

THE FIRST FERRARI



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

Chapter Five – 1949

John Wyer was, in the spring of 1949, the manager of Monaco Motor Engineering, a garage in Surrey, England, which specialized in preparing sports and racing cars. Wyer had a long involvement with motor racing and speed, his father having been an agent for the Sunbeam motor car company. John Wyer had himself been apprenticed at the Sunbeam factory in Wolverhampton, England at the time that Sir Henry Segrave's World land speed record holding car had been built there. In later life, John Wyer was to become famous as, firstly, the racing team manager of Aston Martin and then of the Gulf-sponsored team which raced Ford GT40's and then Porsche 917's.

Wyer was contacted in the early spring by a friend of his, Welshman Dudley Folland, who had heard that a very rare and fast racing Ferrari was for sale. At this time, no Ferrari of any sort had been seen in a Britain that was still only just recovering from World War 2. Nonetheless, rumors, fuelled by the press, had reached Britain of this formidable new make of car, which had already spread an impression of tremendous speed and exclusivity. Wyer and Folland had competed at Spa and Montlhery in an Aston Martin and had been very impressed with the Ferrari 166 Spyder Corsa, which Luigi Chinetti had used to win both races.

After establishing contact with the Ferrari factory, John Wyer travelled to Modena to test 010C. In his book, "The Certain Sound", Wyer later recounted how: "The memory of testing that little car and taking it up to 6,500 rpm on the straight but narrow road from the Ferrari factory at Maranello back towards Modena, with the population waving us on and the odd stray dog and hen getting in the way on a bright but very cold morning in January, will always remain with me."

Folland and Wyer arranged for the car's purchase and shipping to England. This was made difficult because of the draconian taxes being levied by Britain's government at this time in an attempt to stop imports of luxury goods. In order to circumvent this problem, the sum of four thousand British pounds was handed over to a representative of Ferrari in a shoebox in a London hotel! To try to get past import restrictions, a Ferrari mechanic, Boschi, delivered the 166, the very first Ferrari imported into England, to Monaco Motor Engineering in March, the company Wyer worked at, together with his partner, the racing driver George Abecassis.

Monaco Motor Engineering covered the Italian Racing Red of 010I beneath a coat of British Racing Green and painted a small dragon, the emblem of Wales, on each side of the nose. The 166 was then trucked to the Goodwood circuit near Chichester where Folland drove it to a maiden British win in the Lavant Cup on April 18th. The car was entered in a race on Jersey in the Channel Islands ten days later, to be driven by Gordon Watson but for some reason, 010I did not take the start. Wyer later commented that they had "rather stupidly",

used 010I for Formula two races and kept their Aston Martin for sportscar races. That was a mistake as: "Ferrari had already brought out the single seater Formula 2 car and the type 166 was outclassed".

Dudley Folland was back in the driving seat on May 18th in France where 010I took part in the Grand Prix of Pau and, just eight days later, Folland retired from a race in the Isle of Man entitled the "British Empire Trophy", a race for Formula Two cars. Sadly, Monaco Motors had used the wrong material for a flange gasket.

On June 12th, Folland travelled to Angouleme in France for the Grand Prix, which was held then, as now, on a street circuit. It was a three heat race and Folland won the first heat, was third in the second but had problems in the third which placed him fifth overall. He improved on this result five weeks later, again in France where he took part in the "Grand Prix de Petite Cylindrees", at Rheims, an event for Formula Two cars in which he took fourth place.

It was back to England for Folland's next race, which was held on an airfield circuit at Blandford Forum in Dorset on August 27th. Sadly, the little 166 developed a problem with a blown head gasket and Folland was forced to retire. Folland raced 010I just twice more whilst it was in his ownership. He was second in the Wakefield Trophy at Curragh on September 10th in Ireland and appeared again at Goodwood where he had won the Lavant Cup in April. He competed in the Woodcote Cup but the result, at this time, is unknown. In October, Folland lent 010I to John Wyer to drive in the Weston Super-Mare Speed Trial and Wyer set the second fastest time of the day there. John Wyer probably also raced 010I in several more sprints and hillclimbs.

That doyen of motor racing writers, Denis Jenkinson, was the "Continental correspondent" of the respected British magazine, the "Motor Sport". He inspected 010I during the winter of 1949/50 and measured the wheelbase as 2420 mm and the front and rear track as 1255 and 1200 mm respectively. His Majesty's Customs and Excise had meanwhile been exerting pressure on Dudley Folland to pay import duty on the Ferrari. To escape this tax and clear the carnet, John Wyer sent the car to Cataneo's Garage in Paris with instructions that it should be returned to the factory at Modena and sold on his and Folland's behalf.

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