

CLASSIC DRIVER

[This Le Mans veteran is the pinnacle of LWB Ferrari California Spiders](#)

Lead

This 1959 Ferrari 250 GT LWB California Spider Competizione bodied by Scaglietti isn't just a Le Mans podium-finisher, it's also a Pebble Beach Concours-winner. Now, thanks to Copley Motorcars, it could be yours.



The late 1950s and early 1960s was a magical time for privateer racers and fully-fledged racing teams alike. This was motorsport's golden-era, when circuits around the world hosted racing events for anyone and everyone with a competitive car and a keen eye for the racing line. Today, you need an eight figure bank statement and a team of highly qualified racing engineers to even stand a chance at touching the podium. However, post-war racing allowed any average Joe with a slightly above average wedge of cash to purchase a competitive car from top-tier marques like Ferrari and Porsche and hit the racetrack with a legitimate chance of securing first place.



One of these average Joes went by the name of Bob Grossman, a successful sports car dealer based in Rockland County, New York, who had purchased and raced a California Spider of his own in 1959. However, even with a prancing horse in his stable, Grossman was still a small fish in the motorsport world's rather sizeable pond, and unbeknownst to him, a much larger fish had him in their sights.



Enter Luigi Chinetti, a name many Classic Driver readers will be familiar with. Chinetti was an extremely successful racer with outright wins at the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1932, 1934 and 1949. Thanks to his track record, he was able to set up the official Ferrari distributor for the U.S. East Coast, as well as the fabled North American Racing Team. Chinetti had connections that Grossman did not, and he and N.A.R.T. were about to enter a triumvirate of Ferraris into the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1959. Their 250 Testa Rossa and 250 GT LWB Berlinetta were already spoken for, but they didn't have a driver or owner lined up for the [250 GT LWB California Spider you see here, chassis number 1451 GT](#). Fortunately, Grossman was delighted to fill both those roles.



1451 GT represents the crème de la crème of all LWB California Spiders. An entirely different beast to the 'regular' California Spiders Grossman was used to, 1451 GT was built to full "competizione" specification, and is the second of only eight aluminium bodied cars. Notably, this was the first example to be fitted with an outside-plug, Tipo 128F V12 engine, topped with high lift camshafts, triple 40 DCL6 carburetors, and a competition-spec fuel tank with an external fuel filter. Capable of putting out a mighty 262.5 bhp at 7,300 rpm, it seemed as though Grossman was in store for the ride of his life. However, Chinetti was cutting it a little close with his timing.



To say 1451 GT was factory-fresh when it rolled up to the start line at Le Mans would be a definite understatement. Its factory build sheet shows the date of completion as June 15th, just five days before the race. In fact, according to Grossman, the primer was only just masked by a 'flash' of paint, while the unfinished seats were covered by 'rags'. Then there was his co-driver, a Frenchman who spoke zero English by the name of Fernand Tavano. Grossman's French was only slightly better, but having never raced at Le Mans before, their position at the end of the 24 hours was anyone's guess.



Had they been in a lesser automobile, the outcome may have been different, but with the 1451 GT on their side, Grossman and Tavano proved to be an excellent team. The pair crossed the line after 294 laps in 5th overall and 3rd in class, a mightily impressive result considering it was Grossman's debut at the Circuit de la Sarthe.



After the race, 1451 GT returned to Maranello to be properly finished in metallic silver, before being reunited with Grossman in New York, who had already sold his other California Spider to make space for the new arrival. Grossman wasted no time taking to the track again in 1451 GT, participating in SCCA events at Thompson, Bridgehampton, and at the Watkins Glen Grand Prix. He then shipped 1451 GT to Nassau, where it took part in the Nassau Speed Week races, securing 1st place overall in the Memorial Trophy race on December 6th, 1959.



At the end of the 1960 season, Grossman sold on this California Spider, which would occasionally change hands before it was acquired by Jon Masterson of Long Beach, California in 1981. Masterson immediately began a complete restoration on 1451 GT, refinishing the car in Rosso Corsa over a beige interior, while retaining the all-important competition features. By 1983, the restoration was complete, and Masterson swiftly entered his prized prancing horse at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. 1451 GT stunned the judges, who awarded it with 1st in Class honours.



Masterson continued to enter 1451 GT in vintage racing and concours events alike, eager to show his beloved California Spider to the world. Eventually, in 2007, Masterson finally parted with 1451 GT, and in 2008 it was granted Ferrari Classiche certification, confirming that it retains its original chassis, competition engine, gearbox and a rear differential of the correct type.

Since then, this California Spider has enjoyed a more relaxed schedule, with notable appearances at Pebble Beach in 2015, where it secured 3rd in Class, and at the Ferrari Club of America Annual Meet in Columbus, Ohio, where it fittingly won the N.A.R.T Award in 2016.



Recently benefitting from another full restoration, 1451 GT looks simply stunning and is ready to enjoy once more. Wearing the Rosso Corsa paint from its time with Mr Masterson, combined with the period-accurate decals from its outing at the 1959 24 Hours of Le Mans, 1451 GT proudly presents in a "greatest hits" livery that draws from the high points in this example's illustrious history. Thanks to its tall gearing for Le Mans and powerful competition engine, this California is reportedly an absolute joy to drive, as is evidenced by its numerous entries in vintage races and rallies. As one of the most significant Ferraris in existence, this California Spider would easily sit atop many of the finest Ferrari collections in the world. If you'd like to experience the thrill of that Tipo 128F V12 for yourself, [Copley Motorcars](#) await your call.

[VIEW CAR](#)

Gallery

