

Track test Bizzarrini 5300



# POW

*without*

A red Ferrari GT race car is shown from a low-angle, front-quarter perspective on a racetrack. The car features white racing stripes on the hood and front fenders. The background shows a sunset sky with dramatic clouds and a line of trees in the distance. The car is parked on a dark asphalt surface.

# FERRARI glory

The ingredients looked promising and its creator had a fine track record - with Ferrari, no less - but Bizzarrini's GT achieved little in period. Almost 50 years after its last Le Mans start, *Motor Sport* tried an unsung warrior

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**L**T WAS, I THINK, GERHARD Berger who observed that a racing car can only be said to have enough power if it is able to spin its wheels in every gear and at every point on the track. I believe at the time he was referring to Formula 1 cars at the height of the turbo era in 1986, but right now as I try to steer my way around Donington he could as easily have been talking about this Bizzarrini.

ombination of somewhat elderly tyres, curious emulsion of rainwater and Avgas always coats Donington during the off 1, a perhaps sub-optimal set-up for these tions and a 5.3-litre Chevy V8 offering at 150bhp are fast leading me to conclude re Bizzarrini does indeed have enough : More than enough, in fact. Throttle on the straight causes instant wheelspin 'd, so short shift to fourth, press again and he revs head north once more as aged ps give up the unequal struggle against ncer movement of oily Tarmac and it iron.

funny at first because every turn of the seems to require an equal and opposite fraction of a second later, but the nt I try to ride it out I'm aware of first s and then shoulders being press-ganged iding the wrists to tackle the exponentially ding job of rounding up the ever so ful but inconveniently fast moving tail. are no belts in here and I'm in someone very valuable racing car. I can't remember eeding to do this before, but the most priate course of action is really quite quit, while everything is still pointing in ht direction. I drive slowly back to the ut still find myself grabbing armfuls of ck through that well known right-hander Coppice. I park the Bizzarrini, flick off ster switch, sit in silence and wonder on earth I have let myself in for.



**T**HE IS PROBABLY NO SPORT MORE d with the corpses of what might have han motor racing. In this world of 'what ed by the unholy triumvirate of 'coulda, a and shoulda', anyone could have won g if only they'd had the car, the nate, the weather, the tyres... the talent. in the history of our sport, there can be rs indeed that failed so spectacularly to on their potential as the Bizzarrini 5300. l if you laid out its raw materials, then quick squint at the CV of the man who d it, one word would leap instantly into ead: winner. But it never won a major t least not until decades later when its

potential was finally unlocked by the wizards who inhabit the modern world of historic racing.

Giotto Bizzarrini will celebrate his 90th birthday in June, the same month which also marks the 50th anniversary of this, the best of the *competizione* Bizzarrinis, racing at Le Mans for the one and only time in its life, of which more in a moment.

But before he ever became involved in the cars that would eventually bear his name, Bizzarrini made three other contributions to our world and they will stand as testament to his talents far better than his cars ever did. As a chief engineer at Ferrari in the late 1950s, he helped turn the elegant but unwieldy 250 Tour de France into something rather more agile and the result, the 250SWB or short-wheelbase, needs no further introduction. Its replacement the 250GTO was his brainchild, but Bizzarrini was frustrated by the conservative pace of Ferrari development: for all its beauty and success, the GTO was entirely evolutionary, featuring an engine designed in the 1940s and a leaf-sprung live rear axle whose configuration dated back to the earliest days of the automobile. No longer able to tolerate Maranello politics, he left, along with the likes of Carlo Chiti and Romolo Tavoni in the so-called 'Palace Revolt', before the GTO was even launched.

Briefly Bizzarrini became part of the ill-starred ATS F1 project before falling out



**T**HE STORY OF BIZZARRINI THE CAR, AS opposed to the man, started in 1962 when he was hired by Renzo Rivolta to work on a new GT car for the Iso firm – most famous for its Isetta bubble cars – he now controlled. The resulting Iso Rivolta was innovative in the way its torsional strength derived not just from its platform chassis but the body bonded to it. But its influences were not just Italian. It was powered by an American Chevrolet engine Bizzarrini first experienced in an English car. This was thanks to Nuccio Bertone, whose styling house was working on the body for the car that would eventually be known as the Gordon-Keeble. Bertone lent Bizzarrini the car and, while he didn't care much for it in general, he was blown away by his first exposure to Detroit iron. Indeed for its power and response he rated the V8 more highly than Enzo's V12s. The Gordon-Keeble also convinced him of the need for a De Dion rear axle, while after the 1961 launch of the Jaguar E-type, all-round disc brakes were deemed essential.

The Iso Rivolta was beautiful but did nothing to slake Bizzarrini's thirst for a car that could be raced. Rivolta could see demand for a proper sports car, but a racer? In the end he agreed only if one were derived from the other. Which is why at the 1963 Turin Show, there were two versions of the new Iso Grifo: the stunning A3/L road car on the Bertone stand,

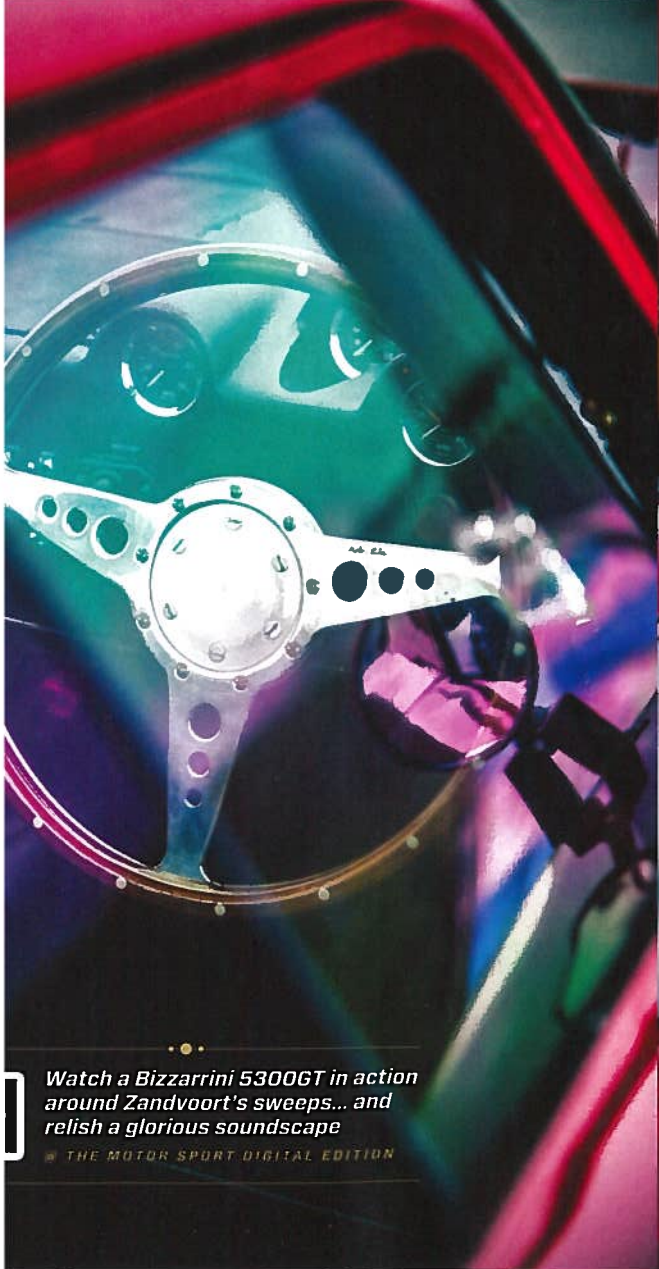
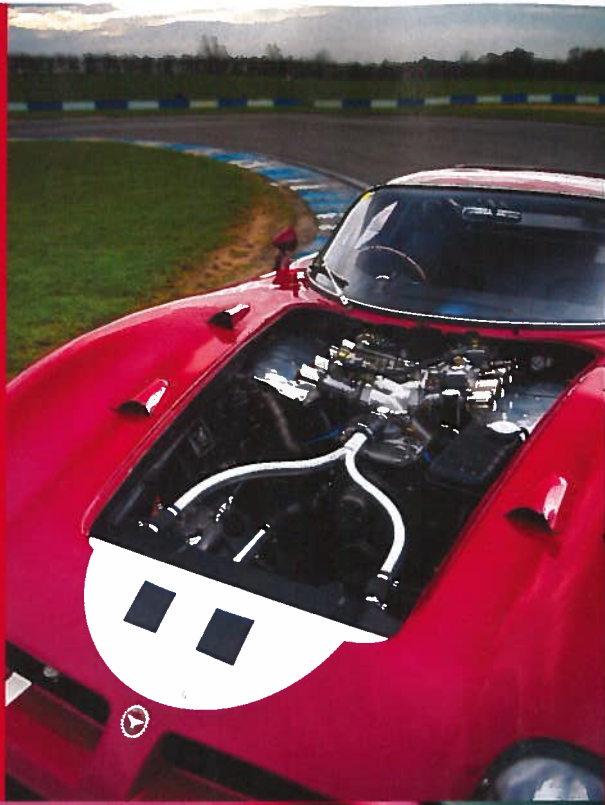
## “LAMBORGHINI DECIDED TO BEAT FERRARI AT HIS OWN GAME AFTER BEING LEFT TO STEW OUTSIDE THE OLD MAN'S OFFICE”

with Chiti. He then started his own Autostar design and engineering consultancy, in which capacity he designed an engine for another person who had good cause to be disgruntled with Ferrari. This was a tractor manufacturer named Ferruccio Lamborghini who, if the story can be believed, decided to beat Ferrari at his own game after driving to Maranello to complain about his car and being left to stew in silence outside the then not-so-Old Man's office. Bizzarrini's V12 made its debut in 1963 in the Lamborghini 350GT and would in various guises go on to power every single V12 Lamborghini until the launch of the current Aventador. And while it became something of a 'Trigger's broom' by the end, the motor almost doubling in size by 2010 with no single part surviving from first to last, its lineage back to the 350GT is direct and unbroken.

and Bizzarrini's brutal A3/C racer on Iso's stand, the car completed so late it appeared *au naturel* without so much as a lick of paint to cover its modesty.

Both cars were instantly successful, the road car gaining praise in the press around the world, the racer performing extraordinarily given how new it was, how little money was used relative to what Ferrari was spending and the fact that, unlike the GTO, it really was based on a standard production car. Key to its speed was not just the beefy 5.3-litre V8, even then giving close to 400bhp, but also its location so far back in the chassis that if you looked under the bonnet you'd see space for a 10-litre V16. At least.

Racing started in 1964 at the Sebring 12 Hours, when an A3/C qualified in the top half of the field before gearbox problems left it



Ground-hugging Bizzarrini boasts strongly rear-set 5.3 Chevrolet under its curvaceous glassfibre bodywork - a powerful recipe that had no time to gel

Watch a Bizzarrini 5300GT in action around Zandvoort's sweeps... and relish a glorious soundscape

THE MOTOR SPORT DIGITAL EDITION

one at the flag. But at the Le Mans test, was a sensational ninth-fastest overall, a 7sec behind the only GTO taking part. ace it started 15th out of 55 and, despite wo hours to braking woes, came home erall, beaten in the over 3-litre pe class only by two purpose-built racers.

ig in 1965 became more chaotic as the ship between Bizzarrini and Rivolta to break down, but not before the A3/C l what it could really do at Le Mans with ouble run, namely finish ninth overall n the over 5-litre prototype category, elped by the fact every other car in the tired. It's worth remembering it finished e lap behind AC's own Shelby Daytona , the car that had ended the reign of the n GT racing.

y, Rivolta's cool business head and 'ini's wild engineering ideals were never o make comfortable long-term ows and by the end of that summer the on was irretrievable. Bizzarrini quit, ed Autostar's name to Prototipi Bizzarrini new marque was born, supplied with ough in from Iso. He renamed the A3/C zarrini 5300 and pressed on regardless. y the following year he launched the 'GT ca' which was visually similar, but lly featured elegant double-wishbone rear ision. Had he just left it at that, the future have been rather different. Instead, y his unquenchable desire to push laries, he embarked on a brand new ngined racing car, the P538.

at you're looking at, then, is the *etizione* or Corsa version of the GT ica, and the only right-hand-drive rini or Iso racer ever built. And if you of what it offered in 1966, it must have a quite stunning proposition. Its engine ad 420bhp, and was positioned to offer ilar polar moment of inertia to a mid-ed car. It was light enough given its power: Mans this actual car with its glassfibre was weighed by the ACO at 1194kg, te all that iron in its nose. And at last it ropriately independent rear suspension, as om the cart-sprung live rear end of the as you could imagine.

t you need more than a seemingly -of-the-art design to succeed in motor g: you also need time and money to op it and a crack squad of engineers and anics to transport to, prepare it for and after it during race weekends. And this rini sadly lacked. Even in the Iso days, ey was so tight Bizzarrini drove the A3/C id from Le Mans himself in 1964. Now on own, it was even worse. This car made its debut at Monza and, having shown nable potential in qualifying, a lack of weather rubber meant it was not even

classified at the finish. It was then entered for the Targa Florio and hit a Fiat 500 on its way to the start before succumbing to head gasket failure on lap two.

At Le Mans in 1966 it at least had a world-class driver in Sam Posey and initially showed quite strongly before being disqualified for twice straying over the pitlane boundary line. Sam recalled it thus: "The driver sat low down on the floor, there was a nice big hood and great power, the car was very predictable with some understeer and the steering effort was very reasonable. Overall it was a damned good car and I would love to have driven it the entire distance in the race. The biggest problem was lack of development and it really needed a proper team to run it." There was another problem, too: all the attention that had been funnelled into the mid-engined car, which lined up for the same race almost seven seconds a lap slower than the coupé and retired with steering arm failure within half an hour of the start.

Still undeterred, the indefatigable Bizzarrini was back in France the following year with this front-engined coupé, now fitted with a big block 7-litre Chevy – you can still see where the body under the bonnet was cut away to fit it. With 5.3 litres the car was reputedly good for 190mph on the Mulsanne, so this one should have cracked 200mph. But Bizzarrini was never to find out: the poorly prepared car was slung out by the scrutineers, never to race again in period.

Bizzarrini went bust in 1969, whereupon the car was put into storage before emerging in a very dilapidated state in 2003. It was fully restored a year later and is now to be sold by Fiskens. But another car, actually an Iso Grifo A3/C with a De Dion rear end, did finally prove the design's potential when Mark Hales and Richard Attwood won back-to-back RAC TT Celebration races at Goodwood in 2003-4, against world-class opposition including GTOs. "The car was very standard," says Hales today, "but it had been well set up. While it was quite loose and struggled to get its power down, it actually had a very nice balance."



EXACTLY THE SAME CAN BE SAID OF this car today, even with Bizzarrini's independent rear end. Once we had taken some static photographs on the Melbourne Loop and the track had dried some more, I put my heart back in my throat and settled in for another session. Spotting a dry-ish line around at least most of the track I tried to gain a sense of what this car was really like to drive.

First you must get over the theatre: the impossibly low-slung driving position and insane ergonomics that place the rev-counter quite brilliantly in front of your non-existent passenger. There's the blue-collar thunder of the Chevy too and, of course, its implausible thrust.

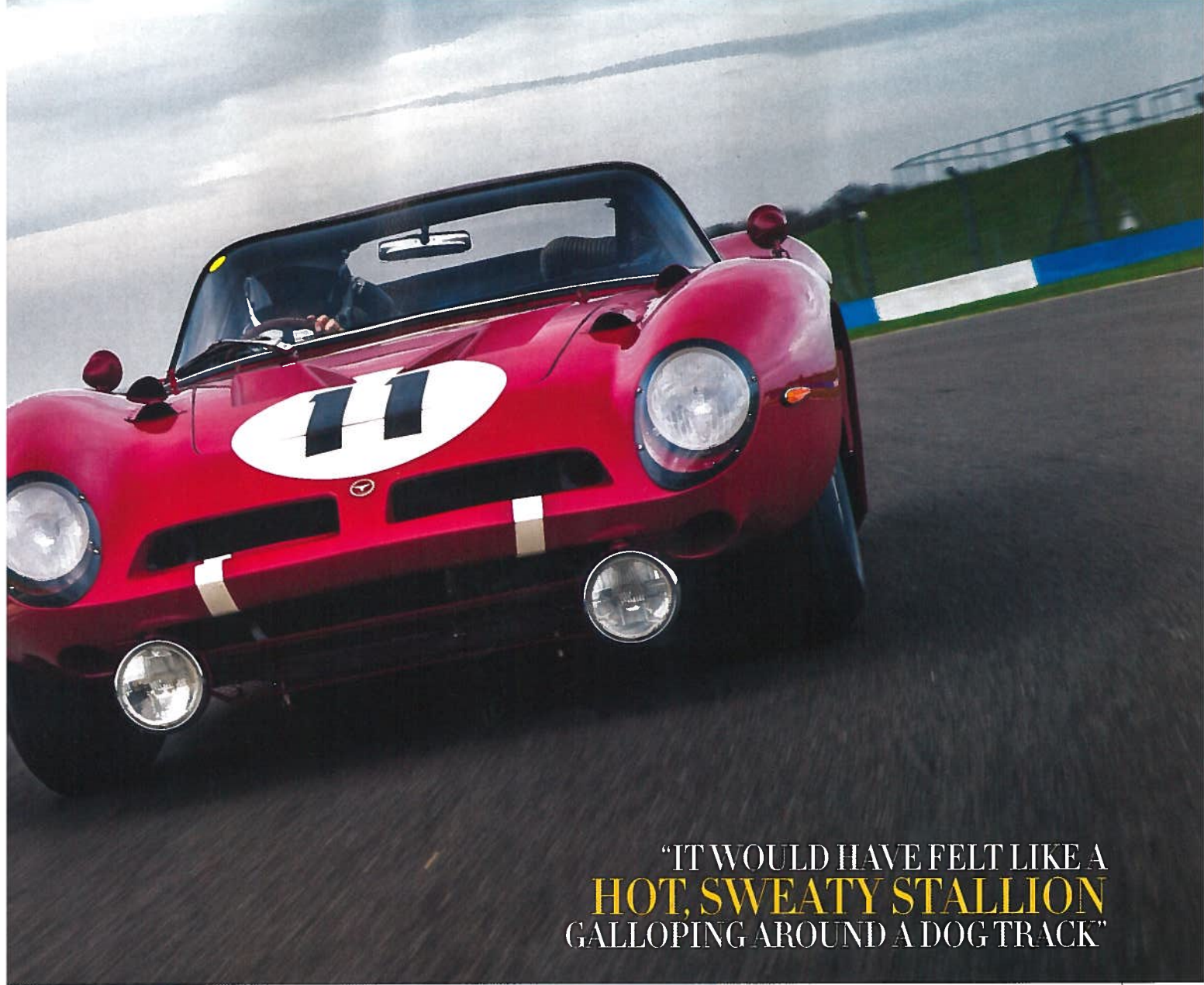


Old tyres and a slippery surface brought Berger's definition to life, with wheelspin in every gear



Sift through that little lot and you'll find something of the car beneath. It tracks arrow straight at high speed and, while it still slides everywhere, it felt more hobbled by its tyres and the surface than inherently treacherous. And when I asked for some air to be let out of the tyres and for the Konis to be softened somewhat, especially at the rear, I ended up having a hoot. And while I still respected it, over a few laps I learned to trust it. It was a highly expressive car with, in these conditions, none of the understeer Posey mentioned, but also very responsive: so long as you applied the correct remedy, it reacted consistently and reliably.

It would have been a hot, physical car to wrestle around Le Mans let alone Monza, so goodness knows what it would have felt like in Sicily on the Targa Florio – like a large, sweaty stallion galloping around a dog track, I imagine. But I learned enough that day at Donington not merely to suspect, but to believe sincerely that had Bizzarrini been able to develop his design in period, we'd not now be looking at a footnote in race car history. An interesting footnote, but a



“IT WOULD HAVE FELT LIKE A  
**HOT, SWEATY STALLION**  
 GALLOPING AROUND A DOG TRACK”



footnote nonetheless. Indeed had he done so I think there is every chance Bizzarrini could have made his dream come true, and shown that he could build a better, faster racing car on his own than the one he was asked to create by the well organised and resourced Mr Ferrari.

‘Woulda, coulda, shoulda.’ That’s all the wishing required to make the difference between a true icon of the sport and a fascinating curio. 📧

*Many thanks to Fiskens ([www.fiskens.com](http://www.fiskens.com)), where the Bizzarrini is currently for sale, and the staff of Donington Park for all their help*

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