

MASERATI IN THE CARRERA PANAMERICANA 2009



Maserati in the Carrera Panamericana 2009



Last week, I drove George Tuma's 1961 Maserati 3500 GT about two hundred miles, in order to get some miles on her prior to George and Jim Pace taking part in the Carrera Panamericana, a two thousand mile rally in Mexico. The experience was.... *interesting*, if for no other reason than to show me just how much cars have improved over the intervening forty eight years. As they should!

The car was bought some years ago. This year, it has been completely restored and rally-prepared by Predator Performance of Largo, Florida, well known for their indecently fast racing Jaguar E types and BMW CSLs. David Hinton, the head of



Predator's race preparation business, said: "It's an unusual car to race in the Carrera, but I've done the race four times now, in a Jaguar XK140 and XK150 and believe the Maserati, driven well, has a chance at overall victory in the Original Panamericana class."

And so to the driving experience... Boy, was I taken back in time! Having got used to the silky smoothness of a 1997 Mercedes SL500, the Maserati came as a rude awakening. Just remember, this car is almost fifty years old now and that's just how it feels. BUT... that straight six engine has raw torque and a wonderful exhaust note, the ride is firm but not harsh, brakes are "adequate" (early discs).

On the freeway the Maserati was a blast. It will do 90 mph at just over 3,000 rpm (27.5 mph per 1000 rpm) and still accelerate forcefully if you put your foot down. There wasn't much on I75 that could stay with me.

But the most amazing thing about this lovely old car (I had got quite used to her when I regretfully handed her back) was the attention she received. I even had one truck pull into the right turn only lane at traffic lights for the gold-toothed occupant to ask: "What's that car man? It's cool!" Another pulled alongside on the freeway with the passenger asking (in a yell!) "What's that worth?" (*Thinks: Where did the "How fast will that go" question disappear to?*)



I couldn't help being reminded of the late 1950s Ferraris that I have been lucky enough to own in the past. For some reason, the Maserati 3500 GT has always been in the shadow of it's contemporary, Ferrari. Whilst there is no denying the appeal of the V12 that the Ferrari had, I have to say that the twin plug, triple Weber overhead cam Maserati engine is certainly as powerful (perhaps even more so?) as the Ferrari engine: The driving experience, as regards steering, braking and handling, is virtually identical. I think this is a very undervalued car in today's world.

George, who for the last two years has been competing in Patrick Peter's CER series, and at Classic Le Mans, with a 1974 Porsche Carrera RSR, will be partnered in the Carrera by Daytona 24 Hour winner Jim Pace in his bid to win the rally.

For more details about the race, go to: <http://lacarrerapanamericana.mx/>



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