

An Italian Kiss For Life

It is said you never forget your first true love. I met mine in the summer of 1964 when my good friend Alex showed me a car his father had purchased from Chinetti's, a 1964 Ferrari 330 GT 2+2, Serial #6539.

I remember it as a metallic sort of aqua color with light tobacco leather interior. For some reason, the color blended beautifully with the interior and to this day I believe the four place cars look excellent in metallic colors. This was a spectacular car, especially to an enthusiastic 16 year old who had grown up in Ford sedans, but dreamed of owning and driving exotic European sports cars. What transpired over the next 10 years was a story of love found, then lost, then found again.



Ferrari 330 GT 2+2 Serial #6539 in 1965

The events of my life with this car are as clear today as when I first sat in the huge leather seats and listened to the phenomenal sound of the 4 litre V-12. Despite its often criticized four headlight styling, it was the sound, the smell and the feel of this car which captivated me.

What was more fun was that Alex was 15. He couldn't drive . . . but I could! And so began a romance, replete with joys and heartbreaks, to rival the truly great international love affairs of the cinema.

I remember the first time I drove the car. Turning the key 180 degrees, pressing the fuel pump switch and waiting for the rapid ticking of the fuel pump to slow, signaling it was ok to start the car. For anyone familiar with Ferrari's of that era, this is just an everyday occurrence but for a wide eyed kid used to driving Ford Fairlanes, this was magic. But the best was yet to come.

Cranking the starter always sounded like there was no oil in the car but when the engine sprung to life, the sound was unbelievable. It was so exhilarating, that for the whole time I owned it, I would drive with the windows down, just to listen to the exhaust note, even in the winter!

For two summers, Alex and I enjoyed the car. Only the educated few really knew what it was. That was, of course, until we would sprint past them in a moment of youthful exuberance.

One was the driver of a '65 Corvette. I remember Alex was driving and we had just turned onto the road going past the Stone House in Wyomissing. Over time we learned that at 3500 RPM the engine would really pull so Alex held it in first gear as the Corvette closed in behind. He floored it and we were off. The Corvette reacted but was no match for the Ferrari. We roared three blocks to a stop sign at the

top of a hill. I'll never forget as Alex hauled the car to a stop, he looked in the rear view mirror and said "I hope that Corvette stops as good as it goes!"

We were both on the swimming pool diving team and were permitted to go to other pools to "practice" for upcoming meets. So it was that for two summers we drove the Ferrari from pool to pool ostensibly to try the diving boards but in reality for "chercher la femme." Then it was off to college and some time later, Alex's father sold the car. I was understandably heartbroken but then it was his car and, well, I'd always have those summers.

Fast forward a few years. Graduated from college, back in Reading and thoughts returned to cars and racing. A brief foray into sports car hillclimbs ended due to lack of funds (and mechanical talent). So if you can't afford them, I thought, photograph them. Good idea by itself, but little did I realize that my new hobby would reunite me with the Ferrari under the most extraordinary circumstances.

I had a part time job at a camera store, mixing the hobby with a little income (and getting cameras at cost!). One evening an older gentleman strode up to the counter. We started talking about cameras and racing cars. Some of his stories were a bit hard to believe and I put it down to enthusiasm and eccentricity. Over time we developed a friendship around our mutual interests and then it happened.

He told me he had a Ferrari he wanted to sell. I asked what kind and he told me it was a 330 GT 2+2. I told him I had once driven one, owned by an executive in Wyomissing. Astonishingly he told me it was that car, he was selling. Thus in the fall of 1972 I was going to see it again.

On a cold, dreary November day, I saw the car and could not believe it. It was, to say the least, a near disaster. The car was sitting in a small apple orchard in front of his house. The beautiful metallic paint was gone, painted over with a burgundy color which was weathered and dull. The windshield was cracked, the front bumper was missing, and there was a huge dent in the right rear from a spin into an embankment. It hadn't been driven in years, the tires were bald and the brakes were gone. It was as if you were just reunited with your high school sweetheart who spent the last 10 years in an abusive relationship. Love and pity overwhelmed me and I was determined to save the car.



The 330 GT in the apple orchard in 1972

I struck a deal to buy it for \$5,000. Now that may not sound like much, but in 1972 it was a significant sum for a bank trainee. My annual income was not a whole lot more than that so I set about trying to fix whatever I could.

The brakes were the first order of business. After all, since it was no longer nice to look at, I really wanted to drive it. Ultimately I resigned myself to seeking professional help. So off it went to Algar Ferrari in Rosemont, with a long list of problems. Some time, and some serious dollars later, the car came home. Love was back. The scars were still there but I could drive it. So who says money can't buy happiness?

Then disaster struck again. Something broke, causing the right bank to smoke like a mosquito spraying truck. Back to Algar and a few more serious dollars later I was back in business with one nagging problem. No overdrive. I'd try it from time to time hoping it would work, but only later did I realize it was simply the switch which had become inoperable from non-use.



To Algar - the dented quarterpanel is prominent

And then it happened. Late one Friday night (actually early the next morning, I was, after all in my 20's) I was headed home and hit the overdrive. It worked! That was it, I thought. Now I could really find out what this car would do. But for lack of a suitable test track I'd be able to let the car do what it was designed to do, go fast!

Ah, but this is America, and ingenuity is the stuff of which we are all made. There were, after all, a few expressways near town. They were new, smooth and hardly used, especially at 3:00 o'clock on a Saturday morning! Surely, in a pinch, one of them could substitute for a more proper testing venue!

So off I went to what I hoped would be a safe, if slightly illegal rendezvous with destiny. I headed south on my chosen expressway. The overdrive was working perfectly and at the end of the expressway I turned back north. The engine was running beautifully and the sound was exceptional. Seatbelt firmly fastened and windows up, it was time.

As I came to a long straight stretch I was in fourth gear at about 90 mph. Halfway along the nearly half-mile straight I hit overdrive and by the end of the straight I was doing about 140 mph. Well, I thought, no sense backing off now. The road curved slightly to the left and down a long hill. The car was rock steady through the curve and I stayed on it down the hill. Halfway down, the tach read 6,400 and the speedometer read 155 mph.¹ The car was unbelievably stable, no front end drift common in mid and rear-engined cars. Mission accomplished. I now fully understood why people buy Ferraris. I never did it again.

My real goal was to properly restore the car. However, after a few visits to good restoration shops, reality set in. I realized I would never

have the money to properly restore the car. It was the love thing all over again. Even though car was not regarded as a desirable Ferrari I hoped someone would be able to properly take care of it. So, I decided to sell.

The buyer was from Long Island, an acquaintance of one of my friends at the bank. I'll never forget, I couldn't bear to see it go. So I drove it to my friend's house, turned over the keys and that was the last I saw the car. Love was found, lost, found again and now forsaken.

Over the years I often wondered what happened to the car. I was hopeful it was all right but convinced I would never know. Then it happened. In early summer 1990 the phone rang and a unknown voice with a heavy Italian accent asked me if I had ever owned a Ferrari.

It was our own Pietro Castiglioni, Director and genius behind the annual Reading Ferrari Concours. We talked a few minutes and then he told me the car was on the cover of Cavallino magazine. Incredible, I thought but it couldn't be mine. Then he told me it had won Best in Class at an FCA National Concours. More incredible, but no, surely it wasn't mine.

Just recently he gave me a copy of the Cavallino issue with the article on the car. The serial number was listed as #6579. Oh well, it was great to have lived with the thought that the car was "ok" but it was the wrong number. But Pietro knows his Ferraris and if he said it was my car, well I just had to find out.

I called Doug Pirrone of Berlinetta Motorcars, the man who restored the car. His wife told me that the article was in error. The serial number really was #6539 (a misprint in the magazine)! As I read the Cavallino article it reflected exactly, my memories of the car.

It had undergone a total restoration (it needed it!). Doug had painted it black. Janet, his wife told me he felt the color helped reduce the apparent size of the car. The Cavallino article applauded the color selection saying "the owner/restorer had been inspired to paint the body a lustrous black, which was . . . absolutely dazzling." It went on to say the, "deep lustrous black paint, set off by the generous glass and the appropriate chrome work, make this model look exactly like what it really was, and is - a high speed luxury touring machine."

I couldn't have said it better. The interior, with leather, carpet, wood and a touch of chrome, was described as "a small sitting room on wheels." This was exactly what I remembered. The sumptuous leather seats and huge steering wheel gave a feeling of refined comfort and security. The author concluded the overall effect made the car "appear like a scaled down Rolls-Royce of another era, which . . . may have been the intent of the men from Maranello all along." Again, I could not agree more!

For owners of four place Ferraris, these exceptional high speed touring cars, the Cavallino article (Cavallino #57, June/July 1990) is a must read. I believe these cars are just as the author described the 330 GT, "something for the mature gentleman and gentlewoman to voyage in."

I also think that red, however brilliant on the sportier cars, is not the color for these cars. I agree with the author that red absorbs "highlights, reflections, and shadows, and its brilliant 'redness' tends to overwhelm everything else." Not all jewelry is gold, not all wine is champagne, and not all Ferraris should be red.

¹ Should this article be read by any law enforcement officials, the statute of limitations has probably run out long ago and I will, if captured, disavow any knowledge of these activities!

The car is now closing in on 40 years old, a minor miracle considering that in 1974 at the tender age of ten it was in serious trouble. I can only applaud Doug Pirrone for his compassion for the car and his determination to do what I could not do, restore it to the brilliant and luxurious condition it had been in when I first drove it at 16.

It is a testimony to his work and attention to detail that it recently sold at Christie's for a price well in excess of that for which similar models are currently selling. I am sure the new owner will enjoy it and hope that he, as should many others, will turn a deaf ear to those pundits who have dismissed these models as "nice". They are what they were designed to be, exceptional, *very* rapid and quietly handsome luxury automobiles to rival anything on the road today.