

CLASSIC DRIVER

Timeless Classics: Ferrari 250 GT SWB Berlinetta Competizione

Lead

To many classic Ferrari enthusiasts, the 250 GT SWB (for short-wheelbase) is the prettiest of all the Prancing Horses of that era, its simple, almost minimalist lines more beautiful than any cluttered, louvred, bespoilered attempt to prove outrageous performance...

But understated as its appearance might be, it had performance aplenty. The Colombo 3.0-litre V12 engine typically offered the SWB driver 240-250bhp, or substantially more in full race trim.

On-track agility meant class wins in period



And to those lucky enough to drive one, especially in competition, the attraction is increased ten-fold thanks to the magnificent handling. The SWB's reduced wheelbase (200mm shorter than its predecessor), low weight, compact shape and powerful engine – all these factors combined to create a superlative racing machine, as class wins at some of the most important events in period, including the Tour de France Automobile, the Tourist Trophy at Goodwood (in the hands of Stirling Moss) and the 24 Hours of Le Mans, proved beyond doubt.

Introduced at the Paris Salon of 1959, the 250 GT SWB followed on from the 'Tour de France' – latterly known, for obvious reasons, as the LWB, or long-wheelbase – and was the immediate predecessor of the legendary GTO. The SWB's bodywork and underpinnings remained fairly true to the outgoing TdF – and that's no bad thing, as it had proved enormously popular and successful. Aside from the shorter chassis and updated V12 engine, the SWB was the first Ferrari to come with disc brakes as standard, plus customers could choose to order their car in either left- or right-hand drive, with two specifications offered – Lusso or Competizione, for road or track use, respectively.

Road or race, no problem



Having said that, even the full-blown 280bhp aluminium-bodied competition version retained its predecessor's ability to double up as a road car and be driven, without too much compromise, to the race circuit on public roads. Meanwhile, despite being heavier and less powerful, the steel-bodied Lusso could prove, in the right hands, a pretty fearsome competitor on the track. So the distinction was by no means cut and dried.

The pictured car is an example of the Competizione model, one of around 45 aluminium-bodied versions built in 1960 and currently claiming 280bhp from its race-ready engine. (It's interesting to note that this car was delivered new to a doctor in Florence, for road use only: further evidence of the competition model's dual-purpose abilities.) Regular visitors to the Goodwood Revival, Silverstone Classic and Donington Historic Festival might well be familiar with its yellow paintwork and competitive performance – more than once in the hands of Le Mans winner Jackie Oliver. This car, chassis 1953 GT, is being offered for sale by RM Sotheby's at its Villa Erba sale on 23 May 2015. The estimate, as you might expect, is only available on request.

Photos: RM Sotheby's

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