

THE FIRST FERRARI



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Franco Cortese drives the first Ferrari at Piacenza, May, 1947.

Chapter Four

Thus in January, 1948, Ferrari had two 159's, chassis numbers 02C and 002C, (the third car built in 1947) and one 166, chassis number 01C, on the tracks. Shortly thereafter they were joined by another car, 004C and two of these cars, chassis numbers 002C and 004C, had their engines uprated to 166 specification and were bought by Gabriele Besana and his brother, the Count Soave Besana. Enzo Ferrari was now offering to sell off his 1947 cars, (as new, re-bodied models!), and sell replicas of his Tipo166 Spyder Corsas to special customers, grandly promising factory entries and full factory support, something the small factory was incapable of at the time but, of course, the fledgling Company needed cash and if that was what it took..! Gabriele Besana took his 166SC, 002C, to the Argentina for the Temporada series of races that were held there in January through February plus taking in one race in Brazil.

02C was retained by the factory, still with its full-width roadster bodywork fitted and it still wore this bodywork as late as August 15th when it raced once again in the Circuito di Pescara race.

01C, in the meantime, had probably been re-numbered to "010I", simply by the expedient of transforming the "C" into a "0" and stamping in an extra "I". It was then fitted with new Spyder Corsa bodywork and sold to a new racing team, "Gruppo Inter" (Team International).

This new racing team was the brainchild of two aristocrats, Count Bruno Sterzi of Milan and Prince Igor Troubetskoy, a White Russian who lived in exile in Paris. Troubetskoy, in a later interview with Doug Nye recounted: "Right at the end of 1947, Raymond Sommer won the GP of Turin with the absolutely new Ferrari."

"That was Ferrari's first big win you know and only a few weeks later Bruno Sterzi called me and said: 'Listen, there is a possibility to buy some Ferrari's like Sommer's. Ferrari is in difficulty. He has to sell two cars. I think we could get them very cheaply. If we buy one each we could make an arrangement so that we would be the only ones to run these Ferraris in the Targa Florio and Mille Miglia. In those cars we could win both races!' A fantastic opportunity..."

"Sterzi had big industries in Milan. Was not particularly a friend of mine but we knew each other. We shared an interest of motor racing and so we formed a team with these new Ferraris which we called 'Gruppo Inter'". Through their team manager, Freddy Zehender, the pre-war Maserati driver, they purchased 006I, another cycle-fendered 166, 010I, (Nee 01C) and a 166 Sport Spyder with full-width bodywork by Allemano, 001S for use as a "Muletto", or practice, car. Troubetskoy again: "In fact, we ended up

with three cars-two of the narrow body cars-one each for Sterzi and me-and one with a wider body covering the wheels-still open cockpit though-which was called the Muletto.”

These three Ferraris cost Gruppo Inter some \$15,000, a large amount in those days but then, the best has always been expensive. As part of the agreement, the three cars were to be kept and maintained by the factory and there is little doubt that, whether or not Troubetskoy and Sterzi knew about it, all three cars were loaned out to other drivers when the team principals were not using them. Troubetskoy: “Zehender did all our organization. He was a wonderful driver, fantastic eyesight, and he sold Mercedes cars-he sold them to everybody. I knew him well, and liked him, but I also knew about his weaknesses, and understood them-you know, with dealings...?”

“Sterzi I think found out about this later, and he could not accept it and would tell me that he didn’t want to have any further affairs with Zehender and asked me to buy his car, so then I owned all three.”

These early Ferraris were known within the factory by their engine numbers and there is a photograph extant which appears to show the assembly shop in early 1948. Quite clearly, the chassis of 010I can be seen on trestles with parts of the new bodywork attached to the bare structure. At this point, all is conjecture but it is just possible that 01C was rebodied by Allemano with another two-seat body, (the Ferrari engineers would not have had to change the firewall), and the resulting car sold to Gruppo Inter as 001S. Sadly, Baron LaMotta was killed in a crash with this car in 1950 at the Targa Florio and so we will never be able to inspect this car but engine number ‘46/1’ , still in existence, is rumored to have come from the wreck.

On March 3rd, the racing season started with the 8th Giro di Sicilia, also known as the 32nd edition of the Targa Florio. Igor Troubetskoy was entered in 006I but an accident by Sterzi in practice forced this car to non-start and so Troubetskoy agreed to share the driving of 001S, originally meant only to be used as the practice car, with Clemente Biondetti, the great long-distance Champion. Troubetskoy later said: “That Ferrari! (Enzo - Ed), He promised us exclusive factory support but when we turned up at the first race, he is helping ALL the Ferraris entered. When I complained he wrung his hands, saying, “Principe, principe, I am a poor man, you have a wonderful chance to win the Targa Florio...”

Troubetskoy and Biondetti indeed went on to take victory for Ferrari whilst Soave Besana, having damaged his own 004C in practice, and Count Bruno Sterzi meanwhile placed sixth, a creditable result with 010I. By an oversight, all the Ferraris were supplied with the wrong fuel. Although the engine ran badly, somehow, 001S held together to win this combined Tour of Sicily (Giro de Sicilia)/Targa Florio, which comprised a single lap of the island, a distance of 1080 kilometers.

In this race, the Ferraris faced tough opposition; Ascari and Villoresi, driving new, works-supported 2-litre Maserati's and Taruffi, 1100 cc Cisitalia mounted, hounded them all the way. Ascari crashed and Villoresi retired with a sick engine, leaving the Ferrari to go on to a well-earned victory. Troubetskoy: "Before that Targa Florio race, Sterzi damaged his own car and asked me: 'Listen. I have lost my own car but I am Italian and you are French and this is an Italian race and this is my crowd-you must let me race yours.' And so I took the Muletto instead with the wide body, which we had only taken there as a training car, and I shared it with Biondetti, a wonderful sports car driver. The roads were crazy, hardly 10 kms of straight in over a thousand kilometers race-and with so many corners, left and right, up and down hills, we spent so much time in the lower gears and had to refuel about every 200 kilometers, and when we stopped we would change around-Biondetti driving, then me. And by a miracle we won in that old Muletto!"

"It really was a miracle, I tell you, because we should have used a special fuel mix, one-third gas, one-third alcohol, one third something else-and by mistake, we were given regular gas. All the Ferraris had the same type of fuel pump and there was a seal in it, which was attacked by the mixture, and they all had the seal break up and block the pump-except the pump on our car. So, although on the ordinary gas, our engine ran really badly, it just kept going and-incredible thing-we won the Targa Florio!"

Troubetskoy also related an amusing aside to racing in Sicily: "The local peasants each had two or three huge dogs which were frightened by the noise and everywhere were running on the roads. Amazing arrangement was done-unintentionally-with the Mafia. We used to eat in a restaurant down by Palermo harbor and one evening, I invited a man there to have coffee with us. We were very friendly and when we parted he asked: 'Do you wish something?' and I just said to him that it was very dangerous, all those dogs. And he said: 'Very well. There will not be one dog on the road on the day of the race...' And there was not one! I asked the restaurant owner later about this and he just smiled and told me: 'Yes-your coffee guest is a VERY important man...' Incredible."

After the Sicilian race, the winning Muletto, (001S), was sold to Luigi Bordonaro who had it fitted with his won version of the cycle-fender theme, a body in which the fenders were flared into the bodywork.

For the fifteenth Mille Miglia in early May, Biondetti and Navone drove 003S, a pretty, Allemano-bodied coupe with race number sixteen, to victory. This car was scrapped in Italy in 1958 after a crash, although the engine and gearbox still survive. The race itself developed into an epic duel between Biondetti and Nuvolari, the latter driving a cycle-fendered Spyder Corsa.

Whilst Troubetskoy was away in Paris, looking after his wife, the Woolworths heiress, Barbara Hutton, who was ill, Zehender had lent 010I to Nuvolari for the race. In later years, Troubetskoy, who was not aware of this transaction(!) conceded that: "I can only

think that, if Nuvolari and Righetti, (he drove 001S), drove those cars at all, I was never told about it.”

This was Nuvolari’s last, and perhaps greatest, greatest race. Partnered by his mechanic Scapanelli, and wearing Race number 1049, he pulled out an enormous lead but spun and damaged a rear spring after losing a fender earlier on. Later, the entire bonnet came off and a seat support broke. The great driver was finally forced out with a lead of 29 minutes over Biondetti when a rear spring shackle failed completely. Biondetti completed the 1134.5 miles in 15 hours, 5 minutes and 44 seconds.

“Ah! it is possible -it really is possible-that this was a private arrangement of Zehender with Ferrari and I never knew about it. But I would have been proud if Nuvolari really did drive my car that day... He was regarded in Italy not just as a racing driver-he was Art you know? A national Treasure!” Of course, Troubetskoy would have been far too busy worrying about his wife to concern himself with the behind-the-scenes negotiations of his team manager.

In 1948, 166's Spyder Corsa's numbered 0061 to 0201. These Spyder Corsas were very versatile, capable of competing in Formula 2 events and then, with cycle fenders attached, entering the sportscar races. In both forms, the little 166's had an excellent year for the new Marque. In Formula 2, Chico Landi drove Besana's car to win the Bari Grand Prix, Raymond Sommer won the "Coupe de Petite Cylindrees" at Rheims, and Farina won the Rosario Grand Prix in Argentina.

On the 9th May, it would appear, although it is not confirmed, that Righetti drove 0101 in the Premio di Apertura, held on the Circuito di Vercelli in a Formula two race, wearing race number 27. Strangely enough, as in Nuvolari’s epic ride in the Mille Miglia, the bonnet was lost again!

Righetti drove 0101, according to the entry list, at Bari for the Grand Prix, run to Formula two rules in 1948 just three weeks later. Once more, he retired, this time with gearbox problems.

Troubetskoy, meanwhile, had driven in the Monaco Grand Prix, probably in 0061. Troubetskoy: “ At Monaco, Sterzi had arranged an entry for himself but the organizers chose me, because just as he had claimed first importance in Sicily because he was Italian so it was my turn at Monaco because I was French, and the organizers chose me instead. Sterzi promised everybody that I would never finish the race, and I tell you-well, Chiron was a nice man but he was a friend of Sterzi. Whatever, he just pushed me off at the chicane on the quai at the place where poor Ascari later fell into the harbor in his Lancia. My steering was damaged and also the right front suspension.”

It wasn't until July 4th that Troubetskoy got to race 0101 again. Entered, as arranged

when the car was first purchased by the Scuderia Ferrari, in the Grand Prix von Europa in Switzerland, Troubetskoy bought the car to the finish line in 9th place. Just two weeks later, again factory-entered, Troubetskoy netted another 9th place finish during the aptly named F2 “GP pour petite cylindrees” run as a support race to the Grand Prix of Rheims, held in the Champagne country of France.

010I may next have been used by the factory again, Troubetskoy this time being kept aware of events. The 166 was entrusted to Biondetti to drive in the Swedish Grand Prix, held on the Sharpnack circuit on May 30th. After an eventful race, Biondetti won, this being Ferrari’s very first victory outside Italy. Ferrari, as always, having a very good “nose” for publicity and always happy to help the press, announced the victory World-wide.

Clemente Biondetti drove the car once more in the Circuit of Pescara race on August 15th where no less than seven Ferraris were racing, including 02C, still wearing its full-width bodywork. Biondetti failed to finish, although for what reason is lost to time. The car took part in a two-heat race next at the Grand Prix of Albi at le Planques on August 29th where this time it was entered by Gruppo Inter and driven by Troubetskoy. After doing well in the first heat, the car retired in the second. The reason for Troubetskoy’s retirement this time was not mechanical. As he was later to recall in an interview: “I had an incident between Ascari’s Maserati and myself.” (Editor’s note: Troubetskoy did not “have an incident” with Ascari, who was not racing at Albi on that day. Troubetskoy entered a corner too fast and crashed, the car throwing him out). “Was very simple, (Troubetskoy) - my fault - I was hurt when my car threw me out fifty meters up the road. - No safety belts of course in those days, it was considered you had a better chance if you came out, and Bang! - I came out, quite simple. I then raced at Lago di Garda, but that was my last race.” It is probable that 010I was damaged in this incident, which would account for the later type Spyder Corsa bodywork fitted to the car during the 1949 season.

Just two weeks later, the now repaired Spyder Corsa failed again to finish, this time at the Third running of the Circuito di Firenze race. According to the entry documents, Righetti drove 010I with Troubetskoy driving the “mule” 001S. This cannot be as 001S had a full-width roadster body fitted and was ineligible for a Formula Two event; (Perhaps 001S had been re-bodied as a Spyder Corsa? Ed) Whatever, 010I did run at the Grand Prix of Florence, where the car appeared, stripped of its fenders and lights, Troubetskoy recovered from the Albi accident was once more at the wheel.

010I was entered for the Grand Prix at the Autodrome of Monza next, a Formula One event where Ferrari and Alfa Romeo were out with their premier league cars. Not surprisingly, neither Troubetskoy nor 010I showed up, Troubetskoy probably realizing how outclassed the two liter car would be, up against the “big boys”.

010I was then entered in the 8th Circuit of Garda, a race run around the lake in northern Italy. This time 010I did finish, Troubetskoy placing eighth. This was, incidentally, the venue where a Formula One Ferrari won its first race, Farina being the driver of the supercharged 125F.

For its very last race with Gruppo Inter, 010I was entered into another Formula One event, the Grand Prix of Penya Rhin, held at the Montjuich circuit, near Barcelona. Despite the entry list showing Troubetskoy in a Ferrari F2 car, entered by Gruppo Inter, there is no mention of him in the results. Once again, this was probably an entry made at the beginning of the season. As time had worn on, Troubetskoy had come to realize just how outclassed the little 166 was against the Formula One cars and had not wasted his time bothering to travel all the way to Spain to be soundly thrashed.

Troubetskoy and Sterzi, at the end of the season were left with three worn Tipo 166 racing cars that would, if they wanted them to be more competitive to face the increased competition of 1949, need complete rebuilding by the factory to bring them up to the latest specification. Sterzi also had problems with Freddy Zehender, disliking his car dealing, "on the side", as it were. Almost certainly, Zehender had allowed Enzo Ferrari to enter the Gruppo Inter's cars without telling either Sterzi or Troubetskoy but they had found out and were not best pleased. They decided to disband Gruppo Inter and Troubetskoy was left with the cars. Naturally, he turned to Freddy Zehender to help him sell the cars and so Zehender let it be known, through the grapevine of racing teams, that the cars could be bought, either as one lot, (preferable), or as singletons.

1948: NOTES:

- Giro di
3-4/4: Sicilia/Targa S. Besana/Sterzi; 010I; 6thOA.
Florio:
- 1-2/5: Mille Miglia: Nuvolari/Scapinelli; #1049; DNF.
- 9/5: 2nd Circuit of Vercelli: Righetti; 010I; #12; DNF, Mechanical.
- 16/5: 10th Monaco G.P.: Troubetskoy in 006I, (Sterzi's usual car); Troubetskoy qualified at 2' 05.0", 6th row of the grid. He crashed on lap 58.
- 30/5: Stockholm GP: Biondetti; #4; 1st.
- 30/5: 2nd GP of Bari (F2): Righetti, #20; DNF on lap 37, transmission problems.
- 13/6: 2nd Giorgio and Alberto Nuvolari Cup: Nuvolari, #11; DNF, lap 8, illness.
- 4/7: 9th GP von Europa, (Switzerland, Bremgarten): Biondetti, #40; qualified at ? 7th row. 10th.
- 18/7: Petite Cylindrees Cup, Rheims: Troubetskoy, #42; DNF.
- 1/8: 14th GP of Comminges: Righetti, #38, Biondetti, #42, both entered by Gruppo Inter. Troubetskoy had entered originally; all withdrew.
- 15/8: Pescara: Biondetti; #9; DNF.
Troubetskoy: 001S?-NO 010I! #48; Righetti was entered in 010I #50, probably drove 001S/006I, both entered by Gruppo Inter as F2 cars. Troubetskoy finished 7th in the first heat, but crashed on the first lap of the second heat. Righetti finished 4th in the final standings; 8th in first heat, 5th in the second. 01/0I Back to factory for rebodding.
- 29/8: 10th GP of Albi: F2 cars. Troubetskoy finished 7th in the first heat, but crashed on the first lap of the second heat. Righetti finished 4th in the final standings; 8th in first heat, 5th in the second. 01/0I Back to factory for rebodding.
- 19/9: 1st GP of Naples: Righetti; 010I?; #11; DNF on lap 19.
- 26/9: 3rd circuit of Firenze, F2: Troubetskoy, 166SC, 006I? #26, Righetti: 166SC, 010I/014I; #20; Both DNF'd.
- GP
- 17/10: Autodrome, Monza: Troubetskoy; DNA.
- 24/10: 8th Circuit of Garda: Troubetskoy; #22; 8th.

31/10: 9th G.P. of Troubetskoy; #42. No mention in results.
Penya Rhin:

Bodywork changes: At the Mille Miglia, 1948, 1/5; Nuvolari's car (race No: 1049), has oval top, flat bottom radiator grill, short bonnet air scoop plus two spring latches.

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