

CHAMPION'S CHOICE

How good is the Ferrari 330 GTC? Good enough for one World Champion to call it "the best."

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ZACHARY MAYNE





After driving the then-new Ferrari 330 GTC in 1966, Phil Hill described the car as “the best road-going Ferrari ever built.” Strong words coming from a Formula 1 World Champion, and it’s worth noting he didn’t say the car was the fastest or the most exciting—he described it as the best.

Hill’s sentiment has been echoed by enthusiasts ever since: The 330 GTC does everything exceedingly well, from cruising down the

autostrada to puttering around town to attacking a winding country road.

One of those enthusiasts is Californian David Steele. “I’d been looking for a GTC since I was 17,” the 57-year-old quips. “I used to spend a lot of time hanging out on Balboa Island, a very wealthy area of Newport Beach. One day, I saw a young guy waxing his 330 GTC in front of his house, and I pestered him with questions about the car.”

The owner didn’t have much

interest in talking with the teenager about his car, but he eventually, begrudgingly answered the budding Ferrari fan’s queries. Steele took enough away from the encounter to decide right then and there that he would someday own one. In 2004, he actively began that search in earnest.

Finding a properly maintained car proved more difficult than he had anticipated, however. “I wouldn’t say that there were a lot of

ratty ones out there, but the owners of these cars tended to take them for granted, so a lot of them were not well taken care of,” says Steele.

While surfing the Internet one night in 2006, he spotted a silver 1967 GTC (s/n 9163) on consignment at Ferrari of Orange County. The dealership was just a couple of hours from his home in Temecula, California, so Steele decided to drive over.

When he saw the car in person a few days later, he knew

“IT WAS THE PERFECT COLOR COMBINATION,” SAYS OWNER STEELE. “I THINK THE SILVER PAINT AND RED INTERIOR IS THE BEST FOR THE 330.”



instantly it was the one he had been searching for. "I was in love with it," Steele recalls. "To me, it was the perfect color combo; I think the silver wheels with the silver paint and red interior is the best combination for the 330."

Overall, the GTC was a very nice driver with just the right amount of patina for his tastes. "It had never been restored, so it wasn't concours, but it was very nice," he says.

Since he had done his research beforehand, Steele spotted the car's incorrect bumpers right away; it also had a modern radio, and the original exhaust had been replaced with a louder Stebro setup. Otherwise, the Ferrari was an all-original California car, and two days later, Steele became its fifth owner.

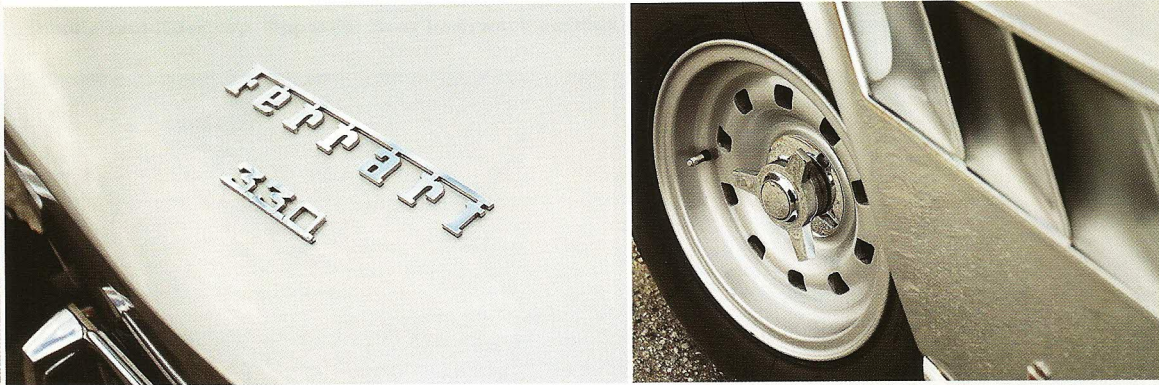
He quickly set about correcting the few issues, starting with the aftermarket exhaust. While it sounded great, it was much louder than the original and drowned out the engine note. An exact, stainless-steel copy of the factory piece from Timevalve was installed: "I wanted the original sound, and didn't want it to sound tinny," Steele says. He also replaced the Sony CD player with a period-correct Becker Europa radio.

For the proper bumpers, Steele contacted Tom Shaughnessy, who he describes as "the go-to guy" for old Ferrari parts in Southern California. "When I called him, he happened to have a set of the right bumpers," says Steele, who had Steve Beckman, another well-known name in Southern California

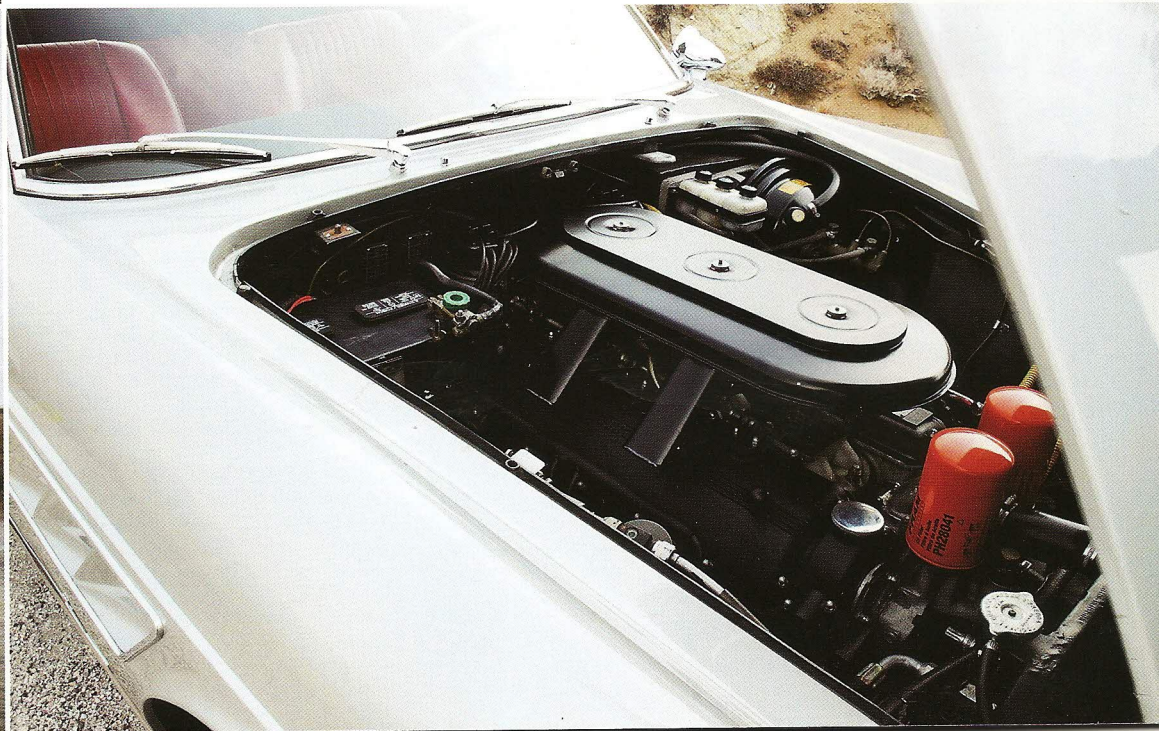
Ferrari circles, install them. The GTC's parking lights were also changed, to European-specification silver ones.

In order to make the 330 useable in any type of weather, Steele had the radiator upgraded. "When I drove the car home for the first time from the coast to Temecula, I noticed it got hot inside, and the temperature needle was moving a little high," he recalls. "I wanted to drive it during the summer, so I had a larger radiator from a later model installed. I also had dual electric fans from a 328 installed and run Evans racing coolant. I've driven it at 80 mph in 108° weather with the A/C on full blast, and it's never run hot."

Steele has so far found the GTC to be quite reliable, a by-product, he says, of the fact that



Above right: Campagnolo alloy wheels were standard, Borrani wire wheels were offered as an option. Below: Ferrari's triple-carb 3,967cc SOHC V12 engine produces 300 horsepower.



A PROD OF THE GAS PEDAL HELPS THINGS ALONG, AND THE 4-LITER V12 FIRES WITH A SURPRISINGLY UNDERSTATED VOICE.

it doesn't just sit in his garage. "Not driving a Ferrari almost ensures it will break down," he states. "You do have to adjust the valves religiously, but other than that, it's a very durable car given regular spark plug and oil changes." The only things that have actually failed are the tachometer cable and pin drive.

The 330 shares garage space with a Dino 246 [*We featured that car in issue #63's "Even Better Than the Real Thing"—Ed.*], so Steele has become familiar with the differences between the two Ferraris. "The Dino is a much more nimble car, but it is not as forgiving

when you corner quickly, so it can be tricky at the limit," he explains. "In contrast, the 330 is one of the best-balanced cars I've driven. With the transmission in back, it's very neutral. It's one of the only cars I've ever felt comfortable drifting; you can really kick the back end out, and it's always talking to you."

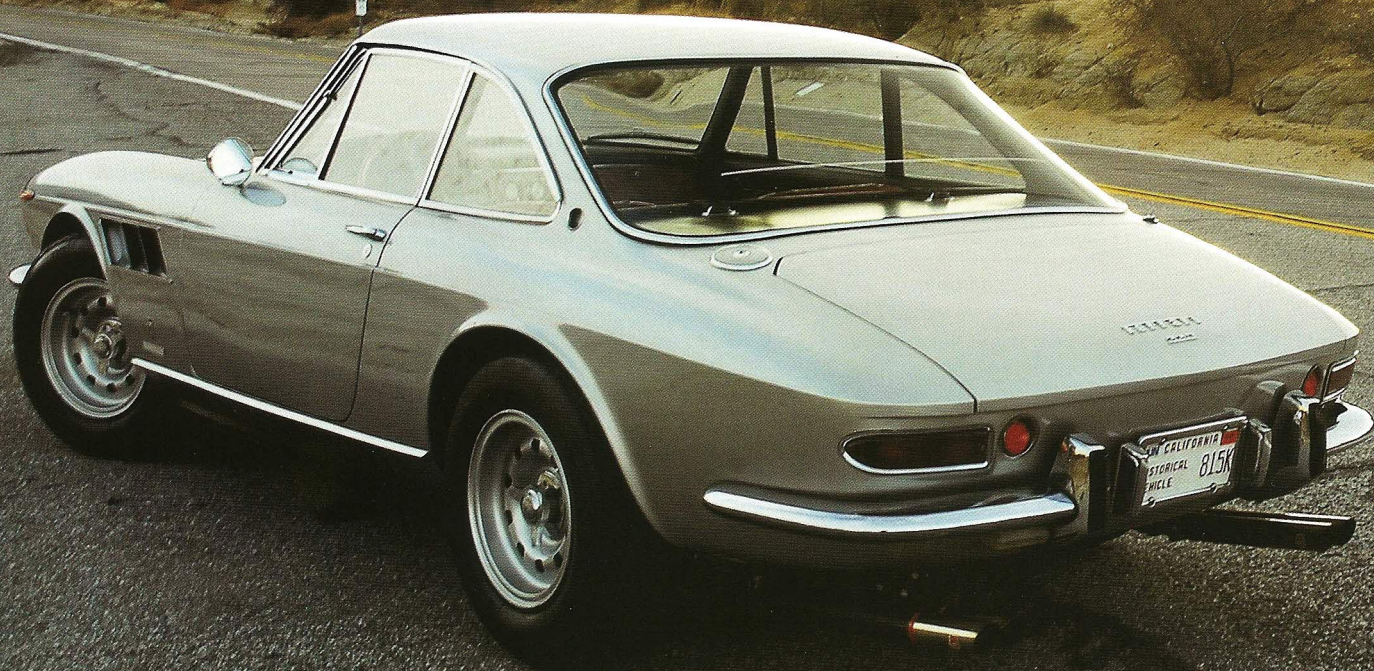
With Phil Hill's endorsement and Steele's infectious enthusiasm floating around in my head, I'm chomping at the bit to get behind the wheel. My chance comes in the town of Palm Desert, about an hour

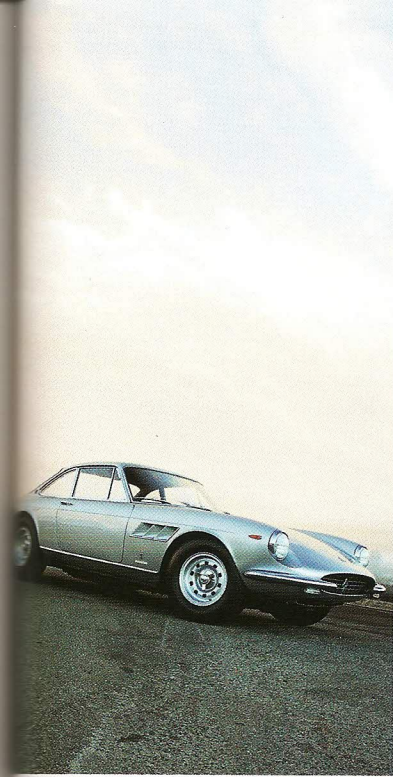
from Steele's home. The road back will take us into and over the mountains, a route which offers a terrific combination of everything from second-gear hairpins to fast sweepers.

I swing open the door and settle into the driver's red-leather seat. It is soft and comfortable, while the large wood-rimmed steering wheel rests just above my lap. The generously sized center console that sweeps up from between the seats and the generous greenhouse contribute to a real feeling of airiness; this interior would still feel spacious after an all-day drive.

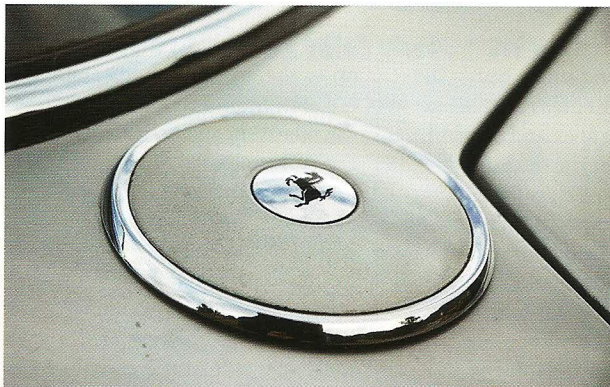
I twist the ignition key, which produces a deep whir from the starter, and the trio of downdraft Weber carburetors prime themselves with fuel. A prod of the gas pedal helps things along, and the 4-liter V12 fires with a surprisingly understated voice. At idle, the valve-train and timing chains make a soft clicking sound and there's a muffled burble from the exhaust tips, but it's otherwise very quiet inside the cockpit.

When I reach down for the black plastic shift knob, I discover that it is unlike those in more modern Ferraris I've driven. Rather than being





Above: Comfortable interior feels very spacious, thanks in part to large greenhouse. Below left: Ornate fuel-filler cap. Opposite: Rear bodywork carried over virtually unchanged from 275 GTS.



round and smooth, this one has indents for my fingers. It's a minor but pleasing ergonomic addition that encourages a more relaxed form of shifting; instead of grabbing the knob from the top, I instinctively wrap my hand around from the back, my thumb resting lightly on the top, my fingers gripping the indents in front.

I select first gear—back and to the left in this dog-leg 'box—and pull onto the road. My initial impression, as we cruise the Palm Desert streets, is that the 330 is heavy and luxurious, more boulevard cruiser than sports car. But as I ease from stoplight to stoplight in the late-afternoon traffic, it also occurs to me that I've

never felt so cool behind the wheel of a car. Observers know the 330 is something special, but its understated styling also says it has nothing to prove. If James Bond had been Italian, a 330 GTC would no doubt have been his steed of choice.

Leaving Palm Desert, I point the Ferrari toward the mountains rising dramatically from the desert floor. At first, I feel the V12's exhaust note is too muted, that I'm missing out on the Ferrari's true mechanical symphony, but as the miles build I start to appreciate the motor for what it is—a quiet, unobtrusive force that just gets on with the business of powering the car down the road. The V12 revs smoothly and enthusi-

astically, which is good since I have to keep it in the upper reaches of its powerband to maintain a brisk pace. As the engine nears redline, it starts to let out that distinctive Ferrari howl, yet the noise levels still remain subdued.

As I row up and down through the gears, the shift action proves to be one of the best of any vintage Ferrari I've driven. Minimal effort is needed to guide the chrome lever home with a precise, well-oiled *clack*.

The heavy nature that the 330 displayed around town continues at first in the mountains. Turn-in is slow by modern standards, thanks no doubt to the tires' tall sidewalls,



and there is noticeable body roll through the turns. These two factors make me reluctant to corner aggressively.

However, when I push on I discover that the GTC really does have wonderfully predictable handling. Upon initial turn-in, the front feels heavy, but as soon as the rear swings around, the Ferrari balances things out nicely. In fact, after a few miles I become familiar

enough with the car's behavior to drift it around turns, gently sliding the back end as I accelerate through the apex and unwind the wheel for the next straight. There is also a reassuring solidity to the way the 330 corners, with no hint of the floatiness that its luxurious ride would suggest.

Given their vintage, the brakes don't slow the big Ferrari instantly, but they do have a nice, progressive feel.

More importantly, they're easily up to the task of slowing the GTC in drama-free fashion at the relatively aggressive pace I'm carrying.

All in all, this Ferrari feels like it was engineered by enthusiasts who really understood what makes a car fun to drive. And in this case, they managed to perfectly match the sports-car side of the equation with true GT ability.

We arrive in Temecula after the sun has dropped over the horizon. As I step out of the 330, the engine ticking as it cools in the evening air, I feel energized by the involvement of the drive, but at the same time I'm refreshed and relaxed. I think I know exactly what Hill was talking about, and I certainly understand why Steele never lets this Ferrari sit unused for very long. ●

JUST THE FACTS

Inside the 330 GTC

THE 330 GTC WAS UNVEILED at the Geneva Auto Show in March 1966. Pininfarina designed the perfectly proportioned body, which features a front end remarkably similar to that of the 400 Superamerica, albeit cleaned up a bit, and a rear end copied pretty much entirely from the 275 GTS. This understated and elegant coachwork clothes what is basically the 275 GTB/4's steel-tube chassis, with four-wheel independent suspension and disc brakes. Production cars were fitted with attractive Campagnolo

alloys as standard, while Borrani wire wheels were optional.

Under the long hood is a 3,967cc SOHC V12 engine (first seen in the 330 GT 2+2) which produces 300 horsepower at 7,000 rpm. Because the GTC's gearbox is partnered with the differential in back for improved weight distribution, Ferrari's engineers had to redesign the engine block in order to allow the driveshaft, itself enclosed in a torque tube, to mate with the motor.

Performance is strong: The dash to 60

mph takes just 6.5 seconds, and the car's top speed is over 150 mph. That said, the 330 GTC is less sports car (a role filled by the 275 GTB/4) and more GT; its spacious, inviting interior features such luxuries as leather seats, power windows and optional air-conditioning.

The model was a big success, and Ferrari produced around 600 GTCs (plus 100 of its drop-top sibling, the 330 GTS) between 1966 and '68. At that time, it was replaced by the almost visually identical 4.4-liter 365 GTC. —Zachary Mayne