

CLASSIC DRIVER

1955 Ferrari 375 Mille Miglia



In many ways, chassis 0490 AM is a pivotal model in Ferrari history. Not only is it the last 375 MM built, its Pinin Farina-designed coachwork introduces classic GT styling seen on later models from the early 250 GTs, right up to the 275 GTB.

For exclusivity, style and performance, the ivory and fine metallic blue car has few equals.

By 1953, **Battista Pini Farina's** Torinese company was responsible for bodying all **Ferrari's** racing *berlinettas*. In a period of intense experimentation, big-engined coupés were used for classic road-races such as the **Carrera Panamericana**, **Mille Miglia** and **Le Mans**, with lighter, open 'spiders' employed on shorter courses where acceleration was at a premium. The 375's motor, a 4522cc Lampredi-designed (originally for **Formula 1**) V12, developed in the region of 340bhp - enough to push a coupé along at 170mph, given the right gearing.

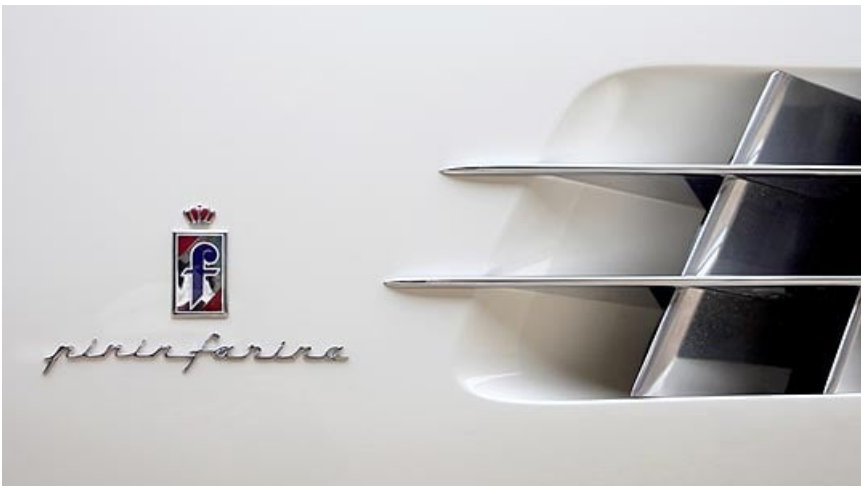




These were seriously fast machines fit only for top drivers of the calibre of **Ascari**, **Villoresi** and **Maglioli**. The long wheelbase endowed the car with high-speed stability, but the massive fuel tank (40 gallons) behind the rear axle meant considerable differences in handling between 'full' and 'empty'. This, together with the tyres, brakes and suspension of the time, made the factory **375 MM** coupés the archetypal 1950s, 'men-only', big-engined Ferraris.

That said, such was the tractability of the wonderful 12-cylinder drivetrain, and an existing chassis, that it was possible - *just* possible if you had the means - to order a **375 MM** road car of the most extraordinary performance and styling.

The **Ingrid Bergman** coupé, with its scalloped sides (to return on the current **612 Scaglietti**) was one of the most famous, with others delivered to **King Leopold of Belgium** and the American industrialist **Robert Wilke**.



The car you see here, chassis **0490 AM**, is the last such car built, and the last even-numbered chassis bodied by **Pinin Farina**. From April 20 to May 1 1955, it was on the **Ferrari** stand at the **Turin motor show** before returning to the coachworks for further adjustments and then delivery to its first owner, **Inico Bernabei** of **Rome**, in late 1955. From the early 60s, the car has been in the USA. In early 2003, it was totally restored to **Turin** show specification by **Wayne Obry** of **Motion Products Inc.**, a recognised 'Pebble Beach standard' specialist.

The result is stunning, and has been enough to garner the car many concours awards including a second in class at **Ville d'Este** in 2005. (You have to wonder, "What on earth could beat this?")





These cars are rare birds in Europe, but I was fortunate to be called by **Martin Chisholm**, who has recently taken delivery of the extravagant GT. “You’ll like what we’ve just got in...” was the offer. So here’s the Classic Driver take on one of the world’s most desirable **Ferraris** – with a value to match.

The extended wheelbase gives the **Ferrari** a low-slung, powerful stance. It’s a big engine, so the bonnet is lengthy to accommodate it, and air exits are incorporated into the wings just behind the front wheels – an early example of this classic styling treatment and one that would return on many later **Ferraris**. The grille is significantly lower than normal practice in period, with a ‘flatter’ top line and more exaggerated radius in the lower.

The entire grille protrudes forward in the manner of the ‘pontoon’ **1958 Testa Rossa** racing cars while, at the rear three-quarters, the back window louvres would be seen a year or two later in the early **‘Tour de France’ 250 GTs**, as would the bezel-less headlamps. The rear ‘fins’ are more wing-like; unusual in a **Ferrari**, and not greatly repeated, but executed to perfection by the master.



The superb combination of ivory and very fine metallic dark blue paintwork exaggerates the 'flying machine' nature of the car, with blue extending into the cabin as the dashboard is painted to match. The superlative restoration extends to sourcing the original, ribbed brown rubber matting that matches the tan racing seats.

Enough, enough, it is a wonderful creation, restored to the highest possible standards that can be seen in the photographs, but from a driving perspective...?



We took the big car for a run on territory it's best at: the open road. It starts, quite literally, 'on the button' and far from being a roaring, fearsome beast, the beautifully trimmed - though still lightweight - car is civilisation personified.

The engine is magnificent. Handbrake off, select first and, using the semi-competition clutch with care, you can merge into traffic, pouring the power on, changing gear via the sturdy but precise lever with ease. It's so tractable that top (fourth) gear is enough for any speed over 40mph. We kept the revs down to about 4000rpm, although peak power would be reached at around 6300rpm.



You just see the road ahead over that long bonnet and open the throttle, feeding the power in and enjoying a rapid increase in pace. The faster you go, the smoother the car seems to ride the road. Despite its live rear

axle and transverse leaf spring, the ride is smooth with no tracking around and little play in the big, studded steering wheel. The long wheelbase helps here; it hugs the road and you can just imagine building up the speed on the terrifyingly fast sections of the **Mexican Carrera Panamericana**, its racing brother's natural habitat.

This is a car for grand events and long journeys. Big money, naturally enough – but rarer than a **GTO** or **SWB**. It's tough and strong, yet carries light, delicately designed and constructed bodywork by **Pinin Farina** and a **Lampredi**, big-capacity **Ferrari V12**.

Truly, a 'million-dollar car' in anyone's estimation. For the exact price, though, you'll need to call **Martin Chisholm**.

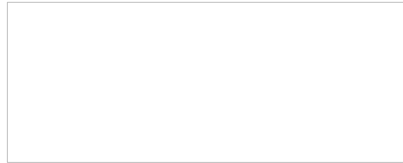


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**Martin Chisholm Collectors Cars
Ltd**

Brockhampton

Cheltenham

Glos. GL54 5TH

Phone: +44 (0)1242 821600

Fax: +44 (0)1242 821555

Email: cars@martinchisholm.com

Website: www.martinchisholm.com

Text: Steve Wakefield

Photos: James Mann / Classic Driver

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