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1954 Ferrari 500 Mondial Series I

The Mondial evokes the larger and more powerful 375 MM. Those who can live without the extra eight cylinders will find their reward in the bank

by Simon Kidston



Photos by Scott Niedermayer © 2009 Courtesy of Gooding & Company

Chassis number: 0418MD

This Ferrari 500 Mondial was the sixth of 22 Series I motorcars constructed. Scuderia Ferrari prepared a group of Mondials to compete at the 21st Mille Miglia and retained 0418MD for the effort. As the chassis numbers of the participants were of no consequence at the time, accounts differ as to who drove which particular car; however, it has since been determined that it was either Sterzi and Rossi or Pineschi and Landini.

On July 14, 1954, the factory sold the car to Mario and Bianca Maria Piazza, a husband-and-wife racing team. The Piazzas paid 3,500,000 lire for 0418MD, a considerable sum for a car that already had a major race under its belt. They decided to enter it at the Messina 10 Hours, coming 11th overall. In 1955, the car was entered in the Mille Miglia; however, it did not start. By the fall of 1955, it had been exported to Venezuela, where it raced at the Grand Prix in Caracas, finishing 10th.

The last recorded South American race came in 1958 with an unidentified driver using the alias "Guido Lollobrigida." By the mid-1960s, the car had moved to the U.S. and was campaigned there. By the 1970s, the original engine had been removed. During the next few years, a proper Mondial engine, 0506MD, was installed, and the car passed to collectors David Uihlein and then Bill Jacobs.

Mr. Jacobs participated in the 1984 Mille Miglia Storica before selling the car to Paul Tavilla. It was then completely restored before being campaigned at the Mille Miglia Storica three years in a row. It was awarded a First in Class at the 1992 Cavallino Classic and the FCA National Concours.

Then it was sold to Dennis Machul of Illinois. He entrusted Skip McCabe to perform a comprehensive restoration that brought the car up to outstanding, concours quality throughout. It was shown at Meadow Brook and participated in the FCA Challenge Rally and the Colorado

Grand. In 2000, 0418MD returned to the Cavallino Classic and earned the FCA's prestigious Platinum Award.

Under its current ownership, this car has been campaigned at the 2007 Mille Miglia Storica. It is astounding to consider that this car has successfully completed the Mille Miglia six times. The 500 Mondials are famous for their forgiving, balanced handling, intuitive responses and an unforgettable sound and sensation of speed. As one would expect, this car is offered with FIA and FIVA paperwork, the correct original hood and windscreen, and a report by Marcel Massini that documents its history.

SCM Analysis

This car sold for \$1,540,000, including buyer's premium, at Gooding & Company's auction at Pebble Beach, California, on August 16, 2009.

It's a common misconception that Ferrari sports racers of the 1950s can be neatly categorized into production types, and that changes followed uniformly across the board when the great Enzo decreed them. This Mondial is referred to as a "Series I" in the catalog, and such generalizations have been passed down over the years, but, as my learned friend the French Ferrari author and 4-cylinder expert Antoine Prunet points out, Ferrari at the time was "un grand bordel" (we Brits would politely call it "a bloody shambles"), at least for historians. Any racer from that period therefore needs to be analyzed on a car-by-car basis. Incidentally, the Mondial was named in honor of Ascari's '52 and '53 World Championships (Campionati Mondiali) in single seaters with similar 4-cylinder power.

The cars most Ferraristi describe as Series I Mondials have a Tipo 501 chassis (round tubes) with front transverse leaves, a 4-speed transaxle, and a Tipo 110 (2-liter, 4-cylinder) engine; approximately 22 were built in 1954. Sixteen were bodied by Pinin Farina, two as closed ber-

Details

Years produced: 1954–55
 Number produced: 22 approx. "Series I"
 Original list price: Lire 3,500,000 (\$5,600)
 SCM Valuation: \$1,200,000–\$2,000,000
 Tune-up cost: \$1,500
 Distributor cap: \$1,000
 Chassis #: Stamped on front left chassis longeron, under exhaust manifold
 Engine #: Stamped on block, between exhaust pipes 2 and 3
 Club: Ferrari Club of America
 PO Box 720597
 Atlanta, GA 30358
 More: www.ferrariclubofamerica.org
 Alternatives: 1954–56 Porsche 550 Spyder, 1954–55 Maserati A6GCS, 1952–53 Jaguar C-type
 SCM Investment rating: A

Comps



1955 Ferrari 750 Monza
 Lot 571, s/n 0502M
 Condition 2+
 Sold at \$1,540,000
 RM, Monterey, CA, 8/17/2007
 SCM# 46252



1955 Ferrari 750 Monza
 Lot 525, s/n 0492M
 Condition 2-
 Sold at \$1,107,000
 B&B, Carmel Valley, CA, 8/18/2006
 SCM# 42651



1956 Ferrari 500 Testa Rossa
 Lot 28, s/n 0620
 Condition 2-
 Sold at \$1,327,500
 Christie's, Monterey, CA, 8/8/2004
 SCM# 34909

linettas, and six by Scaglietti. Ferrari also equipped some Tipo 501 chassis with 3-liter or even 3.5-liter engines.

Earlier Mondials evoke the more powerful 375 MM

As for the so-called Series II Mondials, these were built in 1955, featured a Tipo 510 chassis (oval tubes) with helical springs, a 5-speed transaxle, and a Tipo 111 (2-liter, 4-cylinder) engine, and were bodied by Scaglietti. To add confusion, this same chassis was used for the similar-looking 750 Monza, and some cars used both 2- and 3-liter engines. Generally speaking, if they were delivered with the 2-liter, the chassis suffix was "MD," while just "M" was used for the 3-liter. But only generally...

Collectors tend to favor the earlier Pinin Farina-bodied Mondial, as it evokes the larger and more powerful 375 MM, a car not for the faint of heart or wallet: Gooding had an example displayed for private sale at Pebble Beach, asking north of \$7 million. Those who can live without the extra eight cylinders will find their reward in the bank. Of course, you could pretend anyway and do what a previous owner of 0418MD has done—fit the big hood scoop from a 375 MM. Never mind that the Mondial's carbs are on the side of the engine, not the top.

We know that chassis 0418MD started life as a 2-liter, Pinin Farina-bodied Mondial. The catalog states it was one of a pair used for the 1954 Mille Miglia by Scuderia Ferrari, although historians are divided not just on which of the two MM cars it was, but whether it was there at all.

Its later history follows a fairly typical pattern: After racing duties in Europe, the old warrior is pensioned off to fight further battles in South America, soldiering on in obscurity after its highly strung Italian lump gives up by the simple expedient of fitting a good ol' Detroit V8 in its place. Years later, a prince in shining armor (a savvy collector) spots its potential and, an expensive kiss later (call it a restoration), it's ready for the Cavallino Classic or the Mille Miglia, looking shinier than the day Mrs. Piazza took delivery (wives, rather than their husbands, are often listed as buyers in Italy, where jousting with the tax man is something of a national sport). Incidentally, the "unidentified driver" referred to in the catalog really was called Lollobrigida—he was Gina's cousin.

So is the new custodian, a big cheese in the fast food industry, right to look so cheerful after parting with over a million and a half of his hard-earned cash for this voluptuous Latin beauty?

Worldwide eligibility of the highest order

If he's bidding on a car like this, he probably has more than just looking at it in mind. The Mondial may not have the biggest of hearts—two liters in sports racing car terms isn't exactly fire-breathing—but you'll rarely find a better combination of internationally recognized marque (the marque, let's face it), svelte yet aggressive coachwork (by yet another great name—Pinin Farina), excellent presentation (yes, more expensive makeovers...), and, perhaps most importantly of all, worldwide event eligibility of the highest order.

This Mondial may not have covered itself in period glory, and its original engine



might be powering a tractor outside Caracas, but neither is it one of three cars claiming the same chassis number, nor is it built around a few bits of fire salvage. It's accepted as "proper" and as such is likely to be welcomed into any big ticket event.

Believe it or not, in this price bracket there aren't that many cars that qualify on all those counts, even in these uncertain times. A tired, PF-bodied 500 Mondial with matching numbers but other issues is available in Europe for €1 million (\$1.45m), and the next Ferrari step up is a 750 Monza starting at \$2 million. The seller of 0418MD had recently acquired a new toy and so when bidding came close to reserve, he gave the nod and allowed the car to be sold. I'd say that was the right call, and both he and the beaming new owner can sleep peacefully. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of Gooding & Company.)

