

CLASSIC DRIVER

2005 Giro di Sicilia - Targa Florio

□ Imagine a beautiful island with rugged scenery, the air full of the perfume from wild flowers and surrounded by a sparkling blue sea. All this bathed in early summer sunshine. Sounds idyllic, doesn't it? Ah, but to make it perfect you would want a wonderful selection of classic cars to drool over, wouldn't you?

Well there is such a place. It's Sicily during the first week of June when the Giro di Sicilia - Targa Florio takes place. Organised by the Veteran Car Club Panormus each year the Giro takes these cars on a circuit of the island over a period of five days. With a history going back almost one hundred years it claims to be the oldest motoring event still in existence.

1906 was when Vincenzo Florio instigated the first "Targa" or "Prix" event to be run over a distance of 420 Km using the roads around Sicily. Starting by the sea at Buonfornello and taking the cars to a height of 1000 meters, the course is reputed to have had more than 1000 bends (having driven some of this years route I can well believe it). Florio then went on to found the Giro di Sicilia in 1912 (16 years before the Mille Miglia) this time with route 965 Km, starting and finishing in Palermo. No longer now is the Giro a race, it's 900 Km trial for cars and drivers in the form of timed schedules and auto tests, but still using those taxing Sicilian roads.

This year's entry amounted to 44 cars split into classes according to the age of the vehicle, the oldest being a **1906 Brasier** driven by Rene Giordano, through to Joel Humbert's **1984 Ferrari 288**. Drivers and co-drivers mostly came from Europe but in addition there were three teams from the USA. Probably the most famous name was **Clay Regazzoni**, the ex-Ferrari and BRM works driver, entered in a **1970 Ferrari Daytona**. This had been modified for him to drive allowing for the injuries he sustained in the accident that finished his F1 career many years ago.

As a warm up on the first day, and before the event proper, there was a hill climb up Monte Pellegrino. Situated just to the north of Palermo, Pellegrino's twisting roads rising some 600 meters above the town. After lunch by the palm tree-fringed beach at Mondello it was time for the cars to move onto Piazza Politeama in the centre of Palermo, ready for the start of the Giro at 9pm. This also allowed the occupants of the city's noisy rush hour traffic a close up view of these spectacular cars.



By 9pm darkness had fallen over the city and a large crowd gathered to watch the start, they would not be disappointed. Flagged off one at a time, some more cautiously than others, the contestants headed towards their over night stop at Citta' Del Mar 57Km away. Just the sight of James Glickenhaus taking his, newly restored, **1967 Daytona-winning Ferrari P3** through the evening traffic, or the sound of Clay Regazzoni's Ferrari Daytona as he accelerated along Via Libertà made the trip worthwhile.

Day two's route was down the western side of the island and along the south coast to Kamarina some 228 Km from the starting point. Already the hairpin bends and steep climbs were beginning to take their toll of both cars and crew. In addition to navigating, using the road book provided, contestants had to arrive at control points exactly on time or lose points.

After Kamarina the route turns north, up along Sicily's western coast, taking in the city of Syracuse famous for those 1950s Grand Prix races. By 5.30pm on the third day the cars are just outside the port of Catania and the field had thinned somewhat, sadly the Ferrari P3 being one of them. There was still plenty of exotic

machinery left running; **GT 40s, 250 GTOs, Healey 3000s**, Alfas and many others including that 1906 Brasier. Police outriders bring another rush hour to a halt and escort the cars, in convoy, through the city gates to Villa Bellini, Catania's beautiful central park. This is a very special Giro experience as crowds line the route and the vintage cars respond by sounding their klaxon hooters. Then it's yet another auto test to be carried out in the park before day 3 comes to an end.

Now starts the most testing day so far, 250 Km around the southern slopes of Mount Etna and then turning towards the northern coastline over the Nebrodi highlands. Countless bends and gear changes lay ahead on the hottest day of the event so far. This part of Sicily is particularly beautiful in June, still very lush with roadside hedges full of wild flowers, and to see these cars in such surroundings makes for spectacular viewing. The last kilometres of the day take the competitors snaking along the northern coast back towards Palermo, to spend the night at Termini ready for the Targa Florio the next day.



In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Targa Florio was run as an out and out sports car race run over closed public roads, sadly the last event of that type ended in 1973. In those days it was considered such a demanding event that Porsche and Ferrari would build special models just to compete in the Targa. The Veteran Car Club Panormus use this historic circuit for the last day of the Giro, but with the cars travelling at more regulated speeds now. None the less it is an emotive sight to see classic cars running again on these roads that have changed little since the last Alfa T33 blasted down them over 30 years ago.

Then it's on to the final dinner and prize giving. For the third year running victory in 2005 went to the two Italian Antoninos, Auccello and Panepinto in their red **1961 Alfa Giulietta**, in fact the first three places were taken by Italian teams harking back to those days of Vaccarella and local knowledge. But the Giro is not only about winning, it's a fantastic event just to take part in with great camaraderie between competitors, lending tools to each other, giving advice, even down to push starts when needed. If you prefer to spectate you will need a hire car, but after that all those beautiful vistas, Sicilian hospitality, and sunshine await you. Not to mention a pack of classic cars roaring up behind you.

Next year marks the centenary of the Targa Florio and the Veteran Car Club Panormus have their plans well underway already. For this very special event, they are expecting an entry of over 100 cars running from May 30th 2006 to 4th of June. As usual any classic car up to 1969 vintage will be welcome to enter, and then the 1969 to '73 class cars will be restricted to only the models that competed in the Targa Florio during those years. It's hoped that Porsche, Mercedes etc. can be encouraged to send cars, also drivers such as Vic Elford and Jochen Mass will attend.

It will be a **must** on next year's historic calendar, so if you have a suitable car and would like to enter, contact girodisicilia@supereva.it, or look on www.girodisicilia.com

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