

CLASSIC DRIVER

Fiat 8V Supersonic at Pebble Beach Concours

Lead

In 1953, the Fiat 8V Supersonic was unlike anything else seen before. Even the most radical Ferrari or Maserati looked dull by comparison. One of only 14 examples will be on display at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance...

To consider the Fiat 8V Supersonic, it is first necessary to look at the Conrero-Alfa Romeo. This car was the brainchild of Virgilio Conrero, the Alfa Romeo tuning wizard from Turin. Gentleman driver Robert Fehlmann from Switzerland asked him to build a special car for the 1953 Mille Miglia, based around an Alfa Romeo 1900C Sprint engine with a combination of Fiat 1400 and Lancia Aurelia components. For the coachwork, Conrero went to his friend Giovanni Savonuzzi (of Cisitalia fame), who had just been made head of design at Carrozzeria Ghia.



Savonuzzi came up with the now famous 'Supersonica' shape, which still looks spectacular today. Just imagine this car on the streets in 1953: the low waistline, long bonnet, extremely low roof over the compact cabin and rear lights that seem inspired by a turbine jet engine's exhaust. The rear window/roof was covered by a large, curved Perspex panel to create a light interior. Also notable is the sharp 'arrow' that starts above the front wheels and ends in the tail section. The car was shown at the Salone di Torino in 1953, where it was one of the star attractions. Unfortunately, the futuristic Conrero-Alfa's life was cut short when it was badly damaged during its raison d'être, the 1000-mile road race, Brescia-Rome-Brescia.

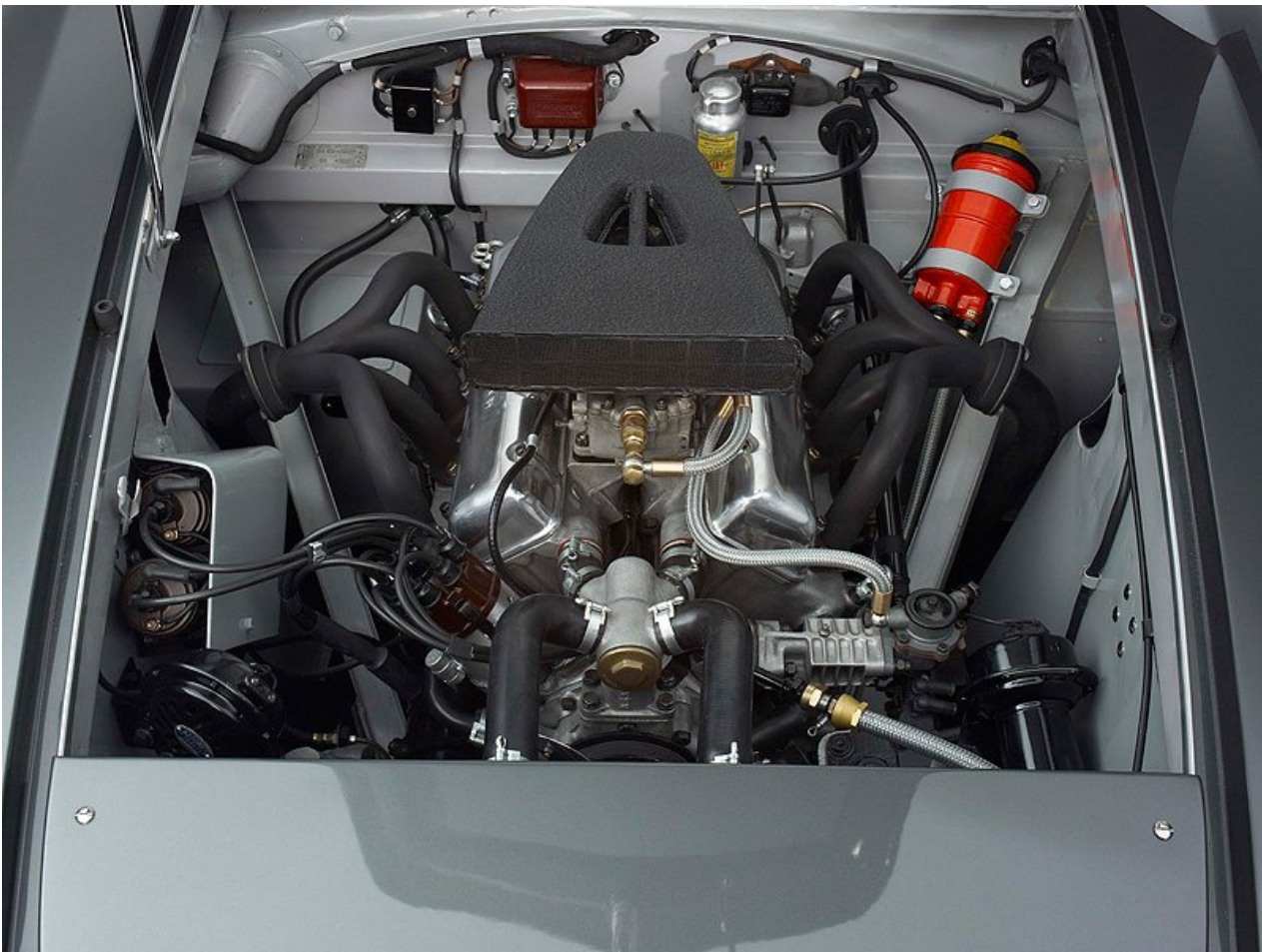




Even though the car made only two brief public appearances in Turin and Brescia (at the start of the Mille Miglia), interest in the new design was such that Ghia planned to make a limited run of Supersonics on an existing chassis, and Fiat was chosen as its partner. The fact that Fiat had just added an exciting 2-litre Otto Vu (Italian for V8) to the line-up probably influenced its choice (except for Ferrari's V12, Alfa Romeo, Lancia and Maserati were all using 4- or 6-cylinder engines). The coachwork of the new car was almost identical to the Fehlmann special, the main difference being the removal of the intricate Perspex roof/rear window panel. It was first shown to the public at the Salon de Paris in October 1953, where journalists were again impressed by its looks and named it the most beautiful car of the show.



One of only 14 produced, the example you see here is the 2nd to last 8V Supersonic built. Strada e Corsa in the Netherlands (who have so far worked on 13 of the 114 Otto Vus made) performed a complete mechanical restoration and acted as a consultant for the coachwork & interior restoration which was done in Italy. It is finished in the subtle combination of dark grey metallic with dark blue leather interior, the same colours it had when it left the Ghia works in Turin. Every detail was restored/rebuilt to correct period specification, from the two twin Weber 36 DCF3 carbs to the flat, wood-rimmed Nardi steering wheel.



The multi-year restoration has resulted in first prizes at the Concours Paleis het Loo (The Netherlands), Schloss Dyck Concours (Germany) and the Uniques Special Ones Concours (Italy): a fine tribute to the craftsmanship and expertise of the restoration team.

Photos: Michel Zumbrunn (Studio Photos), Jeroen Booij & L'Automobile Magazine

Gallery

