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Iso Bizzarrini A3/C: The free-thinker's anti-Ferrari

Lead

As an engineer for Ferrari, Lamborghini and Iso, Giotto Bizzarrini created some of the greatest Italian sportscar icons. The cars he created under his own name are less well known – but just as remarkable.

The peak years of his career began in 1957, with a move from Alfa to Ferrari: ‘Il Commendatore’ Enzo Ferrari personally took the young engineer to Maranello, a decision which paid huge dividends. As a development manager, designer, test driver and chief engineer, Bizzarrini influenced not only the development of the Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa and the Ferrari 250 GT SWB, but he also designed the world-famous Ferrari 250 GTO. Yet as well as being a brilliant engineer, Bizzarrini valued his freedom – and in 1961 he was one of the instigators of the Ferrari ‘palace revolution’.



After leaving Ferrari, Giotto Bizzarrini worked for Count Giovanni Volpi, for whom he designed the Ferrari 250 GTO ‘Breadvan’, as well as for tractor manufacturer Ferruccio Lamborghini in the development of the V12 engine for the marque’s first sportscar prototype. Iso Rivolta, too, benefited from Bizzarrini’s skill. It was with his help that the Iso Grifo came into being, first as the A3/L road car, and then as the A3/C race version, with an American V8 engine and lightweight aluminum body. It was a direct challenge to Ferrari.



Italian-American cooperation

The A3/C was built on a shortened Iso Rivolta chassis (another car designed by Bizzarrini), with a Corvette V8 front-mounted engine moved so far back that it’s almost mid-engined. While Iso continued to develop its road-going Grifo with help from Bertone, Giotto Bizzarrini worked away on his racing A3/C, with its thunderous 5.4-litre engine.



One of the most successful and famous of the Bizzarrini racers was chassis no. 0222 – the car pictured here (thanks to Fiskens where it currently graces the historic dealership’s showroom). This was the car that famously competed in the 1965 Le Mans 24 Hours, driven by Régis Fraissinet and Jean de Mortemart. At an average speed of 169km/h, chassis 0222 won the over-5-litre class and finished ninth overall, a spectacular result given the technical problems experienced during the race. After its success at Le Mans, Chris Amon started the A3/C at the Austrian Grand Prix, the 1000km of the Nürburgring and in Reims.

With its Chevy V8, the Iso Bizzarrini is a true racing beast. Heavy but nonetheless ferociously quick, it demands maximum muscle use at each gear change, and quick wits to balance the vast power delivered through relatively skinny tyres. This, without doubt, is a car made by real men, for real men.

Photos: Jan Baedeker / Fiskens Archive

Gallery

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