

Devil in disguise

GT racer or pioneering supercar? While Ferrari wanted the world to believe its 250LM was made for the road, it couldn't convince the sceptics...

WORDS: Richard Heseltine // PHOTOGRAPHY: Paul Harmer





IT WOULD BE FAIR to say that things aren't going entirely to plan. Chuntering behind, the camera car has taken its toll on both our Ferrari and its pilot. As of right now, the only emotion the 250LM manages to engender is frustration, the cabin being triple-digit hot as the starter is thumbed and pedals are danced on. It doesn't help that we're on an incline sufficiently steep and elevated to induce vertigo. And then the car fires with a surround-sound barrage of pop, hiss and bluster. The throttle is buried, relief and joy coalescing as speed builds and the bellow from the purebred V12 intensifies... before we're back to mild annoyance at the comedy ergonomics. Your typical old-school supercar experience, then.

It holds true in broad outline that Lamborghini invented the supercar. The term was coined for the Miura, after all. As legend paints it, Ferrari concluded that there was little to be gained in striving to push things forward compared with serving the here and now; hence it fired back – eventually – with the altogether more conventional 365GTB/4 'Daytona'. Blazing trails is an easy way to get burned, as those upstarts in Sant'Agata discovered.

Except, as we all know by rote, the media were quick to heap scorn on Ferrari for not shooting for the stars and following Lamborghini's lead with a mid-engined, multi-cylinder blunt instrument of its own. That would have to wait for the 365GT4 BB, which arrived in production-ready

form in 1973, by which time Lamborghini had already uprooted the goalposts with the Countach. Ferrari had missed the zeitgeist – again.

Well, that's one theory. Leaving aside the fact that the Miura wasn't the first supercar in the accepted sense (the short-lived ATS 2500GT preceded it by two years), Ferrari had already beaten it to the punch. It's just that few took the firm's claims that the 250LM was a road car seriously. There was every reason to be sceptical, yet the example you see here spent its early life cruising The Strip in Las Vegas instead of blasting down the Hunaudières straight.

Launched at the 50th anniversary Paris Automobile Show in October 1963, the 250LM was beyond exotic, *Road &*

Track's Henry Manney III reporting: 'Casting a sidewise look over his shoulder at the ATS coupé, [Ferrari] got Pininfarina to clap a dish-cover body on the 250P Le Mans winner and ecco! A 250LM for Le Mans. This is to replace the normally disposed 250GTO of sainted memory... Performance figures are, of course, shattering, but there is no reason that they shouldn't be.' The factory estimated a top speed in excess of 180mph, not that independent road testers would be allowed anywhere near this brave new world.

Powered by a dry-sumped, all-alloy 2953cc (ultimately 3286cc) V12 with Testa Rossa 'heads, and with a five-speed close-ratio transmission, the LM's front and rear ends were suspended by double wishbones and coils, while favoured

Above
The beauty of the LM wasn't appreciated initially, the short front end and long tail proving unpopular with contemporary commentators. Fast forward to today, though, and it's rightly viewed as a work of art.





‘Ferrari did its level best to persuade everyone – not least the CSI – that the 250LM was a GT car’

styling house Pininfarina provided the outline and Scaglietti crafted the bodyshells. And Ferrari did its level best to persuade everyone – not least the Commission Sportive Internationale (CSI) organising body – that the 250LM was a GT car, despite it being in essence a 250P sports-racer with a roof; this being the same model that won the Le Mans 24 Hours *outright* in 1963. The 250GTO was still the dominant force in its class, but the Shelby Cobra was clearly a major threat so Ferrari needed a new weapon in its arsenal. There was, however, one rather obvious obstacle to overcome: in order for the 250LM to be eligible for the GT category, a manufacturer needed to prove that a minimum number of cars had been constructed – 100 cars, to be precise.

Ferrari was a past master when it came to homologation chicanery, having already hoodwinked the CSI over the 250GTO's eligibility. So certain was *Il Commendatore* that his new car would be rubberstamped that 250LMs bore odd-numbered chassis tags – in Ferrari-speak, that meant road cars; even numbers being allocated to racers. Except this time the CSI saw through the smoke-and-mirrors act and refused to sanction it: the 250LM would have to race as a sports-prototype. The homologation saga raged into 1964, during which time Enzo had one of his customary hissy fits and withdrew the factory team from the US and Mexican Grands Prix which rounded out that year's Formula 1 season. It would prove a hollow gesture, as the firm's close ally NART (North American Racing Team) fielded cars by proxy.

The 250LM was simply too heavy to run up front competitively, success being largely confined to local sprint races and Continental hillclimbs. That said, the 250LM did famously win the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1965 (see separate story), this victory being of the against-all-odds variety. While the CSI would in time relent and recertify the model, it never was the class benchmark Enzo envisaged. But see past all the pretext and subterfuge, and you could legitimately claim that the 250LM was a pioneering supercar.

The example here – chassis '6045' and the 19th of 32 cars made – was bought new in 1965 by Reno casino magnate Bill Harrah. A renowned car collector, the seven-times married billionaire was a long-time cheerleader of Italian exotica, owning among others a 410 Superamerica and a Ferrari V12-engined Jeep Wagoneer. Harrah retained the LM until April 1966, by which time it had covered all of 800 miles – and none of them was racked up trackside. Fast forward to 1969 and its second owner, Dr Hart Isaacs of Beverley Hills, was involved in a road-traffic accident. One of the centrally mounted fuel tanks ruptured and the car caught fire thanks to a stray cigarette, damage being largely limited to one side.

As is so often the way with cars of this ilk, the story then gets rather convoluted. The abridged version is this: in 1971 the LM went under the hammer at an insurance auction. It was acquired by Donald Simpson of Bellflower, California, following a tip-off by collector and historian Ron Kellogg, and was then partially dismantled while a replacement body was fashioned out of glassfibre. In 1972, Kellogg took over the project, but a year later the engine was sold to 250GTO owner Dr Stuart Baumgard; the chassis, transaxle, wheels and body passing to Dr Hamilton Kelly as spares for his LM, chassis 6023. Except that when he collected the frame, it proved too long to fit onto his truck's flatbed – so part of the rear portion was sawn off until it did. Crucially, the severed section included the chassis identification number.

And it's at this juncture that the narrative becomes even more tortuous. Kelly sold the largely complete chassis to college professors and arch-Ferrari restorers Charles Betz and Fred Rodgers, who in 1980 moved it on to Lancia works driver Giorgio Schön via an Italian dealer. He in turn had the chassis inspected by Gaetano Florini of Ferrari's Assistenza Clienti department who confirmed it was original. Legendary fabricator William 'The Plumber' Vaccari, whose firm had made the spaceframe first time around, was then employed to restore it, Schön selling the completed item to Swiss broker Ulrich Guggisberg, who had coachbuilders Franco Bacchelli and Roberto Villa of Carrozzeria AutoSport hammer out a new body while also sourcing a period-correct engine (possibly from a 250P). The completed car then pinballed between Japan and the US before arriving with a client of DK Engineering in the UK in 2007.

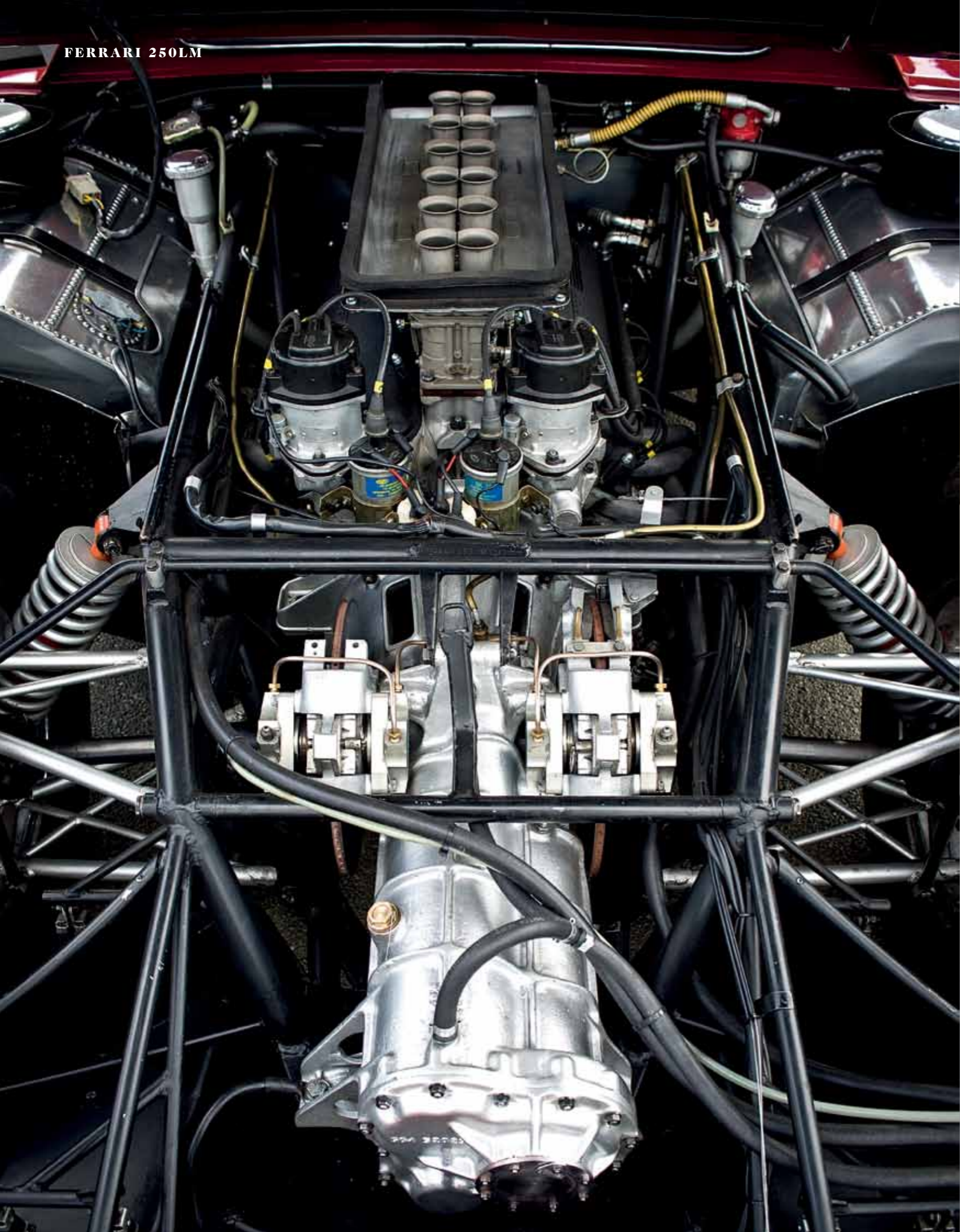
However, it had picked up a doppelgänger along the way, a second car being created in the USA around the small section of framework which had been hacked off the original 6045 more than a decade earlier. Into this was inserted the V12 from 6045. This replica was then sold to an enthusiast in Arizona. So there were now two cars: one with the original chassis minus the factory stamp and original engine, and a facsimile which shared its identity and had the period unit.

Not content to let things end there, DK Engineering acquired the 'other' LM, removed the V12 and dismantled the car. In September 2011, the engine was reunited with the original chassis some 38 years after they had parted. The car's owner has since invited Ferrari Classiche to carry out the transfer of the last remaining part of the frame – along with the correct serial number – from the replica structure to the original item.

The restored and reconfigured 6045 has belatedly found its way trackside, too, with appearances at the Goodwood →

Opposite
This particular example has a chequered history. A road accident was the cause of fire damage, which led to the engine and chassis parting company. They were later reunited after 38 years apart.

FERRARI 250LM



Left and below
It's all about the engine in the LM. With 320bhp under the hood and weighing just 850kg, this car is in its element once it hits the high notes. It's teeth-rattling stuff, which all adds to the experience.



‘With revs comes thrust, and once up and moving you’re never left wanting. It’s heady, addictive stuff’

Revival Meeting and Le Mans Legends, among other events. However, it is still a road car (sort of) and a compelling one at that. What you tend to forget about the 250LM is just how small it is, at least by modern-day standards. It marked Pininfarina’s first attempt at clothing a mid-engined production car, even if it was to all intents and purposes a sham one. In period, some commentators were averse to the cab-forward cockpit, short snout and long tail proportions. But then Pininfarina’s hand was forced somewhat by the acreage of engine and gearbox which dominate the car’s layout. However, when viewed today, the LM is rightly considered a work of artistry. The days of coachbuilders shaping racing cars was drawing to a close after all, sports-prototypes in time becoming more mathematically geometric than curvy, while Borrani wires would soon make way for wider, cast magnesium wheels.

The LM is, however, a pig to get into, to the extent that you wonder how quick driver changes were ever possible. You have to unnaturally stoop and contort your legs until you’ve cleared the huge Nardi tiller. Once in, the curved windscreen offers an uninterrupted panoramic view, but you’re very much aware of being seated far forward and with your feet well ahead of the front axle line. Trim is basic, as is to be expected, while the main instruments – large Veglia tachometer flanked by smaller oil and water gauges either side – are housed in a binnacle partially visible from behind the wood-rim wheel, with minor gauges mounted to the right, just above the next-to-useless parking brake.

And then the good bit. Push in and turn the ignition key and there’s a *clack-clack-clack* from the fuel pumps – then you press the starter button. What follows is a brief whirl followed by a noise that, from a distance, probably sounds like the end of days. Loud doesn’t come near to describing it and, having adopted a lower, more manly tenor, you feel compelled to tell anyone within earshot who can still hear that the 250LM is simply the greatest thing ever.

The clutch isn’t as heavy as expected, but the non-synchro ‘box requires you to double-declutch on the way up and down the gears. The five-speeder here features factory internals – the whole car being very much period-spec, the change from first to second a mite clunky, but once within the ‘H’ of the H-gate it snicks between cogs with precision. That said, let the revs drop and they will graunch in protest. You simply cannot drive the LM slowly, cleanly – it won’t let you. The rack-and-pinion steering is also much lighter than you might imagine. There is a degree of nervousness from the front end at lower speeds, the nose darting ever so slightly, but this all but disappears at higher velocities. Push →



FERRARI 250LM



Above and below
Who were Ferrari kidding? The basic trim, pedals and details all point to a car that was made to race. Fire her up and there can be no mistake – loud doesn't come near...

harder into tighter turns and there's mild understeer, but some way south of ten-tenths the handling inspires confidence. It merely demands a heightened degree of coordination from the driver than is customary with most supercars, even those from the Jurassic era.

But it's the engine that dominates the LM experience. The car weighs only 850kg, but packs 320bhp. Period figures quote a 0-100mph time of 12sec so acceleration is mighty; certainly enough to give a 458 Italia a scare during our shoot. With revs comes thrust, and once up and moving you're never left wanting. It's heady, addictive stuff. But you are also mindful of the many shortcomings for what is purportedly a road car. Leaving aside the fact that it slow-bakes its occupants, the gearlever rests on the passenger's right thigh and the ride quality is of the molar-rattling variety. But it is, whisper it, a racing car...

In so many ways the 250LM isn't far removed from the many homologation specials that have appeared in recent years. And while it doesn't have the same road manners of, say, a Ford GT40, it ticks all the right boxes for looks, performance and pedigree. Ferrari may have played the road-car card for the sake of convenience, but the LM really is a supercar in the literal sense. It might have aged a little, but it certainly hasn't diminished. **End**

THANKS TO Luay Allawi, James and Jeremy Cottingham (www.dkeng.com) and Neil Godwin-Stubbert.

FERRARI 250LM

ENGINE 60deg 3286cc all-alloy V12 fed by six twin-choke Weber 38DCN carbs **POWER** 320bhp @ 7500rpm **TORQUE** 213lb ft @ 5000rpm **TRANSMISSION** Five-speed manual **STEERING** Rack and pinion **SUSPENSION** Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, hydraulic dampers, anti-roll bar **BRAKES** Discs all-round (rears inboard) **WEIGHT** 850kg **TOP SPEED** 180mph

