



TOUR de **FRANCE**

Ferrari 250GT



Leaving the warmth of the Talacrest showroom on a cold and frosty winter's morning, an old Ferrari 250 Tour de France comes face to face with a modern recreation.



● A frosty morning in early December will strike some people as not the cleverest of moments to attempt to distinguish between the finer points of one Tour de France 250 Ferrari and another. But we journalists don't always get to pick our opportunities,

so it was off to the test track early one icy morning pre-Christmas to engage in the rigours of this particular task. Shades of that lovely French film from 1966, 'A Man and A Woman', where the Jean Louis Trintignant character turns up at Monthlery on a misty morn for some pre-Le Mans testing. What a romantic business!

Now Tour de France has always meant Gendebien winning a road event in a GT Ferrari somewhere in France, and one only knew about this road race/rally event after it was over. It was that kind of competition. It has a long and distinguished history, but mainly in France itself. The fame and reputation is evident, however, by the numbers now flocking to take part in the retro event.

As you hard-core Ferrari fans know, Tour de France isn't the proper name for this type of vehicle. It's a 250GT Competition Long Wheelbase, the 1959 car being a First Series version. The Tour de France tag was applied after numerous successes in the event, or even anticipated success, much like the 250LM denoting a serious Le Mans contender.

Variations on a theme

We were about to try two variations on the theme, one an original and the other a reproduction, both with great character, with some marked similarities, but also with outstanding differences.

After a fairly long and foot-chilling wait for the worst of the frost to depart from the circuit, it looked like we might be able to venture out and give the first example, chassis 1309GT, a chance to show her mettle. After all, this was a machine for road racing, especially for racing on real roads so I shouldn't be put off on ice!

Now 1309GT is a long beast, and 'long wheelbase' means long, but this car looks and feels it, as well as having 'long' in the specs. While the car never ran in the Tour de France itself, it had an interesting and successful competition history. Its fastest time of the day, in the Flying Kilometre at Castlefuasna back in 1959, was one of the achievements I thought most fascinating... that meant it was fast, and if even most of its approximate 260bhp were still there, then this was the place to try it out. It should be capable of over 210km/h... some 130mph for you unconverted.

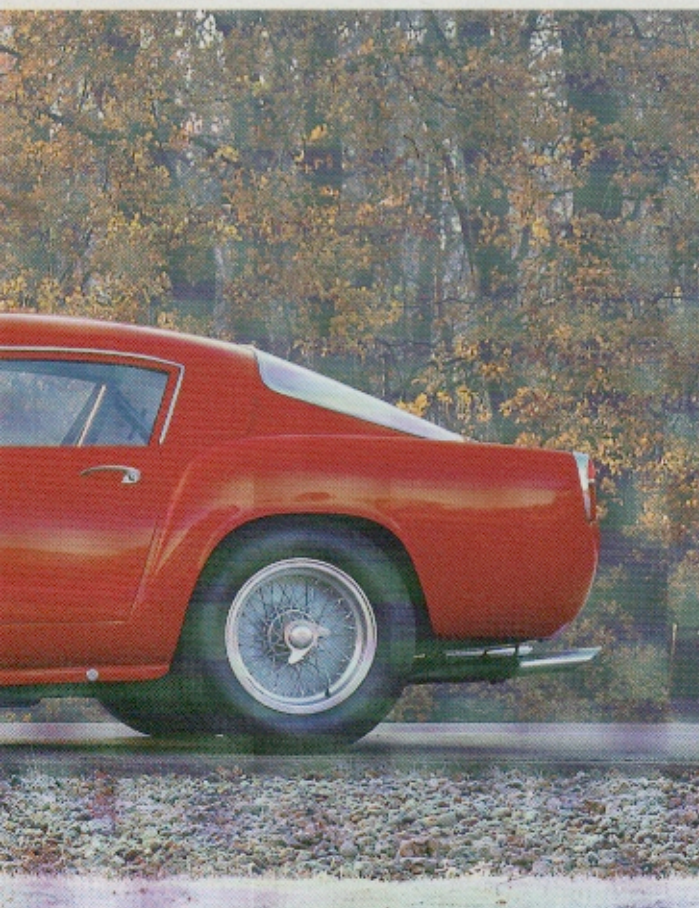
Ferrari 250GT Berlinettas won all nine rounds of the Tour de France from 1956 to 1964. There were some pretty significant names attached to those wins as well as to



TOUR de **FRANCE**

Ed McDonough drives a pair of 250GT Ferraris, an old one and a new old one.





Above and left: 1309GT is a first version TdF of 1959 and would have had exposed headlights when new, but these were damaged in an accident. Initially it was competed by De Micheli in Italian hillclimbs and sprints. Eventually it found its way to the USA via Switzerland and the UK where it was said to have been fitted with a Ford V8 engine. Nick Harley bought the car in 1989 and re-installed the original engine. The car is currently for sale at Talacrest Ltd.

250 TOUR de FRANCE HERITAGE

by Peter Collins



● Piecing together the story of these two cars and their background, in the space allotted to me, is rather akin to making a film of the history of the world lasting thirty seconds or performing all of Shakespeare's plays in ninety minutes.

If the short-wheelbase 250GT which followed it was the last of the road-racers, then the late 1950s 250GT Berlinetta Tour de France, which both of these cars are, was the last of the rally/road-racers. Difficult as it may be to believe, this model gained its name from rallying. No, they didn't crash their way through forests or across East Africa, but they were supreme on all-asphalt events such as the Tour de France, which was a long dash around France visiting many hill-climbs and race circuits on the way and even venturing into Belgium at one point. It was from this event that these cars have received the, unofficial, title of 250GT TdF. To be really pedantic, there are those who think that their full title should be 250GT Berlinetta Long Wheelbase Tour de France, generically they have become known simply as TdFs.

As with most things Ferrari, there is considerable historical precedent to the line and the origins of the species are evident in earlier 250GT models, especially those described in issue 2 of *Auto Italia*. Look at the bodywork of the two cars here and you would be forgiven for thinking that the red car is from an earlier date than the blue one. You would be wrong; setting aside the fact that the blue car is a later reproduction, the fact that it has a smooth, modern appearance does not make it younger than the red car. The blue car, 1657GT, carries a shape that was a direct metamorphosis from both the earlier 250GTs described previously and the 250MM series.

Several different 250GT Berlinettas had been built in '54 and '55, but the Geneva show of 1956 was the date when the various threads of the story started to come together. Back in '55, Farina had exhibited a slightly vulgar over-chromed car, 0393GT, at the Paris show, displaying the fourteen louvres in the rear sail panel for the first time, but it was at Geneva in '56 when a Farina design, executed by Scaglietti, appeared, that the shape of the TdFs to come first materialised. The car displayed was 0425GT.

In January 1957, Scaglietti started building what were the definitive first series TdF Berlinettas. He took the Farina design and effectively softened it a

HERITAGE

little, achieving the shape you see here displayed by 1657GT. The engines used were the Type 128 2,953cc Colombo designed V12s with three 36DCC Webers and developing 230bhp to begin with. A twin tubed chassis with cross bracing was employed, and the wheelbase was set at 2.60 metres and remained thus for the whole of the production period. Despite disc-brake technology moving on apace during this time, the cars stuck rigidly to the use of huge drums and even retained lever-arm shock absorbers until 1960.

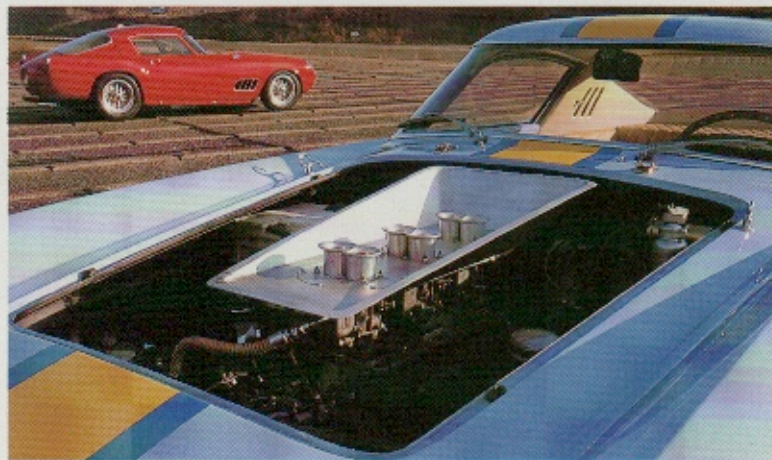
After an outright win on the 1957 Tour of Sicily by Gendebien and his cousin, Wascher, the same duo pulled off an incredible third overall in that year's Mille Miglia to establish the model in the history books. With their 250GT they had averaged 93.6mph for the thousand miles, whilst the winner, Taruffi, in a Ferrari prototype, had only managed 94.8mph. At the Rheims 12 Hours in July, an overwhelming 1,2,3,4,5 was achieved. However, after only a few months and ten Scaglietti cars being built, the revised 1958 version appeared in time for the September 1957 Tour de France event. The cars swept to a 1,2,3 (the '58 version taking third place) and earned themselves the title that has endured ever since. Once again Olivier Gendebien was the leader. The cars had changed shape, though, for 1958 and now looked much like the red car you see here, chassis 1309GT. Gone were the 14 louvres, replaced by three vents; the nose had been lengthened and lowered and the headlamps were faired in, only to be uncovered again for the '59 version in order to comply with new Italian laws. Four years in succession the Tour de France event was dominated by these cars, but they also showed their diverse abilities by gaining excellent results in events as different as the Sestriere and Alpine Rallies, the Le Mans 24 hours and, of course, the Tour de France.

Scaglietti built

Between 1954 and 1959, ninety-three 250GTs were built, Scaglietti being responsible for all the TdF versions except for five bodied by Zagato. By 1959, ways to develop the line further were being investigated and in that year six cars were fitted with completely different bodystyles, which later turned out to be precursors of the following 250GT short wheelbase shape.

The blue car, 1657GT, is a reproduction of the first TdF series based upon the chassis of a 250 Pinin Farina coupe and taking over 2 years to finish, Autosport of Basilia doing much of the work, in particular the body. They had also built the 512BBLM bodies and painted the F50s. Mechanicals were rebuilt by Torelli and disc brakes were fitted. The interior was trimmed by the Luppi brothers. It now looks stunning in Swedish racing colours. The red car, 1309GT, was invoiced on March 24th 1959 and is a first version body from that year.

Whilst the TdFs may not seem to have the ultimate glamour of the 250GT0, they provided many results throughout the latter part of the '50s and contributed a huge amount to the Ferrari mystique that we know today.

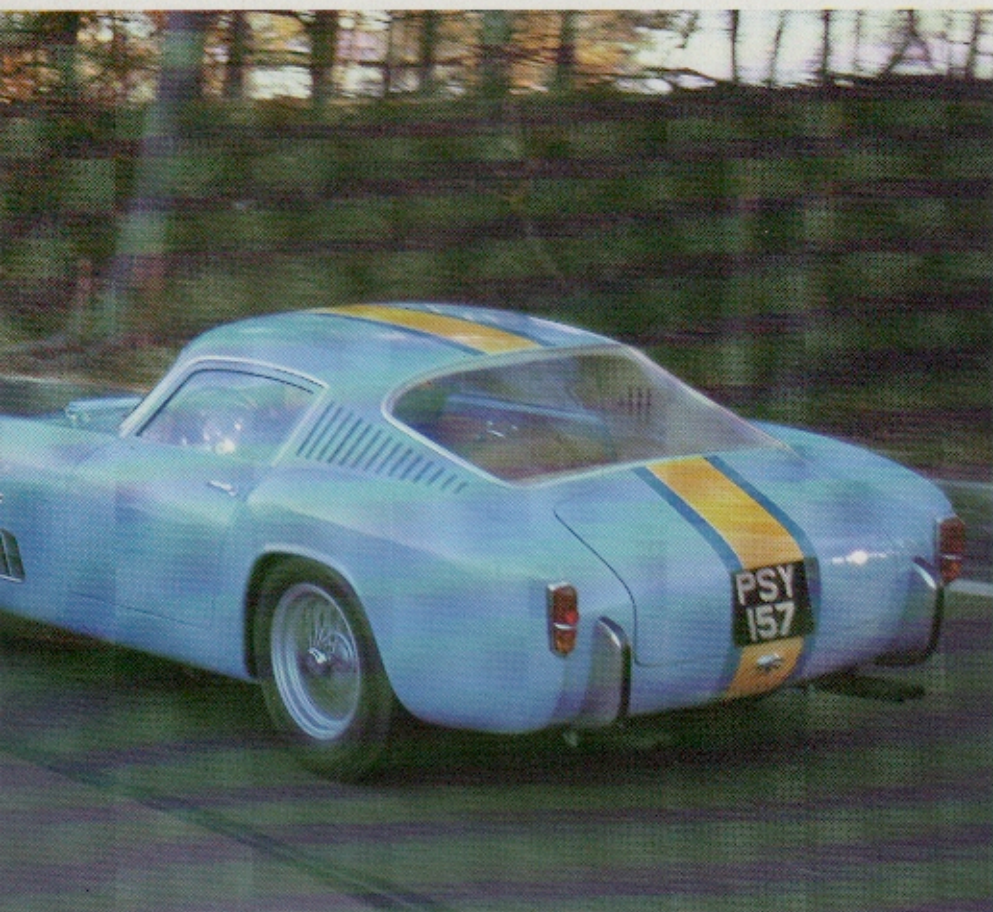


Below: *Detailing on the 'new' 250 is superb, especially the interior, whereas the original car has the patina of a true Ferrari classic.*



the many other international competitions the LWB 250 took part in. These names ran through my head like a high speed record as I tentatively blipped the throttle to warm up the cold V12 heart lying beneath the swooping bonnet: Gendebien, of course, Trintignant (Maurice, not Jean Louis), Lucien Bianchi, De Portago, Rosier, Harry Schell, Phil Hill, Andre Simon, Schlessler, Drogo. This was the cream of the Ferrari GT contingent, and of them all, Gendebien stood out for his ability to get to grips with the challenge and torture of this event.

A few laps were essential to get up to working temperature. The triple carbs were sputtering and spitting and not wanting to respond to anything but a very gradual and gentle right foot. My hand kept reaching for the over-sized chromium shift knob wanting to go down some gears, but 1309GT wouldn't have it, patience being demanded.



the long straight. There was no sense in getting all out of shape on the banking, or in the trees! In the conditions we were not going to use the hilly and tight cross country section of the test track. But on the long fast corners there was a touch of understeer, easily controlled by easing off on the throttle and trusting the 16 inch Dunlop racing tyres. The live rear axle worked its best when understeer started to turn to oversteer, and the car, not being as heavy as it looks, was totally controllable on the throttle. No wonder a 5-6 day race on the open roads of France was so popular. But then again, there was that list of results and all those non-finishers who had managed to break their sumps on roadside rocks and boulders.

Comparison time

Having had a reasonable time to savour the feel of a genuine long wheelbase 250, it was time to do drive version two. Chassis 1657GT started life as one of 350 Pinin Farina designed and built 250 Coupes, chassis type 508G, which indeed was very similar to the TdF chassis. In recent years, this car lost its original body and had a superb hand-built alloy body fabricated in Italy. Where 1657GT is really different is in its performance with considerable work having been carried out to the engine as well as the addition of disc brake. While 1309GT is a wonderful old

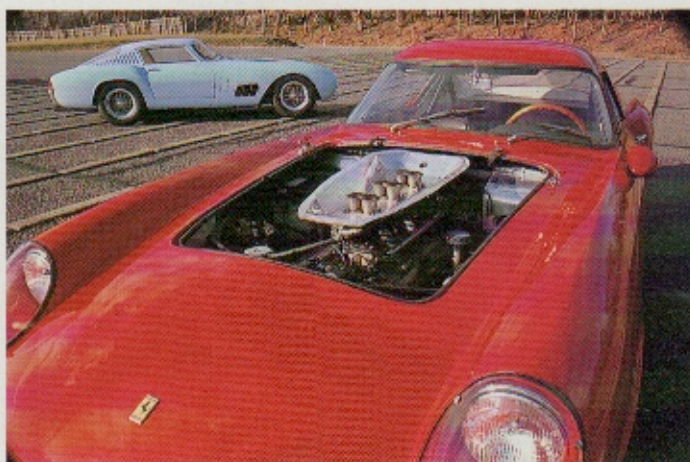
Ferrari, that is what it really is . . . an older Ferrari; in comparison to 1657 it has much heavier handling. The pale blue recreated TdF is very precise, the engine is extremely crisp, the acceleration is markedly better.

With a drying circuit, it was possible to push this car much harder, with the brakes inspiring confidence, and with less tendency for the rear end to move about under hard acceleration.

The smooth operation of the finely tuned carburetors meant the long left-hander on to the return straight could be taken flat in top, and thus a maximum of 7,000rpm in 4th gear could be achieved towards the end of the straight. This was quick!

Stepping back and looking at the two cars sitting next to each other, I couldn't decide which one I liked better. 1309GT is a real classic, with the hint of the rear fins characteristic of the period, and it just propels you back in time, whereas 1657GT has a more pronounced brutality about it. If you could put the performance of the latter into the style of the former . . . wow! Conversely, if that had happened, I suspect there would be even fewer of them left.

I took both cars out again for a more studied comparison and their individual traits became clearer. I was rapidly growing fonder of each of them. What a life! ■



Top: the firmer suspension and enhanced performance of the reconstructed Pinin Farina 250 Coupe makes it feel like a much improved race version of the original 250 TdF.

The early laps, at no more than 4,000 revs, gave plenty of opportunity to take in the essential ingredients of the cockpit. This car was meant for business. It was comfortable and easy to get to grips with, but purposeful, if not quite spartan, after all it was a 1950s GT race car.

Even in the warm-up phase this red beast was ready to go. On the long straight it went up over 100mph with no trouble. There was the danger of being lulled into a false sense of security with this seemingly sure-footed machine, but the first trip into the banking with more revs and 3rd gear brought the rude awakening . . . there was ice on the exit from the banking. The smooth V12, now running better with the oil and water nice and hot, gave the softest of wails as the rear

wheel spun, the back darted up the banking, and it took some quick work on the lock and steady the throttle. Lifting off at this stage would have had dire consequences . . . just feed in some throttle and bring the nose round again.

So it was several more laps of prudent driving. Out on the return stretch, where the winter sun was already at work, the throttle could go down hard and the reward was there to be reaped. The wail intensified, the needle on the rev counter moved rapidly around the chrome dial, and it was soon touching 6,000 . . . 6,400 . . . 6,600 in 3rd and then in top. There was the 120mph point, and then close on to 130.

The great over-sized drum brakes were needed to pull down the speed at the end of