

# HOT OUT OF THE OVEN INTO THE...

By Ed Niles



250 GT SWB s/n 2819 GT as seen at the Ferrari French Quarter Classic in New Orleans, November 2004. Photo courtesy of Carbon McCoy.

Now that I have my brain cells down to a manageable size, I thought I should tell a few more stories. Remember, these stories are fact-free.

At a meeting of the International Registry of Geezers in August (which coincided with the great Ferrari meet in Monterey) I had a little chat with Dick Merritt.

It turns out Dick and I are at the point in our lives when it is easier to remember what happened in 1965 than what happened last month.

One of the joys of recounting tales that occurred forty years ago is that there aren't too many others still around who can challenge one's current version of the facts.

Anyway, somehow, we got to talking about the "breadvan".

2819 GT is an extraordinarily interesting car. It started life as a 250 GT Berlinetta, and was later modified by engineer Giotto Bizzarini into what he thought a 250 GTO should be. The engine was converted to a dry sump, and moved back in the chassis. An entirely new body was built, with a very

square back end, the shape of which gave rise to the common denomination of this car as the “breadvan”. Today, this car is quite famous, and is allowed to participate in 250 GTO meets with great regularity, as it runs with the best of them. If you want to know more about this most interesting Ferrari, please refer to Cavallino No. 135; that issue contained a complete story about the car and its history.

But in the 60’s, when I was importing cars from Italy, it was just another Ferrari 250 GT, and in fact would have been somewhat difficult to sell as it did not have its original body! Nobody quite knew what to make of it.

The car was offered to me by my friend Roberto Goldoni in Rome in June, 1965. During the following months, Goldoni got the price down from \$3,700.00 to just under \$3,000.00!

At the same time, a good friend of mine, Gordon Culp, had noticed that I was having fun with Ferraris and making a little money, and asked me if he could get in on the action. I had assured him that I would let him know of the next car offered to me by Goldoni. It never crossed my mind that there would be any difficulty, as Gordon already had a 250 GT Lusso, and was a very bright guy. He was an electronics wizard, a classical guitarist, and a butterfly collector. So I immediately let Goldoni know that he should put a deposit on the car, so that Gordon could buy it.

Goldoni not only put a deposit on the car, he paid for it entirely with his own funds. That’s when the fun started.

Gordon started writing to Goldoni, complaining about the price of \$3,000.00, to which he would have to add quite a bit of money to reshape the bodywork, etc. While Gordon liked the general body shape, he perceived that there was some work that needed to be done, especially when comparing the back end of the car to the more common (!) 250 GTO. Although Gordon had promised Goldoni that he would buy the car, ensuing letters from Gordon indicated that he feared his overall investment would be in excess of \$4,500.00, and he told Goldoni that he was going to pass on the car. However, I believe the true facts are something like the following:

Culp went to his banker to borrow the money. The banker said, “Certainly Mr. Culp. Do you have the pink slip?” That was Gordon’s first clue that he was going to have some interesting times ahead. To cut the story short,

Gordon was not able to raise the money, and Goldoni was left hanging. I started scrambling.

One of the first people I called was Dick Merritt. As it happened, Dick had just entered into an informal joint venture arrangement with Gary Wales, by which they were going to buy a few cars and “go into business”. (You couldn’t imagine two more disparate personalities than Dick Merritt and Gary Wales. But that’s another story.)

Dick and Gary bought the car in November, 1965. Goldoni was happy, and I had gotten him off the hook so I was happy. End of story, as far as I was concerned.

But wait, there’s more!

Now Dick told me his end of the story: 2819 was delivered to an east coast port, along with another 250 GT (No. 0555 GT) which they had purchased from Goldoni, and Dick, Gary, and a third person went to pick them up. The idea was to transport them to Detroit. Dick had to deliver a 330 2+2 to Detroit, so he got the pleasure of driving the more modern car. Gary ended up with 2819. No. 0555 GT didn’t make it out of New York!

They set off in what turned out to be the worst blizzard of the year, and if you have any idea how a racing Ferrari is built, you’ll have some notion that Gary was a pretty miserable character. He was wearing a huge bearskin coat, but it was not adequate for the job. As Gary tells it, he was shivering and shaking for the whole trip from the east coast to Detroit.

Dick, in the meantime, ran out of gas in the 330 2+2. He got stranded by the side of the road, and when a Highway Patrolman finally found him Dick asked the Highway Patrolman if he had any idea where the other Ferrari might be at that time. The Highway Patrolman responded that there had been radio reports from truckers and Highway Patrolmen of a Ferrari going 100 miles an hour across the country, in the blizzard. Road blocks were being set up to stop it, as the roads ahead were covered with ice, and concern for the life and limbs of the driver was paramount.

Gary was finally stopped by the Highway Patrol just before the icy section of the highway, and his response was something like, “Geez I’m glad you stopped me, officer; I’ve been freezing my butt off”.

A year to two later Gary Wales was in full ownership of 2819, and when he moved to Los Angeles he brought the breadvan with him. Eventually, I arranged for Gary to sell his gem to my friend Asa Clark. Asa was not known for keeping his cars any great length of time, so it wasn't surprising that the breadvan ended up in the hands of another local character, our good friend Matt Ettinger. After Matt got through rebuilding the engine, it was probably the fastest Ferrari around Southern California in the late 60's. (Owners of a 340 MM or any one of three different 375 MMs then running around the streets of Los Angeles County might disagree!) Matt kept the car until around 1971, and got many great hours of use out of the car. In those days, it wasn't considered unusual to drive a racing Ferrari every day, in the streets. In particular, Matt was fond of making "midnight runs" at the time of day and in places where he was not likely to run into too many police officers. I'm sure Matt would be happy to regale you with tales of his ownership, the next time you see him.

2819 GT now resides happily in the New Orleans area, where it is the star attraction to the Ferrari enthusiasts in that area. It's hard to imagine, in this day of "collectable" Ferraris which trade in the millions, that this car was hard to sell at \$3,000.00!