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Inside Maserati

Well positioned for the next 90 years.

BY GARY WITZENBURG



OH-SO-ITALIAN EXOTIC CARMAKER MASERATI HAS SEEN UPS AND DOWNS, changes of ownership and eras of greatness and less-than-greatness. Now, the marque is moving back under the management of parent company Fiat Auto, to be teamed with Alfa Romeo, another legendary brand, and ending a productive eight-year partnership with Ferrari.

All are owned by Fiat SpA, which purchased Maserati in 1993 and transferred half-ownership to Ferrari four years later. The first new-generation Maserati, the 370 hp twin-turbo V-8-powered 3200 GT, followed in 1998, and Ferrari assumed full control in 1999.



THE HERITAGE

Five of the six Maserati brothers, sons of a railway engineer, were incorrigible car nuts. As the Italian auto business grew in the early years of the 20th century, so did they—into talented tuners, mechanics, engineers, and racers, who fixed and drove other people's cars. Then Alfieri Maserati teamed with brothers Bindo and Ernesto to found his own tiny shop, Officina Alfieri Maserati, in Bologna on December 1, 1914. They prepared and raced cars for former employer Isotta Fraschini until 1919, when they switched to a car company called Diatto and younger brother Ernesto joined the fledgling firm. Elder

brother Carlo, who raced both motorcycles and cars, had died in 1911.

The partnership flourished following World War I, until Diatto decided to quit racing in 1926. [It later went out of business.] The brothers could have folded their tent and found employment elsewhere, or gone looking for another client to keep them afloat. Instead, they quickly transformed the loss of Diatto into the birth of the Maserati legend. They incorporated the company that year and built a new 1.5-liter Type 26 racer. At its first competition, the grueling 1926 Targa Florio race, with Alfieri at the wheel, it won its class and finished ninth overall.

Inside Maserati



Meanwhile, the sixth brother, Marco, followed a different muse and became an artist. In 1925, inspired by the statue of the Roman god Neptune in Bologna's Piazza Maggiore, he designed the bold and beautiful trident logo that graced the front of that first victorious Type 26 racer and every Maserati automobile since.

After Alfieri died in 1932, Bindo, Ernesto, and Ettore kept the company going and winning races until, five years later, they sold their shares to the Orsi family while retaining responsibility for the technical side. In 1939, Wilbur Shaw drove the Tipo CTF "Boyle Special" Maserati to a landmark victory in the Indianapolis 500, and repeated the following year. Also during this time, the Orsis moved the firm from Bologna to their hometown of Modena, where it remains to this day.

In 1947, following World War II, Maserati debuted its first road-going coupe, the Pininfarina-bodied A6 1500 Sport. A few others followed, while the company concentrated mostly on winning races, though probably no more than 130 streetable Maseratis were built prior to 1957. The

legendary Argentinian driver Juan Manuel Fangio drove Formula One Maseratis to a string of grand prix victories in the 1950s, culminating in the 1957 World Championship in the 250F. After that, the company retired from factory competition to focus on road cars while continuing to build racers for privateers, most notably the famous Tipo 60/61 and Tipo 63 "Birdcage" Maseratis (so named because of their complex tubular frame) that dominated international sports-car racing in the early 1960s.

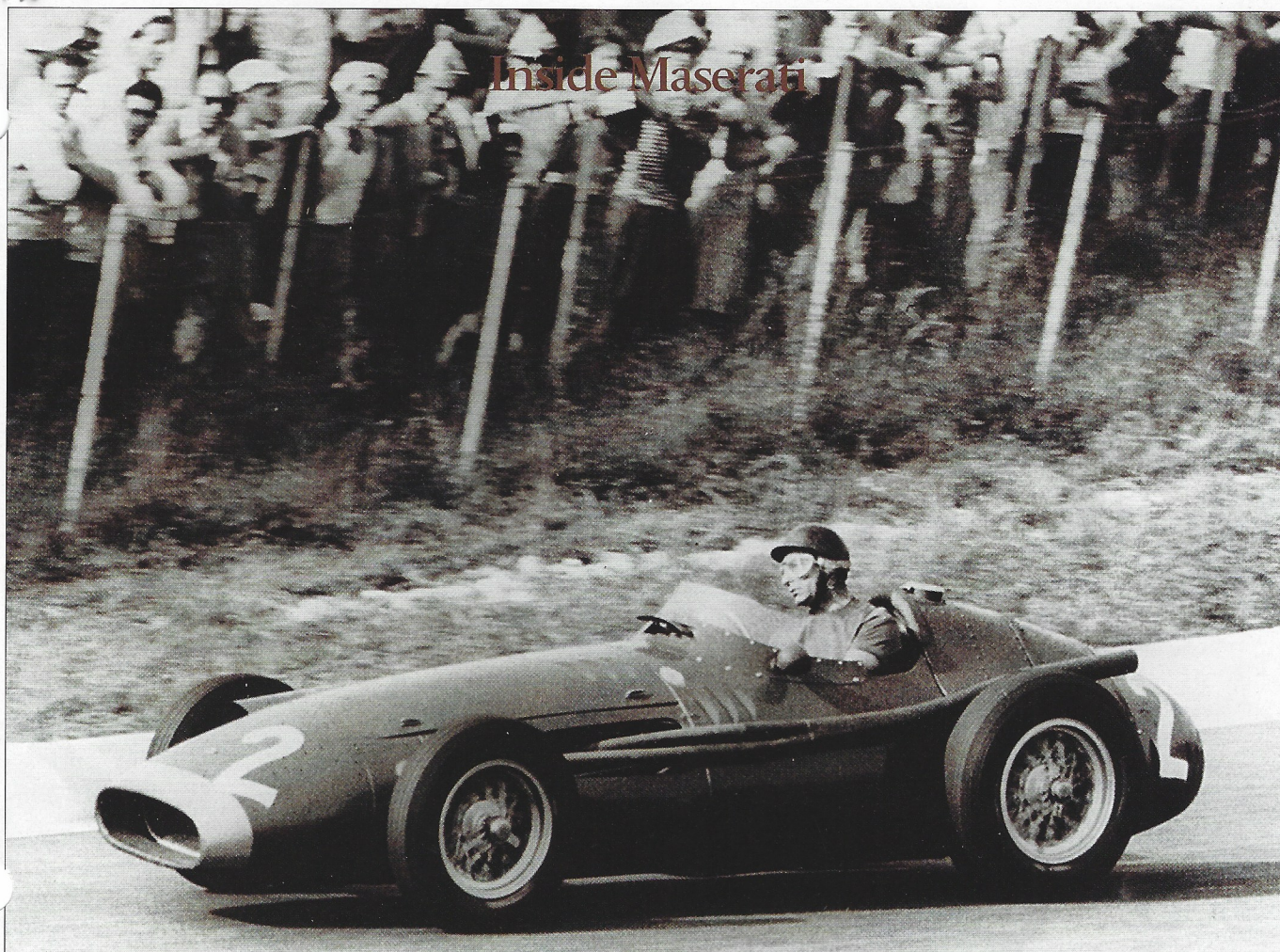
THE CARS

The handsome 3500 GT coupe, designed by Carrozzeria Touring, was unveiled in 1957, followed two years later by a more powerful 5000 GT, built especially for the Shah of Iran. Only 34 were made in total, bodied by eight different Italian *carrozzeria*. The early 1960s brought the Vignale-bodied Sebring (1962), the Frua-designed Mistral Coupe (1963) and Spider (1964), and the first Quattroporte (four-door), also designed by Frua and touted as the world's fastest sedan. The classic Ghibli was designed in

Previous pages: 1927 1.5-liter Tipo 26. Above: The "Boyle Special," driven to victory in the 1939 Indianapolis 500 by Wilbur Shaw.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIO TESTA FOR MASERATI

Inside Maserati



Designed to meet the 2.5-liter Formula One regulations for the 1954 season, the 250F went on to win the 1957 Nürburgring Grand Prix.

1966 by Giugiaro while at Ghia, and is regarded as one of the most significant styling exercises of the decade. The Indy coupe (named in honor of the twin Indianapolis 500 victories) debuted in 1968.

Also in 1968, Maserati was purchased by French automaker Citroën, known for advanced engineering and quirky styling. New models were launched and built in much greater numbers while Citroën used Maserati engines in its Citroën SM and other cars, and Maserati adapted Citroën technology, especially in hydraulics. The beautiful Bora, which was styled by Giugiaro's own ItalDesign and was the marque's first mid-engine road car, debuted in 1971 with impressive performance from its 310 hp DOHC 4.7-liter V-8. Bertone's front engine, four-seat Khamsin followed, then a sophisticated Quattroporte II sedan and the Bora-based (but lighter and less expensive) mid-engine, V-6-powered Merak.

The 1973 fuel crisis brought tough times for expensive, high-powered exotics, and Maserati soon found itself sold to GEPI, an Italian state body. Then, in 1975, it was acquired by Argentinian businessman and former racer Alessandro de Tomaso. A Kyalami coupe and a Quattroporte III were launched in 1976, the latter adopted by

Italy's president as his state car. Then came the lower-priced 1980s Biturbo coupe and convertible and the Chrysler TC by Maserati, an ill-advised and ultimately unsuccessful joint venture with then-Chrysler chairman (and de Tomaso pal) Lee Iacocca.

THE PROCESS

With no in-house styling studios, Ferrari and Maserati contract their design work to the best of Italy's specialist firms. Maserati has used a number of design houses, but primarily Giugiaro and Pininfarina in recent years. According to Ferrari SpA chief designer Frank Stephenson, just prior to the January 2005 move that separated Maserati from Ferrari, the design challenge was to keep the cars as separate as possible, so it did not look like one overlapped the other. "Both are high-image exotic cars, and both have to come across as Italianesque, which is very, very important. A Maserati is more voluptuous, more elegant, sort of a well-dressed-athlete type of car. It uses more natural woods and leathers, everything that can give it more of a feeling of luxury."

A new Maserati begins with a design brief, which—together with a marketing brief—describes in broad terms

Inside Maserati



what the car should be. "I try to keep it as general as possible," Stephenson said, "because the last thing you want to do is limit the designers. We want to make the frame as large as possible so the picture they paint within it is as free as they want it to be. Then we narrow it down."

The designers generate ideas in the form of sketches, which are then pared to the best three or four, then to two that are sculpted full-size in clay for management review. Ferrari and Maserati typically do not use scale models, as most mainstream makers do, between the sketch and full-size phases. "Scales don't make a lot of sense," Stephenson said. "That's like looking at something on TV, not like seeing it in real life."

The final decisions are made by Fiat SpA Chairman (formerly Ferrari president) Luca di Montezemolo. "He is one of those rare guys," said Stephenson, "who has an amazing knowledge of every aspect of the business—financial, marketing, production, engineering, and design—one of those guys who gets it right 99 percent of the time."

THE PRESENT

Maserati celebrated its 90th anniversary and debuted four sexy and scintillating new models in 2004: the beautifully sculpted, 395 hp fourth-generation Quattroporte; a more aggressive, more powerful GranSport version of the

Coupe; a numbered, limited edition (180 copies, 90 for the U.S.) 90th Anniversary Spyder; and a *very* limited edition (25 '04s, 25 '05s) road-going 623 hp supercar version of the V-12-powered MC12 racer.

The historic Modena factory, an Italian national historic landmark, has been transformed into the world's most modern low-volume auto production complex, boasting two state-of-the-art assembly lines—one for the Coupe, Spyder, and GranSport, the other devoted to the new Quattroporte—while its original architecture and character were cleverly preserved. Every Maserati engine is individually tested, and every car gets a 60-mile road test followed by a finishing process where every last detail is scrutinized in a clean-room environment prior to shipment. Worldwide sales have grown steadily from just over 600 cars in 1998 to 2,000 in 2000, 3,000 in 2002, and a strong, yet still exclusive, 4,800 in 2004. And the Quattroporte has again become the car of choice for Italy's president and other government officials.

The powerful and sophisticated MC12 racers were surprisingly successful in their late-2004 competition debut: The pair piloted by Andrea Bertolini/Mika Salo and Johnny Herbert/Fabrizio De Simone finished second and third at the September 5, 2004, Imola round of the FIA GT championship. Two weeks later in Germany, the



Top left: The 1957 3500 GT with body by Touring put Maserati on the map. Top right: 1959 5000 GT with body by Allemano. Above: Giugiaro's masterpiece for Maserati was the Ghibli, produced between 1967 and 1973 in both coupe and spyder form.

Inside Maserati





The famous series of "Birdcage" Maseratis debuted in 1939 with the front-engined Type 60. Followed by the Type 61, both successful competitors were ultimately replaced by the diabolical, rear-engined Type 63 (shown here), in turn succeeded by the Type 64 and a lone Type 65.

Inside Maserati



Bertolini/Salo car scored the marque's first international victory since 1967, and the season's final race in China saw the MC12s take the checkered flag first and second.

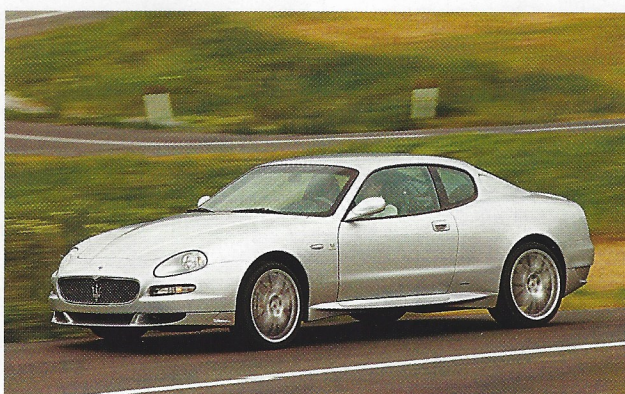
Including the racing department, the company employs some 600 people and has invested heavily in sales, service, parts, after-sale, and customer care. The dealership network has been modernized and expanded worldwide to 280 showrooms in 52 countries, including Hungary, Slovenia, China, and the Middle East. Maserati North America, established in Englewood, N.J., in 2001, now has 50 retail outlets in the United States and Canada, including a new corporate showroom shared with Ferrari at the corner of 55th Street and Park Avenue in Manhattan.

An Officine Alfieri Maserati personalization program for the Quattroporte offers owners the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of exterior and interior colors and trims (more than 4 million combinations in all), plus a

selection of personalization options. They can schedule a guided tour of the production complex, watch their cars being built, and take a one- or two-day Master Maserati driving course on a nearby track. "When our clients buy a Maserati," company literature says, "they aren't just acquiring an exceptional automobile, they are also establishing a close personal relationship with the trident marque."

"Both marques [Ferrari and Maserati] are heading toward more customization and personalization," added former design chief Stephenson (who recently assumed design responsibility for the Fiat and Lancia brands as well), "with the customer having more control over making the car uniquely his. The name of our game is exclusivity, offering the customer a very high-end product that is, at the same time, a balanced package specifically tailored to him." □

Maserati North America, www.maseratiamerica.com



Top: The MC12 is today's state-of-the-art supercar. Above left: The reincarnated Quattroporte. Above right: A 2005 GranSport in action.