

THE ORIGINS OF THE FERRARI 250 GTO



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The "cleaned up" and finalized GTO prototype, now re-numbered as 3223 GT, at the press conference in 1962 at Ferrari's factory in February, 1962.

The Origins of the Ferrari 250 GTO

by Jack Koobs de Hartog and John Starkey

It was the second weekend in June 1961. Although Ferrari had won the 24 hours race at Le Mans outright that weekend, (with the a Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa, 0794, driven by Phil Hill and Olivier Gendebien), his 250 GT Sperimentale berlinetta (#2643GT) had failed to finish and did not meet Ferrari's expectations.

Although in practice 2643 GT was approx. 20 seconds a lap slower than the competition in its class (3000 sports) Carlo Chiti had promised that he would have the better car in the race itself. Just halfway through the race, 2643 GT pulled into the pits with engine failure. Enzo Ferrari was very annoyed.

Although this experimental GT contender had the most powerful engine available, the Ferrari Testa RossaV-12, the aerodynamics of the car did not allow it to reach its theoretically possible top speed. 2643 GT fell short of this by some 20kph.

During this period, Ferrari was racing against the Aston Martins, Ford Cobra's and Jaguar E-type's in the important GT class, and they were becoming faster and faster. The 250 SWB had clearly reached its full potential. Something faster was required and in the eyes of Enzo Ferrari, it was clear that Carlo Chiti was not able to alter this car in a short time.

Well known for his intrigues, Enzo Ferrari proceeded on a different path. He gave a direct order to Giotto Bizzarrini, responsible for the development of the whole 250 GT line, to build a new competition Berlinetta, better than Chiti's #2643GT, completely in secret. Not even Chiti and Scaglietti were to be informed about this project.

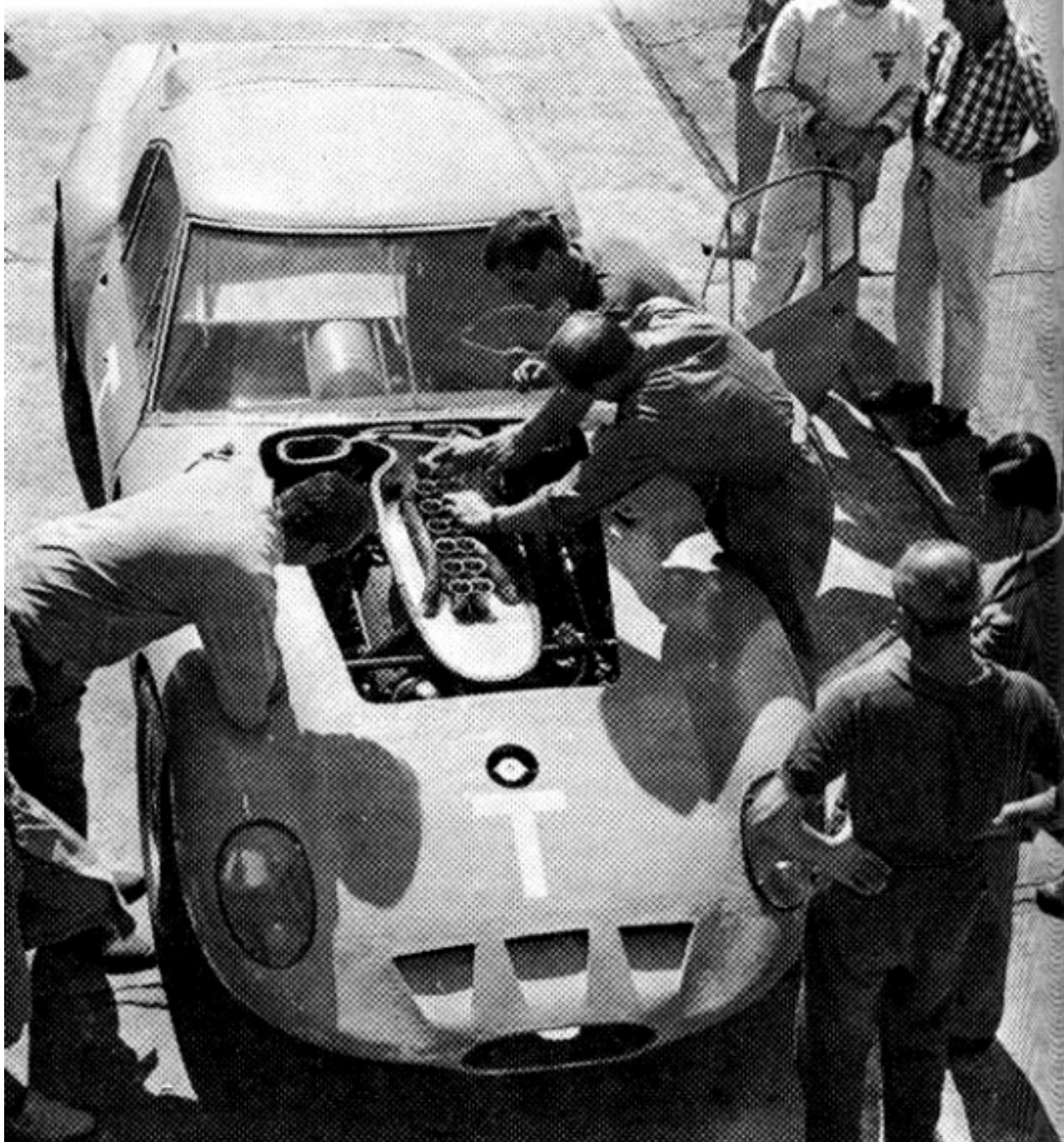
Giotto Bizzarini accepted this challenge against his colleague and friend and, with 3 assistants, locked himself away in a shed and started. One of the problems that Bizzarini faced was that Enzo made it very clear to him that there was no money available for new parts and experiments. He had to use what already existed.

How to start on a project like this? Giotto Bizzarrini took his old Boano, known as the 'Cavia' ('Guinea-pig'), that he normally used as his company car. This had been Enzo Ferrari's daily "driver" in 1956 and '57, chassis number 0523 GT. This coupe was full of test-items as it also acted as a driving test laboratory for all the possible and imaginable experiments that the factory was conducting at the time.

During the years it had been, for test reasons, updated in its specifications.

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The GTO Prototype, 0523 GT, testing at Monza in September, 1961. Stirling Moss in helmet, discusses the car's handling with his co-driver, Willy Mairesse. The engineer on the right, nearest the windshield, is Giotto Bizzarini, the chief engineer and originator of the 250 GTO.



This very car had had disc brakes fitted in 1958 after previous tests with Mike Hawthorn's car. It even had some sort of 'anti skid device' fitted, which distributed braking power, invented in collaboration with Professor Francia of the Genoa University. According to Giotto, it was impossible to skid off of the road with this system in operation under braking.

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The power was delivered by a state of the art three-liter Testa Rossa V-12 engine.

Bizzarrini shortened the wheelbase of 0523 GT to that of the SWB and strengthened the side members of the chassis to improve the general chassis stiffness. An improvement in weight distribution was achieved by moving the engine 20 cm back in the chassis and lowering it somewhat.

Although the body was hand beaten without the help of good bodyworkers tools the "Papero" ("Fool") or "Papera" ("Blunder") took shape. The aerodynamics were taken care of by lowering the front part of the body. This was where the SWB had suffered, its blunt nose not allowing to reach its theoretical top speed and giving front-end lift, which lightened the steering to an alarming degree when top speed was approached. But this was not all. Bizzarrini had realized that a lot of potential speed was lost in bad aerodynamic flow through the engine compartment and underneath the car. He started improving matters by taking care of the exits of hot air from the engine compartment for there was a great deal of dynamic pressure there. At the rear he did the same to extract the hot air from the disk brakes and the differential. The classic three openings in the front, so characteristic for the 250 GTO, were used to divert hot air to the sides of the engine compartment, instead of through it.

The disc brakes were the same ones as used on the Testa Rossa and the front suspension had conventional 250 GT wishbones. At the rear there was the same type of an upper and lower radius arm per side, for Enzo Ferrari was afraid that the car would not be homologated if it had the independent rear suspension fitted that the TR's had at that time. Willy Mairesse tested the Papero on August 11 1961 for the first time. This was within 2 months after Giotto Bizzarrini and his team starting the project!

When Moss tested the car at Monza just before the tragic Grand Prix of September 1961, the engine still had the usual wet sump oiling system. This made the oil cavitate in the corners and was shown by the big clouds of smoke emitting from the exhaust pipes whilst the car was exiting the Parabolica However Moss was still able to beat the current SWB with times of 1.46 and 1.47. The SWB time around Monza was between 1.50 and 1.51, and so Bizzarrini's design demonstrated a considerable improvement.

Due to the growing internal tensions at Ferrari that led to the "Palace revolution" in November, Giotto Bizzarrini did no more work on the "Papero" after these tests. Mauro Forgheri finished the project and added the dry sump to the car.

After this, it is not clear what happened to the Ferrari Boano – SWB – Cavia – Papero – GTO. Many Ferrari authors have their own opinion but Giotto Bizzarrini had this to say when asked:

"The "Papero" or "Papera" was destroyed. Commendatore Ferrari wanted that I had it, but at the end of 1961 there was the well-known "revolution" with the exit from Ferrari of all of

the managers. Therefore I was not able to take the "Papera" home. A true error !!! It did not become a SWB nor a GTO".

So we have a problem. Do we believe what, 'il Ingegnere', the father of the GTO, Giotto Bizzarrini, said or do we have to take the speculations of the writers on Ferrari for granted?

Certainly, nobody has yet proved that the 'Papero' was rebuilt as a SWB or a GTO. That great authority on the subject of the 250 GT Berlinetta, Jess Pourret, thought that a SWB, chassis number 2053 GT, had been the car altered for the GTO prototype tests. 2053 GT, a Competition SWB, had been delivered on August 2, 1960 in Italy to Carlo Toselli, who the year before had raced a LWB "Tour de France" Berlinetta, chassis number 1335 GT, with some success. Certainly, after just a year, 2053 GT is noted as having been "Traded in at the Works and used then for studies on the new GTO" (Pourret). Bearing in mind that 2053 GT had been traded in at the factory in August, 1961, and then sold to Ecurie Francorchamps in early 1962, I believe we have to discount this as the "Donor" car, particularly in view of Ing. Bizzarrini's statements above. As to his contention that: "It did not become a SWB nor a GTO", how would he know? He had already left Ferrari's employ immediately after the September Monza tests and was no longer privy to what went on there.

After those tests 0523GT, the "Papero", went back into the factory and was used for more experiments, whilst the first 250 GTO proper, 3223 GT, was built up, to be shown to the press on February 24th, 1962.

So just what did happen to 0523 GT after this?

When the authors started on the investigations that led to finding out that the Bizzarrini 250 GTO prototype was NOT 2053 GT, we assumed that 0523 GT had been re-numbered and sold as 2053 GT. That, we realize now, was probably not the case. When Bob Bodine owned 3223 GT, the first 250 GTO sold by the factory, he was convinced that it was the "Papera" prototype that had previously been seen at the Monza tests in September 1961. Indeed, what other credible solution to the mystery of what happened to that car can there be? We all know that Enzo Ferrari never threw anything remotely profitable away, and here was a complete car, almost ready to sell. Just a little polishing up of the bodywork shape, a new paint job, a new chassis plate and-voila! One brand-new GTO, to you, sir, a cool \$15,000.

What we do know of 3223 GT bears all the foregoing out. This GTO was kept by the Scuderia Ferrari for more testing by Mairesse, Baghetti and Bandini and had several more modifications made to it until June, 1962, when it was sold to Luigi Chinetti's North American Racing Team. (One of these modifications was the small "Spoiler", placed across the rear of the trunk lid, which both improved high-speed handling and top speed). Bear in mind also that Luigi Chinetti's NART was a favored Quasi-factory team.

3223 GT differed in several details from the GTO's that followed. It had the fuel filler on the left rear fender, (The "Papero's fuel filler was on the left of the trunk lid) and it had no front brake ducts. (Neither did the "Papero".) The Front blinkers were under the headlights, (As were the "Papero's") and it had a Central hood lock plus a small rear fender vent. The gear-shift did not have the classic GTO gate, (Neither did the "Papero's"), the differential casing was modified to take the Watts Linkage, (as was the "Paperos), and the battery was under the passenger seat, (as was the "Papero's). Undoubtedly, some of these differences were a carry-over from the "Papero" of 1961.

3223 GT started its actual racing life at Bridgehampton in where Ed Hugus and Hayes drove it to a third place. This was clearly more in the line of a "test drive" as, shortly thereafter, the GTO went to Nassau for the week-long binge known as the "Nassau Speed Week", a year-end jolly laid on with the help of the Bahamas Government so that race drivers and teams from around the World could get a little winter sunshine before Christmas.

Luigi Chinetti had hired Ferrari's works driver, Lorenzo Bandini to drive 3223 GT and, in the Tourist Trophy, he was partnered with Hayes and they finished in second place. In the following day's Governor's Trophy, Hayes took third with the "new" GTO and, in the Sunday Race, he placed fifth overall.

For 1963, 3223 GT stayed with NART, being raced by, amongst others, "Fireball" Roberts, John Cannon and Bob Grossman. Although placing well, it did not win a race.

For 1964, the now aging GTO was sold to a Mr. Perkins, who contested Sebring, (27th) and Daytona, (11th). In 1966, Perkins, teamed with Slottag, had the misfortune to crash the GTO and, shortly afterwards, he sold the car to Bob Grossman.

For some reason, Bob Grossman removed the heads and carburetors and fitted them to a street GTE but later on, the GTO received new, correct parts to replace the ones removed. Although 3223 GT has gone through several owners since those days, it has been lovingly cared for as its value has risen and people realize how much a GTO in good condition will fetch.

When one looks at the press photos of 3223 GT, sparkling in the late winter sunshine on its debut at Maranello, it's difficult to believe that this sleek beauty started life as a "standard" Boano coupe five years earlier, but such is most likely the case. Perhaps Enzo Ferrari himself could never have conceived just how much more beautiful his daily "driver" would become.

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