Great Cars

Ferrari 250 GTO

The autobiography of 4153 GT

Keith Bluemel

Edited by Mark Hughes
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The 250 GTO is one of the most revered cars ever produced by Ferrari. With only 36 examples produced between 1962 and 1964, it has become an increasingly sought-after model as the years have passed. The reasons for this are manifold.

During its production period and even beyond, the GTO accumulated an enviable race record, building upon the success of the preceding 250 GT series of cars. As the last evolutionary development of the 250 GT series, the GTO was as equally suited to use on the road as it was to tearing up the race tracks of the world and regularly beating all in sight. Add in the emotional factors – the sonorous roar of its V12 engine and its alluringly curvaceous body styling – together with its all-round dynamic attributes – a well-sorted chassis with predictable handling and generous power characteristics – and you have all the ingredients of a true classic.

So it is that the GTO has become one of the world’s most valuable cars.

Chassis 4153 GT, the subject of this book, is a prime example of a GTO with the original 1962 body shape, which is generally considered to be the more desirable version. It has been beautifully restored to the original colour combination of silver with French Tricolore stripes, the livery with which it left the factory in December 1962. Its period racing life was mainly in France and Belgium, and its first race, in June 1963, was what may be termed a ‘baptism of fire’. This was the gruelling Le Mans 24 Hours, which it passed with flying colours, finishing second in class and fourth overall, driven by owner Pierre Dumay partnered by Léon Dernier.

Up to the end of the 1965 season, 4153 GT competed in various other major endurance races, such as the Spa 500Km, the Nürburgring 1,000Km and the Paris 1,000Km, as well as various lesser events, including hillclimbs and even some winter rallies – its versatility knew no bounds. On the driver front, some of its other well-known drivers of the period included Georges Berger, Lucien Bianchi and Willy Mairesse.

Even after its ‘sell-by’ date, 4153 GT continued to have a successful racing career in Spain between 1966 and 1969, making it the GTO with the longest period competition history.

The crowning glory of this remarkable car’s competition career was its overall victory in the 1964 Tour de France. Bianchi and Berger carried off the victor’s laurels in this most arduous of events against very strong competition, not only from other 250 GTs but also from the Ford-backed Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupes. It was truly a magnificent achievement.
CHAPTER 1
Part 1

Setting the scene
Chapter 1
Evolution of the GTO

The 250 GT series of Ferrari cars had its beginnings in the mid-1950s, initially with the 250 Europa GT. This model made its public début at the 1954 Paris Salon, replacing the visually very similar 250 Europa model, which had featured a 2,800mm wheelbase and a 3-litre version of the Aurelio Lampredi-designed ‘long-block’ V12 engine. The 250 Europa shared the Lampredi engine design, the type 104 chassis and the Pinin Farina body style with the concurrently produced 375 America, and some examples of the 250 Europa were upgraded to the larger 4.5-litre engine capacity of that model. When the new 250 Europa GT superseded the 250 Europa, the 375 America ceased production.

The new 250 Europa GT differed from its predecessor in having a shorter 2,600mm wheelbase and a 3-litre version of the Gioacchino Colombo-designed ‘short-block’ V12, the more compact construction of this engine allowing the reduction in wheelbase. During 1955 a small series of competition Berlinetta versions was built, with bodies by Pinin Farina that all differed to varying degrees. Three examples (0369 GT, 0385 GT and 0415 GT) had bodies that were essentially similar in appearance to the 250 MM Berlinetta of 1953, featuring a projecting ovoid nose and a large wrap-around rear screen, and another (0393 GT) had a body style that gave a flavour of how the 250 GT Berlinetta would develop under the guidance of Sergio Scaglietti, who was becoming more involved in the construction of bodies for Ferrari’s competition cars at that time. In fact, Scaglietti also produced a one-off Berlinetta on chassis 0425 GT.

The following year, 1956, Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta bodies were constructed by Scaglietti to his own design, developed from Pinin Farina’s 1955 offerings as well as his own one-off body for 0425 GT. The overall body shape underwent four evolutions during the production run.

The first version of the body shape in 1956 was very similar to the design seen on the 250 Europa GT Berlinetta during 1955, but with tauter lines that had a slimming effect on the car’s appearance. In early 1957 the body underwent its first major alterations, with the provision of a separate horizontal rear wing line with vertical light assemblies in place of the rounded tail of the 1956 model. At the same time the wrap-around rear screen was replaced by a smaller, flatter Plexiglas screen together with sail panels on either side featuring a row of 14 tapering louvres for the extraction of air from the cabin. The nose of the car was very similar to its predecessor, but the oval radiator aperture with recessed egg-crate grille was shallower in depth, giving a leaner frontal appearance.

In late 1957 (for the 1958 model year) it was the front of the car that received the main surgery. There was a revised radiator opening and the forward sections of the front wings were higher, with the headlights raised and placed into recesses under clear Perspex covers. The 14-louvre treatment for the sail panels was discarded in favour of a simpler layout of three louvres. Normally the cars of this period were fitted with full-width...
front and rear bumpers instead of the small vertical ‘bumperettes’ previously provided, but these were frequently removed by owners.

Cars built early in 1959 remained very similar to those of the 1958 model year, except that the headlights were uncovered in shallow recesses at the wing extremities due to changes in Italian lighting legislation (although some foreign-market cars retained covered lights) and the sail panels now carried just a single air outlet. Some earlier cars were changed to the open-headlight layout at this time, when returned to the factory for maintenance or repair.

At the Le Mans 24 Hours Jean Blaton and Léon Dernier drove this 250 GT TdF Berlinetta (chassis 1321 GT) to a class win and third place overall.

Revs Institute/George Phillips

At the 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours Jean Blaton and Léon Dernier drove this 250 GT TdF Berlinetta (chassis 1321 GT) to a class win and third place overall.

Revs Institute/George Phillips

The Colombo-designed ‘short-block’ V12 engine of the 250 GT series had a capacity of 2,953cc, with bore/stroke of 73.0/58.8mm, and produced a claimed 260bhp. Other features included a single overhead camshaft per bank, three twin-choke Weber 36 DCL3 or 36 DCZ3 carburettors, and an ignition system with twin coils and distributors mounted at the rear of the engine. Progressive developments of the unit carried factory type references 128, 128B, 128C and 128D, all with sparking plugs within the vee of the block, while some of the very last examples in the series were fitted with the 128 DF version of the engine, with outside sparking plugs.

The gearbox was all-synchromesh and had four speeds. It drove through a prop shaft to the rigid rear axle, for which a range of ratios was available. Initially the gear lever was positioned either centrally or offset, but from 1958 a revised gearbox with central lever became standard issue.

These competition Berlinettas were hugely successful. Their achievements included four consecutive overall wins in the Tour de France from 1956 to 1959, victory in the Targa Florio of 1957, and first place in the GT category at Le Mans in 1959.

Olivier Gendebien and Lucien Bianchi were the overall winners of the 1959 Tour de France with this 250 GT ‘Interim’ Berlinetta (chassis 1523 GT).

Revs Institute/Edward Eves

This 250 GT ‘Interim’ Berlinetta (chassis 1461 GT) finished second in class and fourth overall at Le Mans in 1959, driven by André Pilette and George Arents.

Revs Institute/George Phillips

At the 1959 Le Mans 24 Hours Jean Blaton and Léon Dernier drove this 250 GT TdF Berlinetta (chassis 1321 GT) to a class win and third place overall.

Revs Institute/George Phillips

Great Cars

Evolution of the GTO

Ferrari 250 GTO

Evolution of the GTO
1959 while finishing third overall, behind two Aston Martin sports racing cars. These were just a few of the many class and overall victories scored in the hands of amateur and professional drivers during the four years in which Ferrari’s Berlinetta was the GT car to beat.

These cars are frequently referred to as ‘Tour de France’ Berlinettas owing to their success on the great French endurance event of that name for cars. Any manufacturer whose car won the Tour de France was permitted by the organisers to use the event name as part of the model title. Although Ferrari, in fact, never used the name ‘Tour de France’ officially, it has gone into common usage as a reference term for this series of Berlinettas.

Another reference term relating to these cars is ‘LWB’ (Long Wheelbase), which came into use after the arrival of the 1960 version of the 250 GT Berlinetta, which became known unofficially as the ‘SWB’ (Short Wheelbase) because its wheelbase was 200mm shorter. The Italians refer to these breeds as Passo Lungo and Passo Corto respectively, while in French they are Chassis Long and Chassis Court.

The 1960 version of the 250 GT Berlinetta was designed by Pininfarina and built at the Scaglletti works in Modena. It was first presented to the public at the 1959 Paris Salon and had a body style very similar to that of the late-series ‘Interim’ Berlinettas produced that year, apart from the omission of the quarter window in the sail panel behind the door glass. The new model was built on a 2,400mm wheelbase chassis, with factory type reference 539. The chassis followed the familiar practice of using two large oval-section longitudinal members, with substantial cross bracing along its length and a rectangular-section cross member at the front. Suspension was independent by means of coil springs and wishbones at the front, with a rigid rear end featuring semi-elliptic leaf springs and radius arms to locate the axle, and hydraulic shock absorbers all round.

The ‘61 competition chassis, designated 539/61, was of lighter construction, with some smaller and lighter gauge tubing, which took the chassis design towards the eventual specification for the 1962 competition version.

This ‘SWB’ model was the first Ferrari production road car to be fitted with disc brakes as standard. Unlike the preceding 250 GT Berlinetta series, which had only been available with left-hand drive, it was offered with right-hand drive as well. Interestingly, the example that was presented at the 1959 Paris Salon arrived at the exhibition fitted with drum brakes, which were changed to discs prior to the car going on display.

The SWB was available in two forms. In Competizione specification it had a full aluminium body, lightweight interior trim and a higher state of tune for the engine. In Lusso (luxury) road trim, it was normally fitted with a steel body with aluminium opening panels. However, there was a great deal of overlap of the two basic specifications, dependent upon a specific client’s wishes, so it is not unusual for road cars to have full aluminium bodies, while some also have the more highly tuned engine. One competition version was even supplied with a steel body.

In 1961 the competition cars received even lighter bodies, lighter chassis and more highly tuned engines, plus other detail changes, in order to maintain their competitiveness against a new challenger in the form of the Jaguar E-type, a car that caused some serious head-scratching and development work at Ferrari.

The overall design of the SWB changed very little during its three-year production run from 1960 to 1962. However, there are a number of detail differences that identify the period of manufacture of a specific car, and there were often special features to suit individual customer requirements.

In the early months of SWB production the sides of the front and rear wings were plain, as was the boot lid. There was an air outlet within the rear screen (at top centre), the sliding door windows had a pronounced downward curve to the top rear edge, and the front valance featured a pair of rectangular slots to serve as cooling ducts for the front brakes.

The cars produced from around the middle of 1960 featured exhaust air slots on the front and rear wings, angled slightly from the vertical and carrying a trim surround on three sides, and teardrop-shaped indicators were provided on the front wings. There was a recess in the boot lid for the number plate, and the brake cooling intake slots in the front valance had projecting surrounds.

Later 1960 examples were very similar, apart from the position of the cabin air outlet moving from the rear screen to a recess in the trailing edge of the roof, and winding door windows became available in addition to sliding ones. If sliding windows were specified, opening quarter lights were usually provided.

The main visual differences between the 1960 examples and all subsequent cars were the shape of the door windows, which had a straighter top edge, and the relocation of the fuel filler. Whereas all versions produced up to this point had an
external filler located in a cut-out in the top-left corner of the boot lid, the filler was now positioned either on the left rear wing or hidden within the boot. There were also myriad smaller modifications, such as a slightly larger radiator grille, mild reprofiling of the rear wing shape or hidden within the boot. There was now positioned either on the left rear top-left corner of the boot lid, the filler external filler located in a cut-out in the
Evolution of the GTO

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Alexis Callier Collection

Bianchi (chassis 2149 GT).

Olivier Gendebien and Lucien
2129 GT) leading 14th-placed

and Georges Berger (chassis
winning car of Willy Mairesse

event, the rather battle-worn
Charade circuit stage of the

250 GT SWB

Two Ecurie Francorchamps
Berlinettas
250 GT SWB Berlinettas on the
1960 Tour de France at the
Charade circuit stage of the
event, the rather battle-worn
winning car of Willy Mairesse
and Georges Berger (chassis
2129 GT) leading 14th-placed
Oliver Gendebien and Lucien
Bianchi (chassis 2149 GT).
Alexis Callier Collection

there were also some one-off SWB body designs, mainly by Pininfarina in a style similar to that of the 400 Superamerica model, including a cabriolet with a removable hard top (1737 GT). These ‘400SA’ coupé-bodied examples comprised two road versions (2613 GT and 3014 GT) and two lightweight competition examples (2429 GT and 2643 GT). While the French-owned 2429 GT never saw race action, 2643 GT was campaigned at Le Mans, Daytona and Sebring, driven by the likes of Stirling Moss and Giancarlo Baghetti.

Bertone also produced two designs, the first in 1960 on 1739 GT, which was unusual in having cast-alloy wheels, and the second in 1961 on 3269 GT, featuring the ‘nostril’ or ‘shark-nose’ look. These two offerings were the last designs by the ‘nostril’ or ‘shark-nose’ look. These two offerings were the last designs by Pininfarina in a style similar to that of the 400 Superamerica model, including a cabriolet with a removable hard top (1737 GT). These ‘400SA’ coupé-bodied examples comprised two road versions (2613 GT and 3014 GT) and two lightweight competition examples (2429 GT and 2643 GT). While the French-owned 2429 GT never saw race action, 2643 GT was campaigned at Le Mans, Daytona and Sebring, driven by the likes of Stirling Moss and Giancarlo Baghetti.

Bertone designed body, was announced. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, various examples of the SWB received one-off bodywork, but these were rebodies of existing cars, as opposed to the provision of a bare chassis from the factory. They were frequently the work of Modena-based Carrozzeria Dongo in Modena, which produced the most famous one-off SWB body of them all, the unique ‘Breadvan’ on 2819 GT.

The SWB’s engine was a further development of the original Colombo-designed 3-litre V12, which had factory type references 168H, 168, and 168 Comp/61 for its SWB applications, all with wet-sump lubrication and sparking plugs outside the vee of the block. There was a bank of three twin-choke Weber 38 DCS or 40 DCL/6 carburettors, although Solex C40 PAAI carburettors were also homologated. The all-synchromesh gearbox had four speeds and drove through a propeller shaft to the rigid rear axle, for which a range of ratios was available. Whereas the gearbox on road cars normally had a cast-iron casing, a lighter casing of ribbed alloy was used for the competition cars.

In competition the SWB Berlinettos continued the run of success of the preceding LWB models, with three consecutive wins in the Tour de France in the years 1960–62. Victory in 1960 and 1961 went to Willy Mairesse and Georges Berger, in 2119 GT and 2735 GT respectively. In those same years there were overall wins in the Paris 1,000Km at Monthléry, with SWBs filling the top five places on both occasions; the winners in 1960 were Olivier Gendebien and Bianchi in 2129 GT, while in 1961 Ricardo and Pedro Rodríguez claimed the laurels in 3005 GT. There was more success in the all-important Le Mans 24 Hours. In 1960, when the 250 Testa Rossa of Gendebien and Paul Frère took overall victory, Fernand Tavano/Pierre Dumay won the GT class in 2001 GT, with a trio of similar models following them home, making the event a Ferrari rout. A 250 Testa Rossa again took the overall win in 1961, this time for Gendebien and Phil Hill, while SWBs occupied the top two places in the GT class, Pierre Noblet/Jeans Guichet (2689 GT) ahead of Bob Grossman/André Pilette (2731 GT).

The start of the 1961 Le Mans 24 Hours, with the 250 GT SWB Berlinette of Jean Guichet and Pierre Noblet (chassis 2689 GT) in the foreground, on its way to a class win and third place overall. Just behind, car 12 is the 250 GT SWB ‘Speciale’ (chassis 2643 GT) driven by Fernand Tavano and Giancarlo Baghetti. Revs Institute/George Phillips

There were other significant victories. Stirling Moss won the Tourist Trophy at Goodwood in 1960 and 1961, in 2119 GT and 2735 GT respectively. In those same years there were overall wins in the Paris 1,000Km at Monthléry, with SWBs filling the top five places on both occasions; the winners in 1960 were Olivier Gendebien and Bianchi in 2129 GT, while in 1961 Ricardo and Pedro Rodríguez claimed the laurels in 3005 GT. There was more success in the all-important Le Mans 24 Hours. In 1960, when the 250 Testa Rossa of Gendebien and Paul Frère took overall victory, Fernand Tavano/Pierre Dumay won the GT class in 2001 GT, with a trio of similar models following them home, making the event a Ferrari rout. A 250 Testa Rossa again took the overall win in 1961, this time for Gendebien and Phil Hill, while SWBs occupied the top two places in the GT class, Pierre Noblet/Jeans Guichet (2689 GT) ahead of Bob Grossman/André Pilette (2731 GT).

The start of the 1961 Le Mans 24 Hours, with the 250 GT SWB Berlinette of Jean Guichet and Pierre Noblet (chassis 2689 GT) in the foreground, on its way to a class win and third place overall. Just behind, car 12 is the 250 GT SWB ‘Speciale’ (chassis 2643 GT) driven by Fernand Tavano and Giancarlo Baghetti. Revs Institute/George Phillips
In the 1961 Tour de France Willy Mairesse and Georges Berger again took overall victory in a 250 GT SWB Berlinetta, this time with chassis 2937 GT.

Similarly, there were GT class wins in the Nürburgring 1,000Km in 1960 and 1962. Carlo Maria Abate and Colin Davis took the honours in 1960 with 2163 GT, while the 1962 win was achieved by Wolfgang Seidel/Peter Nöcker in 1917 GT.

By 1961 there was a 'new kid on the block' in the form of the Jaguar E-type, which made its public debut at the Geneva Salon in March of that year. With its svelte lines and sensuous curves, developed from Jaguar’s successful D-type sports racing model, the E-type wowed sports car fans and wide-eyed schoolboys. It was not only about looks, however, as its rakish lines were allied to stunning performance, with a much-touted 150mph top speed – extraordinary for the time – and acceleration to match.

This was all at a modest price, a little over £2,000 in Britain, around a third of the cost of a GT Ferrari offering similar performance. It was not long before E-types appeared on the race track, and, driven by the likes of Graham Hill and Roy Salvadori, they immediately proved to be very competitive against the Ferrari 250 GT SWB Berlinettas.

Set alarm bells ringing in Maranello. Sergio Scaglietti is on record as stating that Ferrari general manager Girolamo Gardini repeatedly said, 'They are going to beat us.' Ferrari’s initial response was to get Pininfarina to clothe a 250 GT Berlinetta - 2643 GT - with a new, more aerodynamic body configuration. With an engine in full 250 Testa Rossa specification, incorporating dry-sump lubrication and a six Weber 38 DCN carburettor set-up, this car produced a claimed 300bhp. It first appeared at Le Mans in 1961, where the driver pairing of Tavano/Baghetti ran as high as eighth overall before having to retire in the 13th hour.

Although this experimental car impressed with its speed, it needed aerodynamic refinement as it suffered from high-speed instability. It next appeared in February 1962 at the Three Hours of Daytona, where it was entered and driven by the American Ed Hugus, partnered by George Redd, and this time it finished the race, taking ninth place overall and third in class behind two 250 GTOs, those of class winners Guichet/Noblet (3705 GT) and runners-up Léon Dernier/Jean Blaton (3757 GT). In fact one more 250 GTO, 3223 GT driven by Grossman and 'Fireball' Roberts, also finished ahead of Hugus's car, but this NART entry ran in the experimental GT class because it had modified brakes.

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