

# Ex-Gendebien, Ginther, Shelby... and Warhol?

The fastest Ferrari Monza was an 857S built for playboy team boss John Edgar. It was once owned by a Pop Art legend, says **Mick Walsh**, who is captivated by its colourful past

PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MANN





Spacious cockpit feels high and exposed, while transaxle gearchange is tricky but quick. Right: hand-painted crest for John Edgar's equipe

**T**oday, the discovery of a Ferrari's early history as a works racer – with action on the Targa and at Dundrod – would probably be celebrated, but millionaire team owner John Edgar had quite different ideas when he realised that the new 857 Sport he'd bought from the factory was a 'used' racer. Why Enzo and his US importer Luigi Chinetti thought that they could pull a fast one over the tough, no-nonsense industrialist is a mystery. America, and particularly California, had a strong amateur racing scene that tempted wealthy enthusiasts such as Edgar and Tony Parravano to indulge in exotic Italian machinery for rising stars including Phil Hill, Ritchie Ginther and Carroll Shelby. Competition was fierce as these young guns fought to make their names and step up to overseas contracts. Edgar was impressed by the performance of the four-cylinder Monzas at the Nassau Speed Week in December 1955, and instantly called Chinetti in New York to order one to replace his outdated 375 Plus. Early in February '56, a spectacular Scaglietti-bodied beauty arrived at LAX airport, but it wasn't the

860 Monza that he'd ordered. The sexy body may have been fresh – although already damaged during the transatlantic trip – but the chassis and engine weren't. When started up in the San Fernando Valley workshop of Edgar's driver Jack McAfee, the worn engine smoked ominously. Not what you'd expect, having forked out \$17,000 for the latest Italian exotic.

Had Edgar's crew looked carefully at the chassis, they would have spotted welded repairs. Five months earlier, Belgian ace Olivier Gendebien had heavily crashed this very chassis during practice for the Tourist Trophy race when he lost it exiting the infamous Wheeler's corner at Dundrod. The body had been scrapped and an 857S-style shell fabricated. The new, long-stroke 3½-litre unit had proved its worth when Eugenio Castellotti matched the Mercedes 300SLRs on the Targa, because the engine's low-down torque was perfectly suited to tight road courses. This taller new 'four' sat higher in the chassis, so Scaglietti's body men contrived two smooth bonnet bulges to accommodate the twin-cam's wide-angle head. Those "sexy hood breasts" as Edgar called them, matched to a racy D-type-style fin on the head fairing, resulted in one of

the best-looking 1950s Ferrari sports-racers. A slim profile – with exposed sills and wide-rim Borrani wires packing the arches – enhanced its lean, aggressive stance. The final touches were American-style race numbers, Mobil Pegasus sponsorship plus a stars-and-stripes shield on the fairing. Back in Europe, the works 857S chalked up some impressive results before the Testa Rossa arrived. Maurice Trintignant triumphed in Agadir and Dakar, while Peter Collins won the tough Giro de Sicilia in April with photographer Louis Klemantaski riding shotgun.

Edgar's 'new' 857S was hastily prepared for its American debut at Palm Springs, but McAfee didn't stand a chance against Shelby in Scuderia Parravano's mean 4.9-litre V12 410 on the open, fast airfield desert circuit. He still came second though. After a win at Stockton, the Edgar team truck – loaded with new Porsche 550 and 857S – headed north to the scenic wooded venue at Pebble Beach. A pack of quick Ferrari 'fours' lined up for the 100-mile Del Monte Cup, in which McAfee chased hard in the 857S behind Hill and Shelby. Tragically, the race was to be the last around the Monterey pines after Ernie McAfee (no relation to Jack) crashed fatally into a tree at



Turn 6, his blue 121LM nearly cannoning back across the narrow track and hitting the 857S.

Edgar's frustration with Ferrari continued following a second 3½-litre engine failure during first practice at Cumberland in May. The straight-talking American threatened to sell his Ferraris and switch to Porsche, so a humbled Enzo instructed its immediate return for a rebuild. Having just sold several inherited farms in Ohio, Edgar was richer than ever. First he ordered a 410 Sport, then he signed up Shelby for his team. The tall Texan much preferred the big V12, but still drove the 857S on a regular basis through '56, winning at Seattle, Montgomery and Mansfield. The fact that Enzo had sold Edgar a 'used' race car partly fuelled Shelby's distrust of Ferrari, a feud that would continue with the Cobra and GT40. The Texan's last drive in the 857S was at Pomona in '57, but he went off into the hay bales with brake failure. After the body had been bashed out, Edgar sold 0588/M to Stan Sugarman, an Arizona industrialist who enlisted McAfee – and later Ginther – to drive it. The young, crew-cut Californian Ginther finished fourth at the first Laguna Seca meeting.

America's amateur racing scene had slowly started to turn more professional, with paid drivers, start money and bigger prizes. Like so many European sports-racers, the sweet-handling 857S was further exploited when Sugarman replaced the tired four-banger with a Corvette V8. At some point in the early '60s it turned up in a repossession warehouse in Texas, where

Left: spectacular 1955 body style by Scaglietti is the second on this chassis. Below: Jack McAfee lines up at Beverly Airport, Massachusetts in July '56



Aurelio Lampredi-designed, long-stroke 3½-litre dohc 'four' was the best Monza engine. Below: Shelby poses by crashed 857S at Pomona



## 'YOU HAVE TO REALLY WORK AT EVERYTHING ON THE CAR TO GET THE BEST OUT OF IT'

Oscar Koveleski, the Polish-born enthusiast who kickstarted slot-car racing and Can-Am, acquired it engineless. Another Chevy transplant was done and Koveleski campaigned it for three years, regularly upstaging younger machinery. Then sprayed yellow and looking tatty, the 857 was mysteriously bought by New York artist Andy Warhol who – story has it – never learnt to drive. The 10-year-old Ferrari was to have featured in a stillborn spoof of *The Yellow Rolls-Royce*. Instead the 857 Sport remained locked away in a Manhattan basement car park until it was found by Tiny Gould in the late '60s.

By that time the UK's historic racing scene had taken off with the JCB series, and the 857S returned to Europe when Chris Renwick bought it. Repainted red and fitted with a 250GT V12, it made a brief appearance at Silverstone before

Carrado Cupellini found it an enthusiastic new home with Jean-Claude Bajol.

David Cottingham vividly recalls his first sighting of the 857S in 1969: "Chris Renwick was bringing in loads of exciting cars, and phoned one day about a Ferrari he'd just found. I was working in my Northwood garage, and Chris arrived in this fabulous machine with a fin. The long-nosed D-type is my dream car, so the 857 really appealed. I drove it around the block, but I had just borrowed to get a Lightweight E-type so I didn't have the money to buy it."

The respected Ferrari specialist never forgot the 857S and, in early 2011, after much research and engine trading, the famous car and its motor were reunited at DK Engineering's Hertfordshire premises so the restoration could at last begin. The pressure was on, with the challenge of getting it finished in time for the Goodwood Revival. As the car was stripped, the Cottingham team tracked down historic photos of 'Number 98' and struck gold with Edgar's son William, who had an extensive archive of his dad's competition exploits. After Edgar had discovered that Ferrari had rebuilt an ex-works 1955 Monza rather than supply a new car, the freshly arrived racer was photographed in detail to prove the American's case. These shots of the engine and rear suspension proved invaluable. Edgar junior had fond memories of the "sex object that won a few races a long time ago", and was excited by the restoration of the "much missed" car. Bob Dusek, owner of the sister 857, was also a great help, and even sent architectural-standard drawings of the missing engine mounts. "We couldn't have done this without Bob," says Cottingham.

With the chassis revealed, the DK team found repairs confirming 0588/M's European history and Gendebien's crash. Despite its extensive American racing life, the second body was in remarkable shape. "The bonnet and boot were reskinned, and small dents were fixed, but there was no evidence of a major shunt," says Cottingham. "Bodylines did a sensitive restoration and Adrian George at Spraytech did a great job of the paintwork." The engine – with its special screw-in liners and massive twin hairpin valve springs

– proved complicated to sort: “When these Lampredi designs are right they’re great engines, but they are difficult to work on. Getting a gas-tight seal in the head is critical, though the top end is stronger than an early Monza’s. It gave 270bhp at 5800rpm on the dyno, but with loads of torque. With such a massively heavy crank, it’s also much smoother than an 860 Monza.”

Slowly, over last summer, the car started to come together including new instruments made in Italy. After those evocative race numbers, Mobil Pegasus and American shield had all been hand-painted on the body, they began testing just weeks before the Revival. Cooling dramas – plus an oil-pressure surge caused by blocked filters – meant that the stunning machine arrived at Goodwood having barely run, and Cottingham’s son James had little experience of its handling.

After a few tentative laps, James pulled into the pits to check over the car before going out to post a grid time. Quickly the commentators picked up on the impressive pace of the 857S and, even limited to 5000rpm, he took pole by 3 secs from Nick Wigley’s hot Cooper-Jaguar T33. “At eight-tenths it was horrible,” explains James. “You’re conscious of sitting on top of this big car – and you feel vulnerable with no belts or rollbar – but the performance transforms once you commit. Off the power, the engine braking is too much, but it just sits down and grips as you accelerate out of corners. The key was getting on the throttle early. Using the power seemed to settle the car but without commitment it just understeers. As I became more familiar, it also started to slide nicely. The brakes are very good: better than a Testa Rossa’s. I struggled with the five-speed transaxle gearbox at first – particularly down from third to second – but it works well as you gain the confidence to change quicker. Hesitate a tiny bit and it’s a disaster. The steering doesn’t have a lot of caster, so it’s heavy and you have to work at it. Like the rest of the car, you have to really drive it to get the best out of it.”

In gorgeous late-afternoon sun, the stunning early-’50s group lined up for the Freddie March Memorial Trophy. When the flag dropped, the dark blue Cooper-Jaguar led the Ferrari as James had planned, and quickly the two pulled clear. The Anglo/Italian battle gripped spectators for the first 10 laps, with Cottingham eventually finding a way past Wigley. The two were the only cars setting 1 min 33 secs times as Wigley pushed harder on lap 11 to try to regain the lead, but the Jaguar started to smoke and rapidly slowed after posting the fastest tour. With a clear lead, the 857 looked to have a dream Goodwood Revival debut victory in the bag, but Cottingham spotted a problem with the oil pressure on the penultimate lap and, rather than risk damaging its rare motor, he brought the Ferrari into the pits to retire.

The future of the ex-Edgar 857 Sport definitely involves a return to America. “We’d love to take it back to race at Monterey and show it at Pebble Beach,” says Cottingham senior, “but maybe that pleasure should be left for the next owner.”



**Dynamic duo: Shelby (on right) with Edgar, in whose Ferraris he loved to compete**



## On the wild side

American millionaires with an automotive bent knew how to live in the '50s, none more so than Ohioan John Campbell Edgar. Born in 1902, he was blasting around in a Mercer by 16 and running Canadian booze at college during Prohibition. After moving to Hollywood, Edgar indulged in photography and fast motorcycles.

The acquisition of an MG TC converted him to cars. A *Road & Track* cover car, the blown MG also featured in the movie *On the Beach*. When sports-car racing took off, Edgar entered Bill Pollack and later Jack McAfee in the hot MG and his XK120, but the performance of his cars was upstaged by Edgar’s outlandish lifestyle.

Ferraris soon joined the stable including a brutish 375 Plus, which crashed out of the '54 Carrera PanAmericana killing co-pilot Ford Robinson. The incident deeply affected Edgar, who increasingly turned to drink. The team eventually returned to racing – with McAfee successful in a Porsche 550 – and Edgar’s links with rising star Carroll Shelby became the talk of the paddock. With a 100mph transporter and a team of the hottest Ferraris headed by the ex-Fangio 410 (Shelby’s favourite), they drove fast and partied hard.

Shelby was loyal to his friend right to the end, when Edgar lost his battle with cancer in '72.



**From top: McAfee in the final race at Pebble Beach; 857 Sport gets the jump in Freddie March Trophy at Goodwood Revival before Cooper-Jag took the lead**