

CLASSIC DRIVER

The Ferrari 250 GTE is all about discretion

Lead

The magic sequence of numbers and letters '250 GT' has appeared on many Ferrari sports cars of the 50s and 60s. Except, of course, that the models never actually carried anything so ordinary as a name badge.

While attention has focused on multi-million-dollar GTOs and Spider Californias, the discreet 250 GTE has always had its enthusiasts. Having spent many years as the 'starter Ferrari' or even - heaven forfend! - as a donor car for 250 GT SWB and GTO replicas, the classy 250 GTE is now well-established as a desirable *berlinetta* in its own right.

The model made its debut on a thoroughly appropriate occasion: the 1960 Le Mans 24 Hours, where a red-painted prototype with no side vents acted as a course car. Its competition-focused brethren did not let it down, the marque finishing 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th.

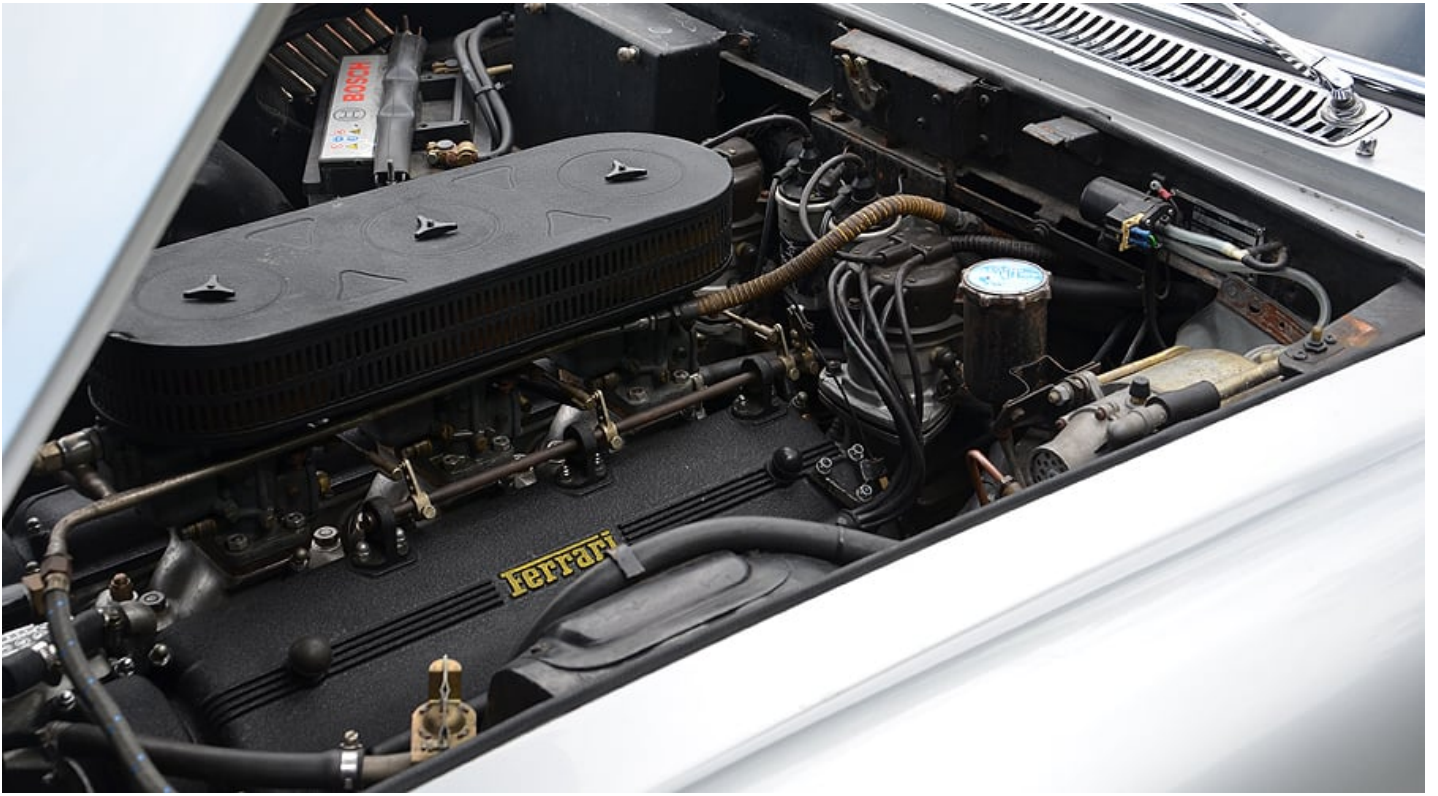
'Short Wheelbase' 250 GTs took the fourth to seventh spot, with an interloping Aston Martin DBR1 spoiling an otherwise all-Maranello finish.

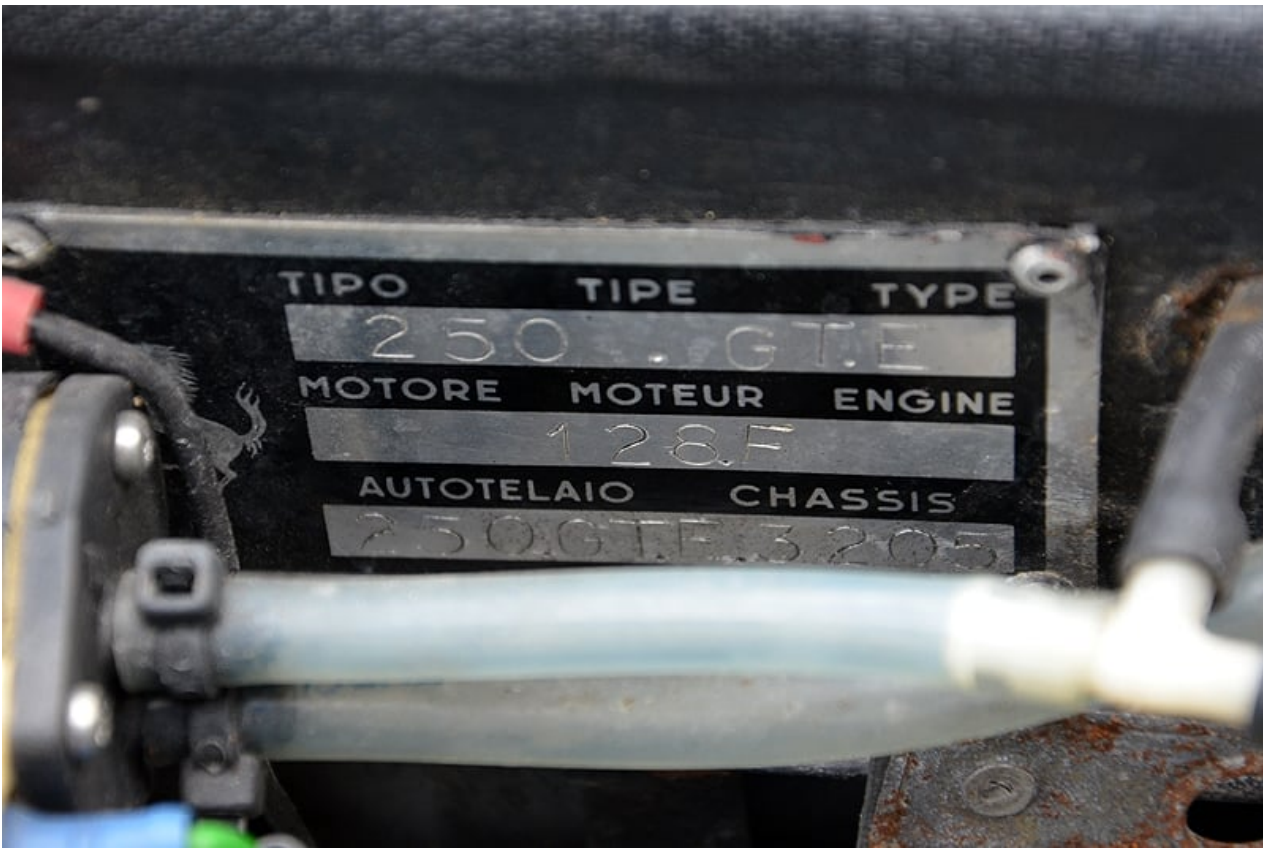




So, if you wanted a 250 GT, a model that had already covered itself in glory on the Mille Miglia and the Tour de France Auto, yet were looking for a genuine 2+2 with generous luggage room, the new GTE model – the first 4-seater production car from Ferrari, built on a specially made chassis of 2600mm – was just the thing.

Disc brakes and an overdrive gearbox brought further civilisation to the car and set the tone for an expansion in production by Ferrari, transforming the company from being purveyors of cars to the super-rich, to simply making extremely expensive vehicles for the merely 'very rich'.





Compared with the outgoing 250 GT Pininfarina Coupé, the classic three-litre V12 was mounted further forward in the chassis, thus allowing greater room in the cockpit for driver and passenger. The car was also larger (around 12in in length, and 2in wider) and heavier (by 400lb) – but the 2.2in reduction in height coupled with the extra length undeniably makes for an attractive car, better balanced than the Pininfarina Coupé.

It's more 'Maserati' or 'Aston Martin' than Ferrari. And no worse for that.



The 250 GTE made its press debut at the Paris Show in 1961, with production running to around 1000 examples, over three series. With generous 2+2 seating verging on a four-seater, and the availability of air-conditioning, it brought a new class of client to Maranello.

Nowadays the model looks as good as ever; a timeless Ferrari design with the famous 250 GT engine and name.

While red might not show the lines of the understated car to their best, in gunmetal grey, ivory, silver, dark blue or dark green the 250 GTE can be a real head-turner, and, as a result, has rightly found its way into some of the very best collections in the world, often rubbing shoulders with more illustrious 250 GTs.

Market experts tell us that the 'smart money' started moving into these cars last year... and prices look set to rise. We've been told that, in all likelihood, by this time next year, £250k+ will be the starting point for a decent example.

Photos: Artcurial

Gallery

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