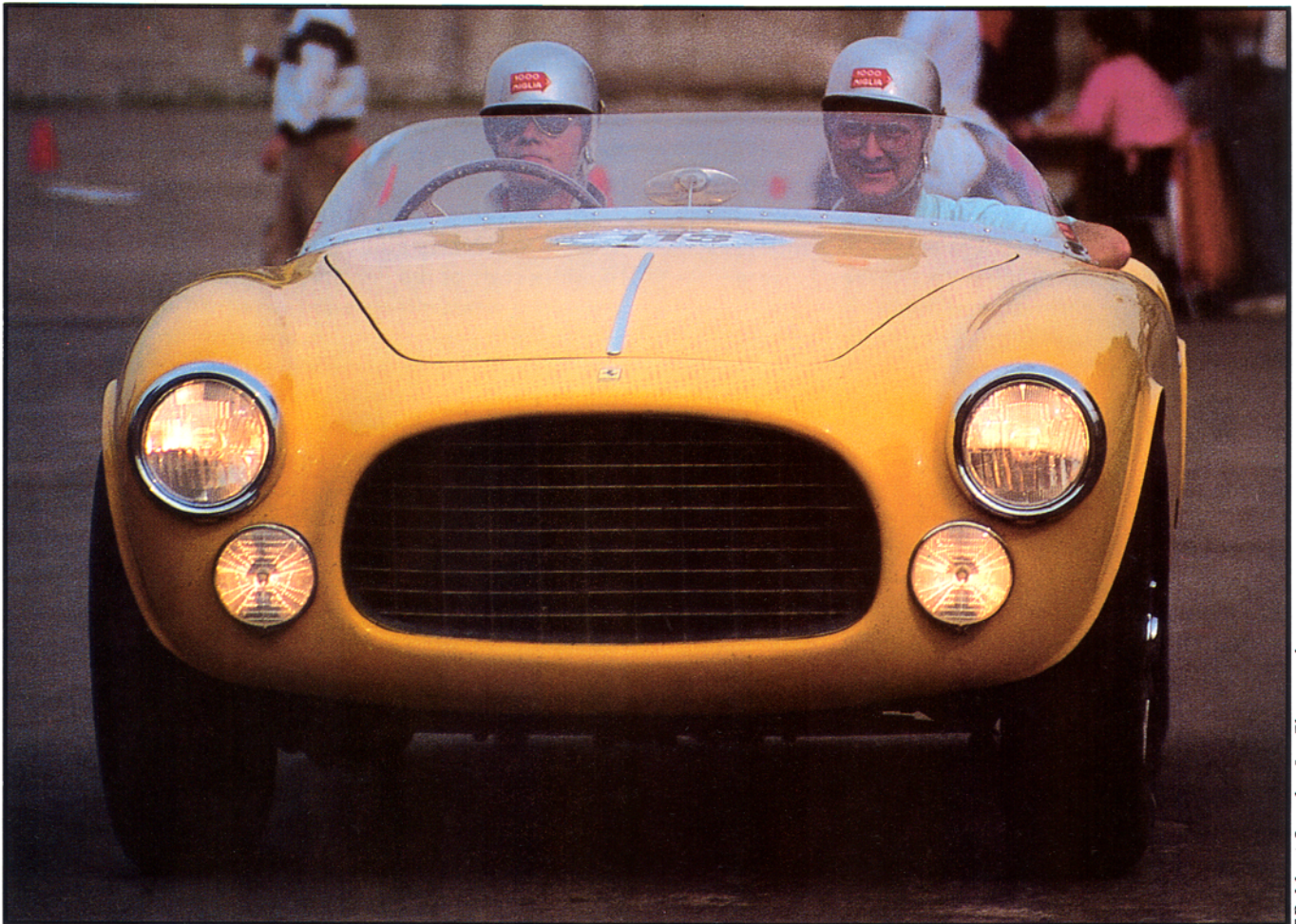


Mille Miglia~1986

*The Great Ferrari Race As Seen By
One Of The Participants*

By Douglas Pirrone



F.R. Mazzi-Saunders Int. Photograph

A 1951 340 America Spyder, No. 0140 A, lights ablaze, heads off into the gloaming on the next leg of the Mille Miglia. Thoroughly enjoying themselves are Americans Messrs. Nickel and May.

If you are a car nut, and in particular, a sports car nut, or more specifically, a Ferrari nut, then the current Mille Miglia event was for you. Furthermore, if you grew up when the cars from 1927 to 1957 were around and running races for real, then it will have had even more appeal for you.

Being in the 1986 running of the Mille Miglia was one of the most exciting things I've ever done, bar none. Seeing and hearing all those great cars from the past in one place at one time was almost too much for the senses. Beside the dozens of classic racing Ferraris, Testa Rossas, Mondials, Tour de Frances, a 315 Sports racer, etc., there were Bugattis, supercharged Alfa 1750s, Mercedes 28 Cavallino

300SLs and 540Ks, Oscas, Maseratis, Fiat Abarths, Porsche 550 Spyderys, BMWs, D-Jaguars, Aston Martins, Bentleys, etc., etc., etc.

The current Mille Miglia event was actually a timed rally—or at least that's what it is supposed to be. However, if you were in it, you would swear it could be nothing other than a flat out race! The instructions sent to all the participants specified that all cars must obey the posted speed limits, and that the points awarded would be based on the fact that you would reach the timing check points at the proper times when adhering to the speed limits. (No autostradas were used in the event.) The instructions also said that the police had orders to

apprehend anyone found driving at excessive speeds and to eliminate them from the event. Well, as is the case with most rules, they were not meant to be followed, as we shall see!

The starting times of the cars were staggered, with the older cars leaving first at around 8:00 pm on Thursday evening, May first. I was co-driving a 1956 Tour de France No. 0503 with owner Bob Rubin, and this was the Olivier Gendebien first place GT Winner of the 1956 Mille Miglia. Our scheduled departure time was just before 10:00 pm, and everyone was very excited. You drive up a ramp amidst a blaze of lights and cameras (it was televised in Italy) to get your official checkpoint list stamped. You then drive off trying to negotiate your way through the endless crowds of people lined up for miles while trying not to run over their feet as they yell and cheer you on and slap the fenders and roof of your aluminum bodied Ferrari classic! The people in Italy are always very warm and friendly, but this night they were infinitely more so. They were fantastic! Their enthusiasm was as much a part of the event as the driving and the cars themselves. They lined the streets of every town on route and even out in the countryside through the farms pointing the way, yelling and cheering, especially if you were driving a Ferrari.

After leaving the city streets of Brescia and reaching the countryside, I was driving along a typical two lane highway trying to stay within the speed limits as prescribed. Well, not more than one minute had gone by when I was rapidly passed by a silver Porsche 550 RS Spyder with two gentlemen on board, wearing blue driving suits, silver helmets and sporting big moustaches, looking very German, while actually being from California! They were running straight pipes and Castrol R racing oil! The smell of that oil and the sound of their exhaust brought back so many memories of the old racing days at tracks like Bridgehampton, Lime Rock and Watkins Glen that that was all I needed to step on the gas a little harder and make that glorious V-12 engine start to sing. Within another minute I was passed by a D-Jag and then Stirling Moss came by driving very briskly in a Maserati! (Phil Hill and Michele Alboreto were also driving in the event.) By this time I had my right foot fully into the loud pedal and was driving flat out behind Stirling Moss. To hell with the rules! My co-driver had never experienced driving this fast on the street before and said he preferred to save this kind of driving for the track! I said, "Nonsense! I drive this way on the street every day back home," and reassured him he had nothing to worry about. We henceforth drove the whole race (I can call it a race by now) without a scratch only to have the car dented on its return trip home to the U.S. on the plane!



F.R. Mazzi-Saunders Int. Photograph

The Master himself! Set at a modest table in the courtyard of the Scaglietti plant in Modena, he nevertheless was the high point of the trip for most Ferraristi at the Mille Miglia.

After about forty-five minutes of this type of driving, I saw two cars with flashing blue lights on top about half a mile down the road driving in front of us. "Cops!", I said. They must be trying to keep a lid on this thing by getting in front of the cars in an attempt to slow them down. However, after about 10 minutes of driving with the police in front of us, I realized we were driving just as fast and just as flat out as before! They weren't trying to slow us down at all. They were blasting down the road in their multi Weber carbureted Alfas escorting us through traffic! The policemen were absolutely incredible. Throughout the whole race they waved us on (along with the spectators), and cleared the way for us. You couldn't tell them that this was only a rally and that we weren't supposed to drive fast. To the police and the people, this was a race just as serious as the original Mille Miglia races were. To go slow would have created tremendous disappointment for all those enthusiastic crowds.

The end of the first leg brought us into Ferrara at about 2:00 am with the whole town lining the streets yelling and cheering and giving us flowers as we came through town into the brightly lit piazza where all the cars stopped for the night. ▶



Bob Rubin Photograph

The author adjusting the 250 GT TDF's clutch in Rome. Most of the Ferraris required minor repair of one form or another, but nearly all completed the 1,000 miles. Quite a feat for pre-1958 automobiles.

The next day took us along the beautiful Adriatic coast through numerous beautiful, affluent vacation resort towns. We then continued on to Rome for the end of the second day.

The third day took us through the famous Futa pass and countless beautiful little towns up through the Appenine Mountains. I would guess that most of us would never get to see all these beautiful little out of the way towns and all the beautiful scenery along the country roads on a normal tourist's trip through Italy. Imagine! A thousand miles of driving through Italy in two and one-half days. On this third and last day, we drove through Bologna, Modena, Parma, etc., and back to our starting point, Brescia.

One of the checkpoints on this day was at a road racing track. It was at this place that a gentleman came up to me and announced that the man standing next to him was Ingegnere Bizzarrini! For those of you who might not know, Engineer Giotto Bizzarrini worked at Ferrari in the 1950s and early 1960s and was very much responsible for the development of the SWB and GTO. He was a humble man, and was immensely warm and enthusiastic about all the people and the cars. He immediately wanted to know the serial number of the Tour de France we were driving. "Ah," he said,

"I remember this car!" Then I introduced him to fellow Ferrari owner Bob Bodin from Minnesota who was driving his 1957 Tour de France, the Gendebien third place overall winner of the 1957 Mille Miglia. Ing. Bizzarrini remembered that car very well. Bob told him that it had special Testa Rossa brakes installed by the factory. Ing. Bizzarrini said he knew—he had ordered it done! Bob immediately had him autograph pictures of himself in a Ferrari book on Berlinettas.

In Modena, we all drove into the parking lot at the Ferrari Scaglietti body plant and stopped one at a time in front of the entrance to wave hello to the Master himself—Enzo Ferrari! It was the highlight of the trip for me. To actually see and exchange salutations on a one to one basis with *the* man was beyond any of my wildest expectations of what the Mille Miglia had to offer.

The Mille Miglia is now normally held every other year. However, since 1987 will be the 50th Anniversary of the first Mille Miglia, it will be run again. If you want to have the time of your life and want to drive an Italian car (or any other eligible car) through Italy along with 200 or so other similarly enthusiastic people, then you must go to the Mille Miglia. I know I'll be going again. Hope to see you there.



The view from the cockpit in every town in Italy along the route.



Bob Rubin Photographs

Ing. Giotto Bizzarrini takes a cheerful look at a car he knows well, 1956 250 GT TDF No. 0503 GT.