

STILL TURNING HEADS

MARIO MASERATI WAS A PAINTER. HIS FIVE BROTHERS WERE ALSO ARTISTS, BUT THEY MADE BEAUTIFUL CARS WITH FINE ENGINES THAT WON RACES AND THE RESPECT OF ALL WHO ADMIRE ARTISTRY IN ANY FORM.

WORDS RICHARD WEBB



The name Maserati evokes strong images of a great motor sport past – winning the Formula One constructors and drivers titles in 1957 was but one of many achievements. What started out as a small workshop specialising in the preparation of race cars for the Italian elite is now celebrated for crafting some of the world's most stylish and fastest sports coupes.

Financial mismanagement has seen the famous brand pass through various hands over the years, but the passion for building beautiful motorcars has endured. The stunning 1960's models like the 3500GT, the Indy, Bora and Merak from the 1970s and today's Quattroporte and GranTurismo have found homes in the garages of many of the rich and famous.

The Maserati story began on 1st December, 1914 when the Societ Anonima Officine Alfieri Maserati was set up in the Italian industrial town of Bologna. It was little more than a garage run by a family of motoring enthusiasts. In the early days, the Maserati brothers merely modified the luxury Isotta Fraschinis of the day for road racing purposes.

Maserati's rapid rise to engineering and racing supremacy was celebrated in 1929 when the brand produced a car which shattered the world land speed record by more than 10km with a speed of 246.069 km/h. The car was powered by an astonishing 3961cc, 280 BHP 16-cylinder engine.

At the end of World War II, Maserati got back to business, creating the A6 1500 Sport, around which Pininfarina

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THE FUTURE

A major product expansion is planned for the Maserati brand. The current Quattroporte successor is expected to be a GranTurismo sedan powered by the 4.7-litre V8 engine. Power should range from 298 to 324 kW. Early reports suggest the model will move even more up market, equipping it to do battle with the Aston Martin Rapide and Porsche Panamera.

How about a Maserati SUV?

Remember when Porsche stunned the motoring world and launched the Cayenne? In an interesting departure, Maserati is rumoured to be planning the 2013 launch of a car-derived SUV (also known as a 'crossover') based on the Jeep Grande Cherokee and the Dodge Durango, but with a Ferrari sourced engine.

In 2015, Maserati will also launch an entry-level sedan priced at about R625 000. This, the 'baby Quattroporte', features a V8 engine and will compete with the Mercedes Benz E Class, BMW 5 Series, Jaguar XF and Audi A6. The Maserati magic continues.

built an elegant coupe body. It was around this time that a powerful new rival emerged, and in 1947 Ferrari and Maserati were engaged in an epic all-Italian duel on racetracks all over the world. In 1953, Juan Manuel Fangio's Maserati A6GCM 2000 came second in the World Championship behind Alberto Ascari in his Ferrari.

1954 saw the debut of the legendary Maserati 250F with a 2500cc, 6-cylinder engine and transverse rear gearbox unit. Fangio won the Argentine Grand Prix and ultimately the World Drivers title in this car. A similar Maserati 250F forms part of the magnificent Franschoek Motor Museum collection of Johann Rupert, the South African born chairman of the luxury goods company Richemont.

In 1957, Maserati also previewed the 3500GT 2+2 seater sports coupe at the Geneva Show. It was the start of a new era for the brand, with the production of some of the best coupes and sports saloons of the era. The 3500GT remained in production until 1964 and was responsible for introducing a whole series of important innovations, like twin-plug ignition systems, disc brakes and fuel injection.

The official departure of the Maserati team from racing didn't end the firm's interest in motor sport and in 1958 it launched the Tipo 60-61. Nicknamed the *Birdcage*, its revolutionary chassis was constructed out of a trellis of slender tubes.

In 1968 Maserati turned out a record 733 cars and acquired a new shareholder in the shape of Citroen. That same year, it launched the Indy 2+2 coupe and started production of the new V6 engine. This engine powered the

revolutionary Citroen SM. At the 1971 Geneva Show, Maserati launched the Bora, a two-seater, mid-engined Grand Tourer. That year, the Citroen SM won the Moroccan Rally, giving Maserati its first ever rally success.

In 1975, the effects of the oil crisis forced Citroen to sell the firm to Alejandro De Tomaso, and under new management, the firm launched a new version of the Quattroporte – the best selling Maserati of all time.

The 1980s saw many changes, not least the creation of a mass production Biturbo, a not altogether lovely saloon with a 2000cc V6 engine. In 1993, Fiat Auto bought Maserati, which was later put under the full control of Ferrari in July of 1997. In 1998 the 3200GT coupe was launched at the Paris motor show. It was the first Maserati of the new era and a revival of the four-seater Grand Tourer tradition that began 40 years earlier with the 3500GT.

The 2011 GranTurismo is a throwback to the road-going models of the 1960s and 1970s: beautiful, brawny cruisers like the Mexico, Indy and the 5000GT. Like those older cars, the GranTurismo has its flaws, but they're far outweighed by its charm and character. Which is why the GranTurismo fares well against obvious competitors like the BMW M6 and Mercedes CL. While the 2011 Quattroporte lacks the interior volume and the electronic gadgets of its big German sedan rivals, it is a sportier and more engaging car to drive than some of its competitors. The Quattroporte is an alternative to the German luxury-car kings and the Sport GTS version is a hard core 4.7-litre, 440bhp, 283 km/h express. ■

THE HISTORY

1954

The practically priceless Maserati 250F.

1957

The elegant Maserati 3500 GT.

1959

The Tipo 61 was unveiled in 1959 when Sir Stirling Mos drove the car to its first win.

2011

Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS.

