

1958 FERRARI 250GT TOUR DE FRANCE



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Many years ago, in the late 1970s, I bought a 1958 Ferrari 250 GT “Tour de France” Berlinetta.

I’ve written about her before but not for a long time and, coupled with my feelings about old cars today, I thought it might be a good idea to take a look back at that car and see what’s happened as she’s gone from the GT class winning racecar that she was in 1958, to the blue-chip revered icon of fine art that she’s turned into today.

0911GT was built, if memory serves me right, in May 1958 and almost immediately entered in the truncated version of that once great road race, the Mille Miglia. The original version of that truly death-defying race had been stopped in 1957, after the Marquis Alfonso de Portago had crashed into the crowd, killing himself, his navigator and several other

bystanders. It then became a rally around the Dolomites, which was won by Luigi Taramazzo, 0911's first owner. Taramazzo, incidentally, had a string of 250GT Berlinettas before switching his allegiance to Porsche in the 1960s and racing, I believe, a 904 and then a 906.

Taramazzo and 0911 GT then took the class win in the Trento-Bondone hill climb on July 13th and a week later Taramazzo and 0911 GT were overall victors at the Garessio-San Bernardo hillclimb. The Coppa Intereuropa was held at Monza on September 7th and on the fast 4.65-mile Grand Prix track, against heavy opposition, Taramazzo in 0911 GT took overall victory and was not that much slower than Tony Brooks' Van Wall Grand Prix car. The Pontedecimo-Giovi hill climb came next on September 28, and Taramazzo and 0911 took second overall and first in GT. It was then back to Monza, for the Coppa San Ambroeus and again Luigi Taramazzo came home second overall and second in the GT class. Taramazzo was crowned Italian National GT champion and then, after just one more race, traded the car back to Ferrari for yet another 250 GT Berlinetta.

After a few more owners, 0911GT was bought in the early 1960s by Paddy McNally, who is today better known for his association with one Bernard Ecclestone. She then went to a wealthy young man, Paul Kay, and it was whilst she was in his ownership, during 1962, that I first encountered her.

I'd been to our local pub "The Boot" at Mappleborough Green in England with my friend Allen Goodall and, despite it being evening, there was no mistaking the sleek lines of the then black Ferrari in the car park.

To cut a long story short, Allen swiftly found out who owned the car and introduced himself! It turned out that Paul Kay lived locally to my parents' house, where I was then living and, at the end of the evening, he gave me a lift home, a distance of about eighteen miles.

Like many before and since, that ride changed my life; my father had been fortunate enough to own a string of saloon/sedan Jaguars but nothing came close to that Ferrari on rural roads in 1961 England. Paul Kay said we hit 140 mph on the Alcester Road on the way home and I happily believed him. He mentioned the fact that it had won the 1958 Mille Miglia and that fact stayed with me for life. He offered me the car for £1750 but, as I pointed out to him, I didn't have 1750 pennies then.

Years later, I bought 0911GT. In 1979 to be precise. By then, I had made some money and, remembering her chassis number, I placed an advertisement in the Ferrari Owners' Club newsletter for her, which was answered by Ed Niles, a Ferrari broker in Los Angeles. I'm happy to say that Ed and his charming wife Phoebe are friends to this day.





Ed had recently sold 0911GT to Dennis Autrey (the son of Gene Autrey, the Cowboy star) and, at six feet three inches tall, he was somewhat compressed in the Ferrari's cockpit. When asked by Ed, he happily consented to a sale for approximately £17,000.00 (if memory serves me right, which it probably doesn't!). I didn't have all the money and went to my local bank manager for a loan. He refused. I pushed back the chair I had been sitting in and got down on my knees and begged him for the money. Somewhat astonished at this unconventional application for a loan, he agreed to give me the money!

I then embarked on a twelve year love affair with 0911GT. Oh sure, she was now back to being red and that nose was still somewhat off shape from a previous accident, and the engine finally blew a head gasket on me but she was mine! I did the Mille Miglia re-run three times, started taking her to track days and did the odd historic/vintage race with her, which she never failed to finish and then get me safely back home.

But then I bought a Lola T70 Mark IIIB coupe, a designed-for-the-job race car and, suddenly, just like that, 0911 GT was no longer the love of my life and I sold her for an absolute fortune, compared to what I had paid for her twelve years previously.

And now comes the rub; the next owner gave 0911GT a complete restoration but, in doing so, removed the nose and, I believe, the front fenders also and re-made them from new. When I next saw her at a concours, I had difficulty equating this concours queen with the 0911 GT that had been mine. Somehow, the spark that had been the character / personality of her was gone, ironed out of her with all the old parts that had been replaced. Oh sure, she was still 0911GT but she wasn't the 0911GT that I'd owned and loved.

Perhaps this is sour grapes on my part. After all, she is now worth, what(?) \$2m plus, even in these straitened times and that's a lot of money. It would certainly replace the retirement pension that's gone.

So here's the thing: In this current recession, we're still seeing rich folk buying very expensive old cars, particularly Ferrari competition cars. Just like old masters in the art world, these cars are now valued extremely highly, more highly than cash perhaps?

In my experience, most wealthy people are clever; that is not to say intelligent, or original, although some are. As a breed, they put their money into what they perceive as assets, recoverable for cash when a rainy day comes and, just like blue chip shares and fine art, there seems to be no top in sight. But then again, there are only so many of the "best" cars around, aren't there? And that all depends on what you define as "best"...

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