

Turning up the Heat

A RACE-BRED V8 ENGINE NESTLED beneath a rakish, Giorgio Giugiaro-designed body was a potent combination that had enthusiasts drooling when the Maserati Ghibli debuted at the 1966 Turin show. The public loved what it saw, and the motoring press was equally smitten with the 330-hp car's performance: 0 to 60 mph in 7.5 seconds and a top speed of 150-plus mph were mighty impressive numbers 38 years ago.

The Ghibli was the result of Maserati owner Adolfo Orsi and chief engineer Giulio Alfieri's concerns that the company was falling behind its more powerful Italian gran turismo rivals. The 4.7-liter V8 engine that began life in Maserati's brutally fast 450S sports car of the late 1950s seemed the ideal starting point to correct this, as it was a significant step up from the inline six used in Ghibli's precursor, the Mistral. The V8 had proven its street mettle when slotted under the hood of the horribly expensive 5000GT series, as well as the Quattroporte sedan of 1963. Named for "a hot desert wind," the new Ghibli turned up the heat on Ferrari and Lamborghini, which replied with the Daytona and Islero.

Despite the thoroughbred powerplant, the Ghibli's underpinnings were decidedly pedestrian. Most surprising is that the clever Alfieri went with a solid-axle leaf-sprung rear suspension with trailing arms. Like the Ferrari Daytona that would be unveiled in 1968, the Ghibli eschewed an independent rear for this simpler arrange-

ment. The car was no small fry, either, at 3500 pounds and 180.7 inches in length. Yet Giugiaro's magnificent lines clothed the Ghibli's tubular steel frame to perfection, giving it a sleek and nimble look. It was well received, and Maserati built more than 1100 before production ceased in 1973.

Our featured car, which belongs to Oliver Cromwell of Bronxville, New York, is one of only 125 Spyderys built between 1969 and 1972. Its finish is sublime, a



NICK KURCZEWSKI

testament to its owner's care as well as the car's thorough restoration by Vantage Motors in Connecticut. The odometer reads a mere 58,000 pampered miles.

Don't let its looks fool you: "It's a car I try to use every weekend and find a good excuse to go someplace in," Cromwell says.

Looking like an E-Type in an Armani suit, the Ghibli exudes class. "Some people confuse it with a Ferrari," says Cromwell, "but the general lines have

held up so well that people appreciate it for being a great-looking sports car, regardless of who made it."

The expansive hood is a bit intimidating, an impression that is reinforced upon sliding into the car's spacious cockpit. For sub-six-footers like us, the low seating position and sightlines take some getting used to, and you have to shake the feeling of being a kid in Dad's car, peering up and over the dash at the vast red hood. The roof neatly stores under the metal tonneau.

At slow speeds the Ghibli is perfectly docile, with nary a cough or sputter from the four Weber carburetors. Anything beyond half-throttle belies the dry-sumped V8's racing heritage, as its basso rumble suddenly acquires an edgier, metallic bark. It's addictive stuff. The long throws of the ZF five-speed transmission, combined with the heavy clutch, would be tiresome were it not possible to simply waft along, courtesy of the

335 lb-ft of torque available at 4000 rpm. With a redline of 5500 rpm, the Ghibli's copious grunt takes the "ow" out of around-town driving.

The roomy, air-conditioned Ghibli, with its power windows and disc brakes, is a relaxed cruiser. Large potholes or railroad crossings can get the solid rear axle thunking and make the windscreen do a little shimmy. But an open road and the flexing of your right foot are all it takes to forgive this wildly sexy car any minor quirks.

—NICK KURCZEWSKI

MARKET

Bonhams Auction at Goodwood
Chichester, England
June 25

1980 Triumph Spitfire 1500
two-seat convertible

Mustard yellow with black upholstery. Luggage rack with spare tire mounted. Left-hand drive. 1500-cc, 71-hp four-cylinder; four-speed. Here's where the fun starts: According to the auction company, "At the time of cataloging the starter motor



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was removed and had not been located, but it is hoped that the car will be running by the time of the sale. Following a period of museum display in Holland we advise careful recommissioning before use."

Sold at \$3,782

Spitfires are harmless cars, except for the tendency of the early models, due to their cheap and ineffective independent rear suspensions, to flip over under hard cornering. But just what are you buying here? A car that is missing its starter motor (why?) and has been stored in a museum (for how long?). Buying this car wasn't a terminally stupid move, as it doesn't cost much to fix nearly anything on Spits. But it was no great bargain.

—KEITH MARTIN