



Just leave me alone

Suddenly everyone wants a bit of the Ferrari 250 SWB's soul. To be frank, we find it all a little distasteful, but wait until you read what Marcel Massini – the world's leading assayer of Ferrari purity – has to say about it over the page. First though, feast your eyes on why what he has to say matters

STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY ASHLEY BORDER



JUST THIS ONE 250 SWB PARTICULARLY COMES TO mind. It is still painted in its very special, original dark green colour, known as Verde Pimlico. It is a fantastic car, such a genuine one, having never been restored. It lived most of its life in France and is now owned by somebody in Germany. I hope the current owner never restores it because that would... well, perhaps I shouldn't say destroy, but that would ruin its condition. I don't want that to happen. It's too nice, so to me this is important. I know of only one or two others as original.'

Marcel Massini is *very* discerning. But that is his job, a job in which he has achieved global pre-eminence. He describes himself as 'a Ferrari historian, a researcher if you like, and a purist.' He is the man you go to before splashing out millions of dollars on a rare Ferrari. His customers are potential buyers – collectors the world over – and all the major car auction companies. He also works with Ferrari's Classiche department. They get information from him. And sometimes he gets information from them.

Massini then was the man *The Road Rat* turned to when, earlier this year, not one but two celebrated British specialists announced cars that, at a glance and very deliberately, would be mistaken for SWBs. 'Tribute cars', if you want to be polite. Imposters, if you are less inclined to be so. Massini doesn't discriminate. His business is to say which cars are honest, and which are not. The SWB – unsurprisingly for a car which changes hands for over \$10m – plays a big part in his life.

You might not agree with *The Road Rat* here, but we'd rather pass the time gazing at a SWB than at a GTO. There's an honesty to its beauty, a sense of purpose, aggression, and yet also that restraint. Is the GTO really more beautiful or is it just rarer? And possibly only as a consequence of that, so much more valuable? Do we prostrate ourselves at the alter of the GTO only because of the whole most-valuable-car-in-the-world thing? Massini doesn't disagree.

'Personally I prefer the 250 SWB over the GTO and believe that the GTO is grossly overrated. You pay a huge premium for three letters – GTO – and of course to be in the legendary GTO owners' club. Did I say "status symbol"? Of course GTOs are much rarer – only 39 vs 165 SWBs – but that alone should not be the deciding factor. SWBs are glorious cars with sensational overall characteristics. The package is just perfect.

'The 250 GT SWB Berlinetta combined everything. It was a road car, but also a race car – and an exceptionally good looking one, with a design by Pininfarina, that design then executed by Carrozzeria Scaglietti.

'I have researched all 165 chassis numbers during my career. Such a small number of SWBs

were built, yet they won so many races across the world, from 1959 up to around 1965. Unlike the 250 GTO, which the SWB preceded, you could race it at the weekend, then drive it back to your office on Monday morning. That's what still makes it so fascinating, and such an icon in Ferrari's history. The SWB is a dual-purpose GT car.

'The character of all versions is centred around a classic V12, the three-litre 250 GT engine. But of the 165 SWBs made, each was slightly different – there was no 100 per cent rule. The majority were in Lusso specification, which means the "luxury" version – a steel-bodied and road-focused car. Then some early Lusso cars became race cars as well. There are certain cars that have the bonnet, doors and trunk lid in aluminium, and the true competition cars that are full aluminium.

'In 1961 came – and this isn't the official name – the "SEFAC Hot Rod", which had a super lightweight full-aluminium body, higher-lift camshafts, and all sorts of little goodies that made it even more powerful and aggressive. And more winning, of course. These are the most sought after cars, of course. But they are all wonderful: they move with grace and the fabulous exhaust note is just supreme.

'As I said, 165 real SWB were built, and yet the market – quite clearly – is now bigger than that. Something's not right here.'

Massini has been doing what he does for 45 years, accumulating a massive database which he says is updated at the end of every day. 'I have an international network of friends who supply me with information,' he says. 'It's like detective work.'

He goes on: 'I put together individual, chronological history reports about every single chassis number. These start with the dense detail of the original colour, the interior, the engine number, gearbox number, rear axle number. When was the car built? Who were the mechanics that worked on this particular car, at a certain time, at the factory? When did they deliver it? Who was the original dealer agent? Who was the first owner? The second owner? And on, and on, and on.'

'If something is not right, if a car is a replica, or if a car is just not good enough, I will say it, clearly and loud. No bullshit, full disclosure. It takes ages to build up a reputation, but it takes a minute to ruin that reputation, so I have to be very careful.'

Not unsurprisingly he hates replicas and believes they have the potential to damage the reputation of the real thing. 'If you stop at a red light and an AC Cobra pulls up alongside, what goes through your mind?' he says. 'Your immediate thought when you look at that Cobra is, "that can only be a replica. It cannot be genuine".' It's the same, he goes on to say, with a Porsche 356 Speedster, or a Mercedes SL 'Gullwing'. What first comes to mind?

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41 SWB

Below: The very first SWB, shown at the time of the Paris motor show in 1959. Note that, unlike later versions, there are no vents in the front wings

'WHEN WAS THE CAR BUILT? WHO WERE THE MECHANICS THAT WORKED ON THIS PARTICULAR CAR? WHEN DID THEY DELIVER IT? WHO WAS THE DEALER? WHO WAS THE FIRST OWNER? THE SECOND OWNER? AND ON, AND ON'





‘THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THAT SOME PEOPLE WHO BUY REPLICAS DO NOT PUBLICLY ADMIT THAT THE CAR THEY ARE DRIVING OR SHOWING IS ONE. THEY PRETEND THAT IT IS THE REAL CAR, AND THAT IS WHERE THE TROUBLE BEGINS’



It must be a replica. This is not good a good thing. At a recent show *The Road Rat* attended, we found ourselves asking this question again and again. Well over half of the star cars there had us pausing for thought. The joy of the experience blunted by the initial wave of doubt. Some of course just took a second look to detect the fraud, others were impossible to place without your very own personal Marcel in tow.

With restorations it is, however, a lot more complex, Massini concedes. While many owners do appreciate the importance of originality, others, he explains, ‘don’t want to put it in their garage, then invite their friends over and have them say, “What? The car is unrestored. You paid 8-10 million bucks for such a car with quite a bit of patina?” It puts them under pressure to have a car restored, even if they shouldn’t do it – even if it’s not necessary.’

Moreover, he concedes that a 60-year-old car such as a SWB will most likely at some stage during its life need to have been restored, and possibly more than once. Some of those restorations may have been completed decades previously and not to the standard of contemporary restorations. But when it comes to what Massini believes to be replicas, any sense of empathy evaporates. And, it’s fair to say, it’s personal.

‘My network of contacts includes Egidio Brandoli from Brandoli Carrozzeria in Montale near Maranello, who’s still fit and mentally well. He’s 80 years old and he was working at Carrozzeria Scaglietti at the time – he built these very cars with his own hands. He was good friends and a close collaborator with Sergio Scaglietti in the Sixties.

‘A replica is a car that has been completely built to replicate something genuine, meaning it may have a new frame, it may have another engine, another gearbox, another rear axle and, of course, a new body. The biggest problem with such replicas is that some people who buy them do not publicly admit that the car they are driving or showing is, actually, a replica. They pretend that it is the real car, and that is where the trouble begins.

‘When these replicas are built, they may use a chassis number from another old car, such as a Ferrari 330GT 2+2 or a 250GTE 2+2. Outside of the UK, for sure in many countries, that practice is illegal. I know of cases in my home country of Switzerland where 250 SWB replicas have been

confiscated by the state attorney because it was very clear that a particular chassis number on that car had never been meant for a SWB – it was a chassis number of another Ferrari. Such authorities are not stupid, they do their homework. I work a lot with them.

‘They call me when there is a special Ferrari to be registered in my country and we have found, more than once, a car that is using the chassis number of a completely different model. It’s not good. I understand that building such cars is a business – increasingly so in the UK.

‘There is a production line of sorts where these replicas are built, but again, it comes down to the owner of such a car. And it’s a legal question, each country has its own rules and laws. It might be okay in the UK but if it happens that the car is sold from the UK to another country in Europe, and it uses a chassis number that has never belonged to a 250 SWB, that certainly can be wrong and illegal. Similar cases have been pursued in Germany and Italy as well.’

Does this matter? Of course it does. How often do you see a 250 SWB? Once, twice a year? Maybe up close, maybe passing by on the public highway if you are really lucky. Would you rather not know for certain the experience you’ve just had is genuine? Massini is in no doubt about the motives of those who steal the purity of that moment from under your nose. (‘I understand that there’s a lot of money to be made, yes. There’s good reason why these cars – the real ones – are so expensive. From a business point of view, it sounds better, but still it shouldn’t be done.’) And of course, he would say that, wouldn’t he? Honesty is his business. But then he says, ‘Then we think about Goodwood and The Revival in September. Cars are being raced there, very seriously, often by professionals. Those cars get damaged. You can see why some owners would rather enter a replica than potentially damage the real thing. Let’s face it, quite a number of replicas are now allowed to enter races there.

‘But, in a way, it’s fooling the masses. For an average guy, with an average income, who wants to have a great Sunday out and watch these races – just before he leaves for home afterwards, he hears someone say, “Oh, by the way, those were all replicas.” I mean, come on, you just paid £300, or whatever the price might be for your tickets. Don’t you feel like an idiot?’ 🙄

This SWB was first sold to Alberico Cacciari in Bologna in 1960 and was raced extensively, before being sold to Erich Bitter in Germany