development of the Savonuzzi/Pinin Farina style.)

The definitive berlinetta showed the careful study and artistic imaginations that Savonuzzi devoted to it. The most important single feature was a hood line below the height of the fenders; this was the happy result of the Cisitalia's small, dry-sump engine. The berlinetta had a sharply-raked vee windshield and

the roof tapered inward as well as downward to a very small Kamm tail. The underside of the car was as carefully studied as the upper; favorable airflow tests in the Politecnico di Torino *galleria del vento* were confirmed by a speed of 201 km/h (a whisker under 125 mph) actually achieved by the car, 202 CMM number 001, on the Torino-Milano *autostrada* in April 1947. It should be emphasized that this speed was reached with a 1089-cc, 4-cylinder engine producing only 61 bhp.

The construction of the CMM was the first independent project of Alfredo Vignale, who went on to produce many efficient and beautiful sports cars, especially the Ferraris of the early Fifties built to the designs of Giovanni Michelotti. The Cisitalia SMM spyder was derived directly from the berlinetta, but lacked the full spaceframe that extended up over the driver's head on the latter. The first open car was constructed by Garella in Torino; the subsequent spyders (approximately 20) were built by Stabilimenti Farina.

It was a spyder that made Cisitalia's first sports car appearance, in the Sassi-Superga hillclimb in Torino on May 15, 1947. Piero Dusio himself drove it to 3rd place overall. In the Mille Miglia on →

June 22 there were five Cisitalias entered: the CMM berlinetta 001 for Piero Taruffi/Buzzi, the *Cassone* berlinetta for Inico Bernabei/T. Pacini, and three spyders for Tazio Nuvolari/Francesco Carena (SMM 001), Eugenio Minetti/Piero Facetti (002) and Piero Dusio/Adolfo Macchieraldo (004); this last car, with a shorter, lighter chassis, was called the *Razzo* (rocket). In the legendary race, swept by rain at the finish, the great Nuvolari placed his 1089-cc Cisitalia 2nd overall to Clemente Biondetti's Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B berlinetta (nearly three times the Cisitalia's displacement, even if running without the customary supercharger), only 16 minutes behind at Brescia at an average speed only 1 mph slower for the 1000 miles. The little spyder had led for much of the race, including at Rome (a jinx for Mille Miglia competitors until Stirling Moss's victory in 1955); at the end, it was only the weather that gave Biondetti's closed Alfa the advantage over Nuvolari's spyder. Nuvolari naturally won the 1100-cc class, followed by Bernabei and Minetti, who were 3rd and 4th overall. The *Cassone* was the fastest car of all on the Torino-Brescia leg of the race, averaging 153.413 km/h (just over 95 mph) compared to 141.006 for the winning Alfa Romeo.

It was an almost incredible accomplishment for Cisitalia, and the retirement of the two hottest cars, Taruffi's CMM berlinetta and Dusio's *Razzo* spyder, was by comparison a minor disappointment. (But one would like to have seen Taruffi's Torino-Brescia average if he had lasted that far, remembering that the CMM was some 20 km/h faster in testing than the *Cassone*.) Linked with Nuvolari, the hero of all Italy, the name Cisitalia had achieved fame in one day. Several months after the race Dusio sought and received permission from the great driver to name the open 2-seat model the Spyder Nuvolari. Within the year, linked with the already famous Pinin Farina, the name Cisitalia would achieve a less dramatic but possibly more lasting fame.

While the SMM and CMM competition cars continued their participation in the many Italian sports car events, and later in Argentina and the United States, the next phase in Dusio's seemingly irresistible success story was underway—the development of a production Gran Turismo car. Before turning the project over to Pinin Farina, Dusio had already asked for sketches from Savonuzzi: "I want a car that is wide like my Buick, low like a Grand Prix, comfortable like a Rolls-Royce and light like our single-seat D46." Savonuzzi's GT design, following logically on the shape of the competition spyder and berlinetta, received Dusio's full approval and was submitted to Pinin Farina as an initial concept. It in no way diminishes the accomplishment of Pinin Farina to say that he took the wisest course in refining the inspiration of Savonuzzi.

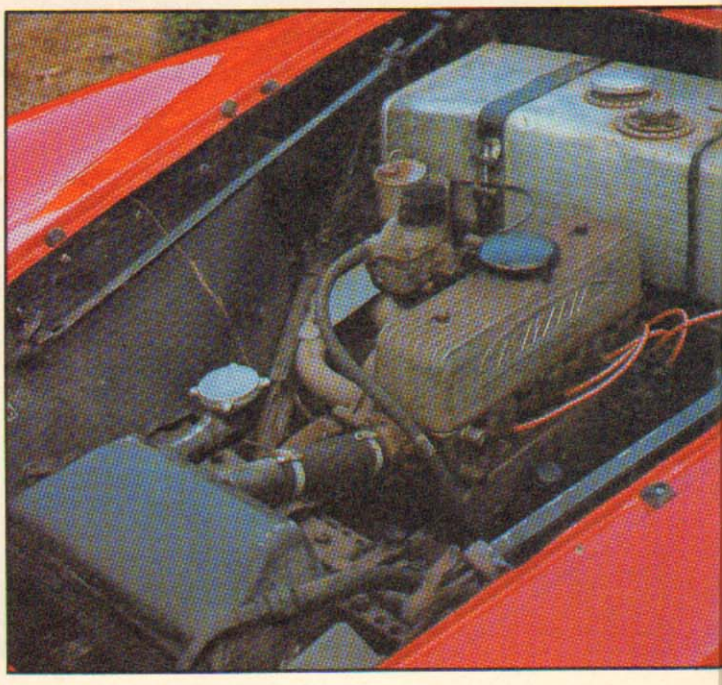
The engineer's "sketch" (actually a finished perspective rendering, accompanied by 4-view dimensioned plans) already dispensed with the exaggerated rear treatment of the CMM, impractical for a GT car, but the front half retained the character of the earlier cars. Pinin Farina, while producing a shape of subtly different contours and completely different dimensions throughout, also kept this character intact. The master *carrozziere* was aware of the task he was undertaking, and possibly its great significance, and he was not too proud to work from the design provided by Savonuzzi. Starting from the back of the car and working forward, Pinin Farina developed the nearly perfect form, the first absolute refinement of the new concept that had been handled tentatively by many designers in the mid-Thirties and was ready for resolution in the late Forties. While every square centimeter of the Cisitalia 202 coupe's surface showed complete authority, there are several aspects which deserve special consideration.*

First of all, the hood, lower than the fenders, was maintained; this cannot be overemphasized as the key to the Cisitalia's true impact. Pinin Farina reduced the angle of vee in the windshield to make it more harmonious with the restrained rear third of the car, which was the coachbuilder's great contribution along with the refinement of every detail. Among the most beautiful of the details was the construction of the grille, formed by 23 thin vertical blades that made it convex vertically and horizontally. The hood, window, door and trunk openings were cut in harmony with the form rather than imposed upon it. While wire wheels had an esthetic appeal all their own, especially on a competition car of the period, Pinin Farina emphasized the simple elegance of his design by fashioning full wheel covers with 64 thin radial slots. (In the writer's opinion, the reversion to the wire wheel, on the later Cisitalia and on other cars which were not even designed with them, is inappropriate to modern styling and constitutes a "sporty" cliché.)

Pinin Farina completed two Cisitalia coupes in the fall of 1947. The first, painted light metallic green (an excellent color for the form), made its public debut at the Fiera de Milano on September 16; it was subsequently shown in the *concours d'elegance* at Villa Olmo near Lake Como and then at the Paris salon on October 23. The second, painted pearl gray and wearing whitewall tires that made the overall impression a bit precious, was exhibited at the Salone della Carrozzeria in Milano from November 6–16.

The 202 Gran Sport went into production at the end of 1947; in all, about 170 cars were built through 1952, including about 60 of the cabriolet version. The majority of these were built by Stabilimenti Farina (an older firm from the same family as Battista Pinin Farina's but commercially separate) and Vignale. With the two Farina shops just down the street from each other it was common for the Cisitalias' wooden body bucks to be wheeled back and forth according to production requirements; in fact, the same form was even used by Stabilimenti Farina (with numerous detail variations) for several Ferrari 166 Inter coupes and cabriolets. Then, there was the basically similar French Simca 1200, an esthetically more successful variation which has been conspiciously absent from later assessments of Farina's work. A not very flattering imitation of the Cisitalia was the use of its form for various American fiberglass specials (in the same way that the Ermini spyder body, inspired by Scaglietti's Ferrari 750 Monza, would be lifted several years later).

Real Cisitalias were sold in the United States for $6800 (about what a Ferrari cost then!) by Max Hoffman, Fergus Motors and



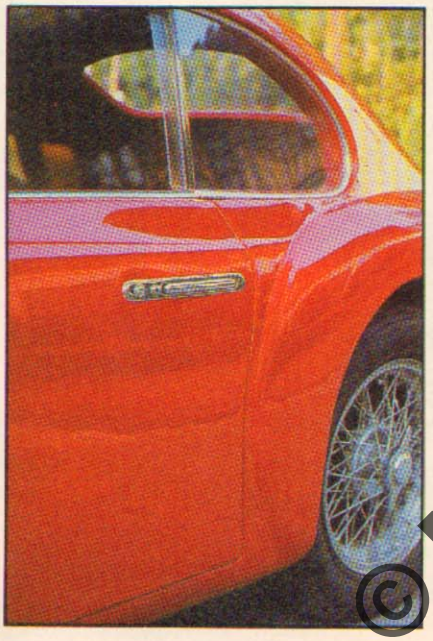
*For a detailed account of the creative processes of Savonuzzi and Pinin Farina, as well as the entire story of Dusio's enterprise, the reader is directed to Nino Balestra and Cesare de Agostini's superb book *Cisitalia* (Automobilia, viale Monte Santo 2, Milano, Italy), distributed in the U.S. by Motorbooks International.

Tony Pompeo. Although some might have considered the price outrageous for a 55-bhp, 1760-lb coupe (at a time when cars were judged by the pound), there were a number of enthusiasts who appreciated its nimble beauty and 96-mph top speed (at a time when the most powerful American sedans, despite much higher claims, probably barely exceeded 85). As for fuel economy, nobody in the United States was giving it much thought then, but the 202 delivered 28 mpg.

Ironically, the Cisitalia's greatest impact occurred after Dusio's romance with Teutonic engineering had exhausted the firm's once-substantial resources. (The T.360, designed by Dr Ferdinand Porsche, was developed under the supervision of engineers Eberan von Eberhorst, Karl Rabe and Rudolf Hruska, with Carlo Abarth as team manager.) In 1951 the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented the 202 coupe Gran Sport as part of its exhibition "Eight Automobiles." The Cisitalia was established as a work of art for an audience which would never have known about it otherwise; through the generous publicity afforded the show, the real audience was far larger than those who actually visited the museum exhibit. At that time, long before the emergence of the "world car," automobile design was seen as displaying national characteristics (even moral judgments seemed to be involved) and the Cisitalia represented Italy in masterly fashion. This conception of design—and automobile design itself—has changed in the ensuing 30 years but the Cisitalia's place in history remains secure.

The original car exhibited in 1951 was not, as is generally believed, a part of the permanent museum collection. In 1972, Sergio Pinifarina, at the request of the museum's curator, decided to donate another Cisitalia to the permanent collection. He bought the car shown here—chassis number 057, with engine number 099—from Massimo Colombo, who had purchased the car in Venice in the late Sixties in very bad condition. The car was then restored at the Pininfarina factory. The new car, with portholes in the fenders (as on Savonuzzi's original CMM—was Dusio amused when Buick copied them?) was photographed after a recent repainting and detailing by Anthony West in Long Beach, California, under the aegis of Fiat Motors of North America.

To return to 1948: For Cisitalia's second Mille Miglia, two production 202 Gran Sports were entered as part of the factory's official 5-car team, all painted silver (possibly Abarth's influence). Guido Scagliarini's Gran Sport, a satisfactory 5th overall and 4th in the 1100-cc class, was the most successful Cisitalia: 16 had been entered, counting the private entries. Taruffi's CMM berlinetta (the second car, 002) again retired, as did Dusio's special spyder, and the triumph of 1947 was not repeated. But private owners continued to run their 202 Gran Sports with some success well into the Fifties. In 1952 the 202 D, with BPM engines



Dante Giacosa's 1100-cc monoposto Cisitalia (below).

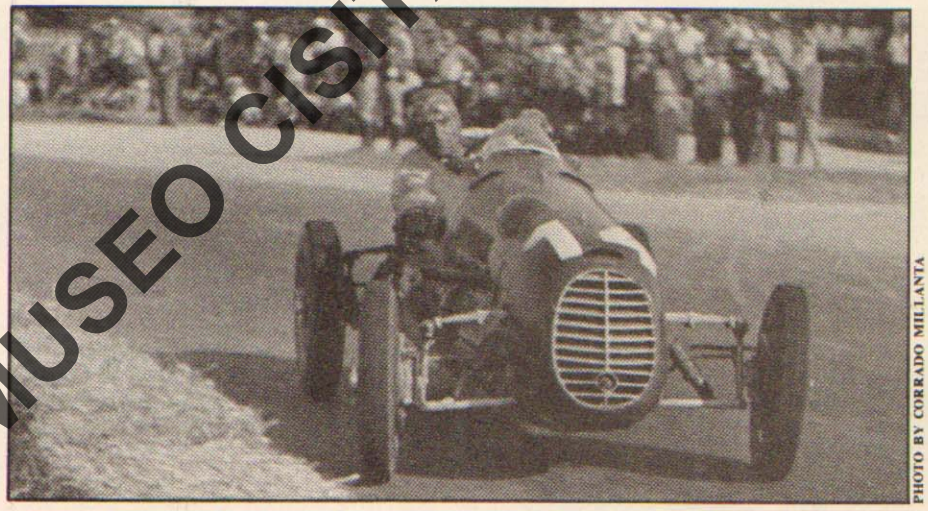


PHOTO BY CORRADO MILLANTA

of 1996 and 2772 cc, failed to generate the necessary finance for a Cisitalia comeback, despite power outputs of 130 and 165 bhp respectively. One coupe and one cabriolet with each size of engine was built. Carlo Dusio, Piero's son, ran the larger-capacity coupe, stripped and tuned to produce 180 bhp, in the Mille Miglia that year but dropped out with clutch failure.

One is tempted to imagine Cisitalia's history if Piero Dusio had retained Savonuzzi and built steadily on the successful sports and Gran Turismo programs, rather than embarking on the grandiose T.360 adventure. It is idle to suggest that its career might have matched Ferrari's, or even Maserati's, but the company's three strong successes out of four programs made an excellent beginning. The Cisitalia impact—by Giacosa's D46 *monoposto*, Nuvolari's performance in the Mille Miglia, and Pinin Farina's 202 coupe, all within three years—was of more significance than some manufacturers have achieved in 50. The common factor was Giovanni Savonuzzi, whose departure was Cisitalia's greatest loss. Savonuzzi later worked for Ghia, and then Chrysler (on the gas turbine project), before returning to Fiat, ultimately as consultant to the aviation division. It may have seemed an anticlimax after his remarkable early success.