

CLASSIC DRIVER

The policeman's De Tomaso Pantera from 'Hawaii Five-0'

Lead

As an early 'push-button' Pantera, this De Tomaso is a rarity in its own right. But a stint as a 'Hawaii Five-0' car, both on and off screen, gives it a unique and even more intriguing history...



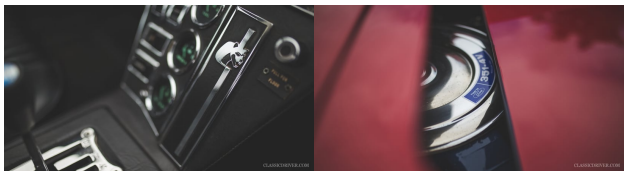
One of the primary lures of the De Tomaso Pantera is its mix of brawny American V8 and taut, purposeful bodywork of the type that had become popular with Italian coachbuilders (in this case, Ghia) in the early 1970s. However, this Pantera has a continent-crossing story of its very own: it spent much of its life in Hawaii – where it was owned by a policeman and used in the famous TV series 'Hawaii Five-0' – before recently becoming part of a UK-based collection. We took it on a short outing through unfamiliar territory: the damp roads of northern England, to be specific.

Setting the Pulsante racing...



The Pantera in question is a rare, early Pantera 'Pulsante', so named because it was one of the 'first execution' cars that retained the push-button door catches of previous models. Although these were true to the original designs penned by Ghia's American stylist Tom Tjaarda, they were actually hand-built by Vignale prior to a full production run with America in mind.





At the time, ‘Hawaii Five-0’ was the most-watched television series in the world. Soon after the car was delivered to its policeman owner, the show’s producers required a pair of Panteras for a storyline in the fifth-season episode, ‘Death Wish on Tantalus Mountain’. Ford, which usually supplied vehicles for the show and was listed in the credits, was not able to provide a demonstrator, as the car was in short supply. Instead, a search began to find existing Pantera owners in Hawaii. Two cars were found, one yellow and one red – the custodian of the latter being a Hawaiian policeman by the name of George Frain. When actor Ricardo Montalban (who played the part of Alex Pareno, a wealthy motor racing enthusiast) was injured before the filming took place, Frain stepped in and drove the car himself.

The crimson Panther

In the story, gentleman racer Alex Pareno’s mechanic is slain on the eve of a high-profile hillclimb in Hawaii. The episode includes several driving sequences in which the Pantera is rapidly hustled along the dirt roads leading up the Tantalus Mountain, with its real-life owner, policeman George Frain at the wheel. There is one dynamic shot that looks down over the roof and chiselled bonnet while the car is in motion – a shot achieved by removing the engine cover and strapping the cameraman into a makeshift chair above the engine. However, as dramatic as its 15 minutes of on-screen fame was, one does wonder whether the car’s off-screen life was even more eventful, as Frain kept the car for 35 years, before selling it on to... another Hawaiian policeman, in 2006.

From Hawaii to... Nottingham



While the large-audience, small-screen appearance might have seen the Pantera flung around the mountain tracks quite enthusiastically, the brief for today’s journey is more sedate – and after watching the episode, that’s something for which we’re quite grateful. Instead, we happily take the time to acquaint ourselves with the ‘crimson Panther’ properly: it affords us the opportunity to savour the bassy thrum of the Cleveland V8 as it warms its cylinders, and feel the satisfaction of guiding the gear lever through the dogleg chrome gate, down into first. On the move, the soundtrack progresses from a thrum, into a howl through the mid-ranges, and up to a full-blown wail near the red line. In period, Alessandro de Tomaso said that most owners would rather hear the Pantera’s 351ci V8 than Janis Joplin – we’re not sure if that still applies today, but the point remains. And if the spirited driving sequences in the show weren’t enough to remind you of the Pantera’s performance potential, the steeply raked windscreen, compact steering wheel and reassuringly firm ride do so soon enough.

Plenty of stories



Fresh from restoration, albeit retaining its original configuration and the #6 livery it wore on-screen, [this 1971 De Tomaso Pantera](#) is now just as desirable as the day it was delivered new to Hawaii – but with the addition of an abundance of ‘stories’, both told and untold, that increase its curiosity value. It will cross the block this coming Friday at [Silverstone Auctions’ 2015 Salon Privé sale](#); if you’re there, do stop by to say ‘Aloha’...

Photos: Tom Shaxson for Classic Driver © 2015

Gallery

Includes video

Has video

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