MOTOR SPORT

DECEMBER 1995 FOUNDED IN 1924 £2.00

WIN A SCALEXTRIC SET – see page 1334

Stop and go, go, go

ow the F1 title was won

izzarrini Strada
orgotten temptress?

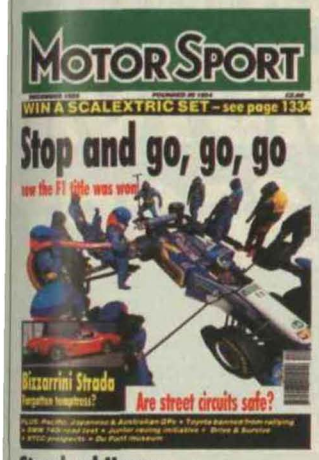
Are street circuits safe?

9 770027 201049

LUS: Pacific, Japanese & Australian GPs ★ Toyota banned from rallying
BMW 740i road test ★ Junior racing initiative ★ Drive & Survive
BTCC prospects ★ Du Pont museum

MOTOR SPORT

INCORPORATING *SPEED* AND *THE BROOKLANDS GAZETTE*



Standard House
Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4DA
Telephone: 0171 628 4741
Fax: 0171 638 8497
Modem: 0171 256 6246
Telex: 888602 MONEWS G

Volume LXXI Number 12
DECEMBER 1995

Founder Editor
William Boddy

Editor
Simon Arron

Grand Prix Editor
Mark Skewis

Deputy Editor
Gordon Cruickshank

Pictures
LAT Photographic

Advertising
John Deverell ext 129
Binn Mengher ext 146

MOTOR SPORT SUBSCRIPTIONS:
SURFACE MAIL: Home £24.00; Overseas £28.00
AIR MAIL: Eire and Europe £28.00; Australasia £50.00; Elsewhere (except USA) £47.00
Annual rates include postage. Subject to increases of postal rates and cover price.
Net amounts payable in sterling on London. If payment is made in a currency other than sterling please add £2.50 to sterling rate prior to conversion.
USA: (Airfreight) per annum $49.00.
All enquiries to: MOTOR SPORT
Box 188, Berkeley Hts
New Jersey 07922, USA
Telephone (908) 665-7811
Fax: (908) 665-7814

Next issue out December 22

CONTENTS

Front cover: Benetton at work in the pits, one of the key elements behind Michael Schumacher's success this year. Inset, the alluring Bizzarrini Strada.

CAPTAIN SCARLET

In a few tempestuous years, Ingeniere Bizzarrini walked out on Ferrari, gave Lamborghini its greatest asset, fell in with and then out with Iso, and then put his own name to some dramatic creations. LM has been trying one out.

Forty years ago, Tony Vandervell was the first in a long line of motoring folk who publicly declared an intention to knock Enzo Ferrari and his "bloody red cars" off their perch. Those who followed included, among others, Ferruccio Lamborghini, Henry Ford and one of Ferrari's own engineers, Giotto Bizzarrini.

The British bearings manufacturer had a good stab at the Prancing Horse concern on the world's Grand Prix circuits with his beautiful Vanwalls; the tractor maker, Lamborghini, succeeded up to a point with his increasingly exotic range of 'supercars', and Henry Ford most definitely overcame his frustration with the Commendatore when various versions of the GT40 scored four successive wins at Le Mans between 1966 and 1969, and ended a similarly long string of victories at the Sarthe by Enzo's "bloody red cars".

However, where these three mavericks enjoyed rubbing Ferrari's nose in it and beating the cunning old man at his own game, Giotto Bizzarrini had no such luck. Nor did he have a multi-million pound budget.

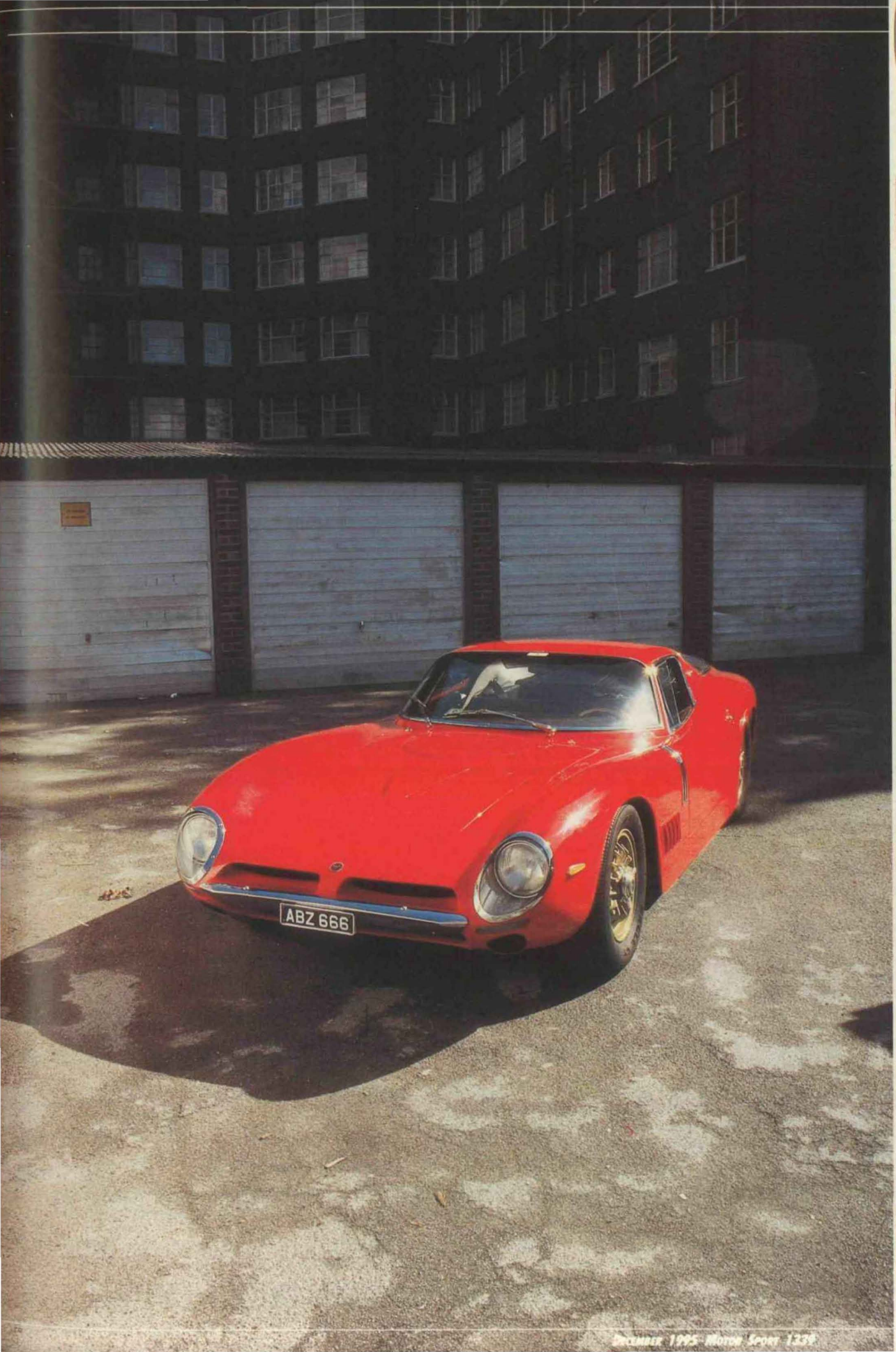
One thing Bizzarrini wasn't short of, though, was engineering and artistic talent. Very much in the same mould as Giorgetto Giugiaro, Bizzarrini had worked on the development of the SWB 250 GT Ferrari and was almost solely responsible for the design of Ferrari's masterpiece, the 250 GTO. But 1961 was a strange year for the Maranello stable. On the one hand, there was the euphoria of Phil Hill winning the Grand Prix Drivers Championship in the 'sharknose' 156, and on the other, Italians will be Italians. . .

A disagreement or two led to a number of employees walking through the factory gates at the end of the year, never to return, and Giotto Bizzarrini was among them. As Darryl Zanuck once noted: "If two men on the same job agree all the time, then one is useless. If they disagree all the time, then both are useless." Clearly, two geniuses in one factory was hopeless — and Enzo gave way to no-one.

The man responsible for the delectable 250 GTO was on his own. His first job away from Maranello was to design the V12 engine that went into co-conspirator Ferruccio Lamborghini's first car. It took him just four months from start to finish. That little exercise was followed by a chassis design for Enzo Rivolta. But Bizzarrini's relationship with Rivolta didn't last long. It wasn't that Giotto had anything in particular against people called 'Enzo', but more that the ex-Ferrari man had motor racing running richly through his arteries and Enzo Rivolta had not.

Bizzarrini believed that to sell road cars successfully, it was necessary for any self-respecting manufacturer to also be involved in top-level motor racing. Rivolta on the other hand was only interested in producing high-performance GT cars — the Grifo at this stage — and after Bizzarrini had finished the Iso project, the two had a stormy relationship.

Left to his own devices, Giotto Bizzarrini drew on his own artistic talent and considerable engineering skills. With a little help from Piero Vanni, who did the initial drawings, and Giugiaro, who was entrusted with the final design work, he came up with the


ABZ 666

competition version of the Grifo. Essentially the Grifo was an extremely fast road car, which relied on 5.3-litre V8 Chevrolet Corvette power. Both the cylinder block and heads were made from cast iron, the valvegear was actuated by pushrods and rockers, and the crankshaft ran in five main bearings. For the suspension, Bizzarrini used coil springs and wishbones at the front, and a coil-sprung De Dion tube located by radius arm and Panhard rod at the rear.

By 1965, there were two versions of the Grifo — the Iso Bizzarrini A3C racer and the A3L Grifo road going version, the main difference between them being that the Bitza had its engine moved back in the chassis by 16in. A class win in the over five-litre category and ninth overall at Le Mans in 1965 proved that Bizzarrini was working along the right lines. There was also a fifth placing in the 1965 Monza 1000kms, but when pitted against pukka thoroughbreds from Ferrari the Bizzarrini stood little chance of outright victory. Those "bloody red cars" had the opposition licked once again.

Buckets of character inside, but you can't tell how fast you're going . . . Super low profile has engine set for back, running under screen, below.

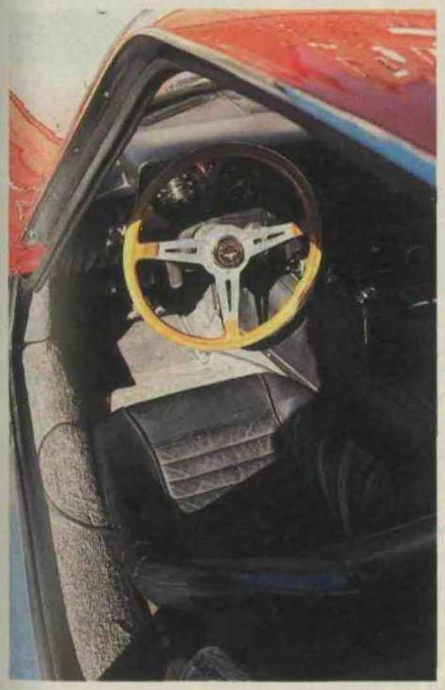
Bizzarrini returned to Le Mans in 1966 with an open-top mid-engined Chevrolet-powered P538 prototype. As usual, the body styling was stunning — a typical Bitza cocktail of voluptuous curves, swooping lines and deeply cut louvres over a simple tubular chassis. But the 1966 24-Hour French classic was one which those involved with the Bizzarrini project would rather forget. The car retired early in the race with a broken chassis frame, and that was that. It seems likely that three of these racers were built originally — one in coupé form — but Salvatore Diamonte, who made the bodies for Bizzarrini's sports prototype, retained the body forms and constructed further cars after the company's demise in 1969.

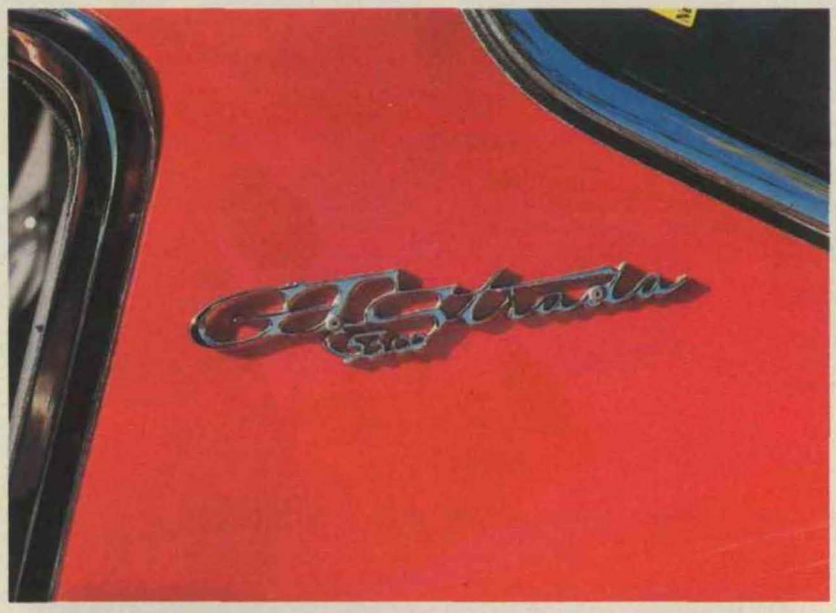
But to return to 1966. Enzo Rivolta and Giotto Bizzarrini finally fell out over the latter's use of the name Grifo for his road cars. Wisely, Bizzarrini had already registered the Grifo name, but allowed Rivolta to use it in exchange for a supply of parts for 50 cars. At last they had managed to agree on something. So Rivolta continued to make the Grifo, and Bizzarrini went his own way with cars which bore his name. Some 35 examples of the GT5300 model were built throughout 1967, and 60 Strada versions followed in 1968 before the company was finally laid to rest the following year.

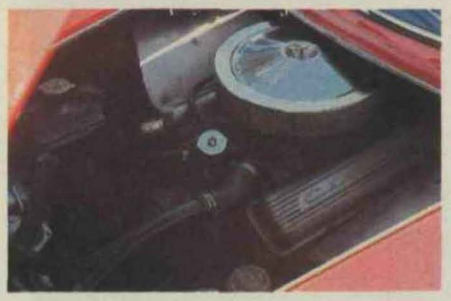
The limited number of cars produced by Bizzarrini (around 143 all told) were stunning by any standards. Fast and reliable, their simple American power units ensured that they suffered from none of the niggling problems which typified contemporary Ferraris. Bizzarrini's company might have lasted longer — it certainly deserved to — but 1968 was a significant year in 'supercar' production. Enzo Ferrari launched the 365 GTB Daytona, and such was this model's impact that even Lamborghini, who had debuted the magnificent and technically advanced Miura two years earlier, was forced to draw breath more deeply than usual. The old man and his "bloody red cars" had done it yet again.

Driving Impressions

Smartly dressed, with designer sunglasses and a king-size cigarette between his lips, the young executive in the silver BMW 530i suddenly changed the expressionless shape of his protein-starved face. Unlike dozens of others who stared in amazement as the Bitza burbled its way across Kew Bridge en route to the M4, the man in the BMW didn't smile — he'd just dropped his cigarette onto his lap.







Access compromised by broad fuel-filled sills far left, but adjustable pedals help comfort. "Strada" suffix, above, denotes one of 60 1968 cars. 5.3-litre Chevrolet engine hard to get to, left.

And there were the two joggers who thundered across the petrol station forecourt; "Ere, John, what sort of car's this then?" Their question is quickly answered. "Yeah, that's obvious," says the one with the purple and yellow trainers, "But who made it? Nice paint job, Rover V8 is it?"

So, for the benefit of Mr BMW and the two tubby youths in the world's most frightful clothing, this car is a Bizzarrini GT Strada 5300, designed by Giotto Bizzarrini and built by his company in 1968.

When the car's owner and fastidious custodian, Alexander Fyshe, removed the protective dust sheets from the gorgeous bodywork of this beguiling monster, the genius of Giotto Bizzarrini became immediately apparent. Like so many other Italian supercars of the mid-1960s, beautiful styling was accomplished at all costs. The frontal aspect is pure Bizzarrini, with just a hint of post-war Alfa around the wheel arches and headlamps, whereas the middle and rear sections of the body show undertones of Ferrari, Lamborghini and Maserati. Make no mistake, though, this was Bizzarrini through and through — not quite at his best, but, overall, the smooth slipperiness and overall effect is as pleasing aesthetically as it is correct aerodynamically.

Because beauty and folly are generally good companions, getting into the cabin over the broad sills, which interestingly double as fuel tanks, one is poised between cliché and indiscretion. I'll skip the clichés but admit to slight apprehension at the thought of a prolapsed spinal disc. There is, however, a technique: throw the right leg against the left of the transmission tunnel and hold it there firmly; next, fall carefully into the body-hugging leather-covered seat and pull the left leg in behind you with both hands.

Once installed behind the classic three-spoke wood-rimmed alloy steering wheel, you experience the typical Italian driving position, specially tailored for folks with long arms and legs severed just below the knees; but at least the pedal cluster is adjustable, and the large curvaceous windscreen creates a wonderful feeling of cabin space. So many of the Bitza's low-slung contemporaries feel so claustrophobic that sitting in them, let alone driving them, can be oppressive.

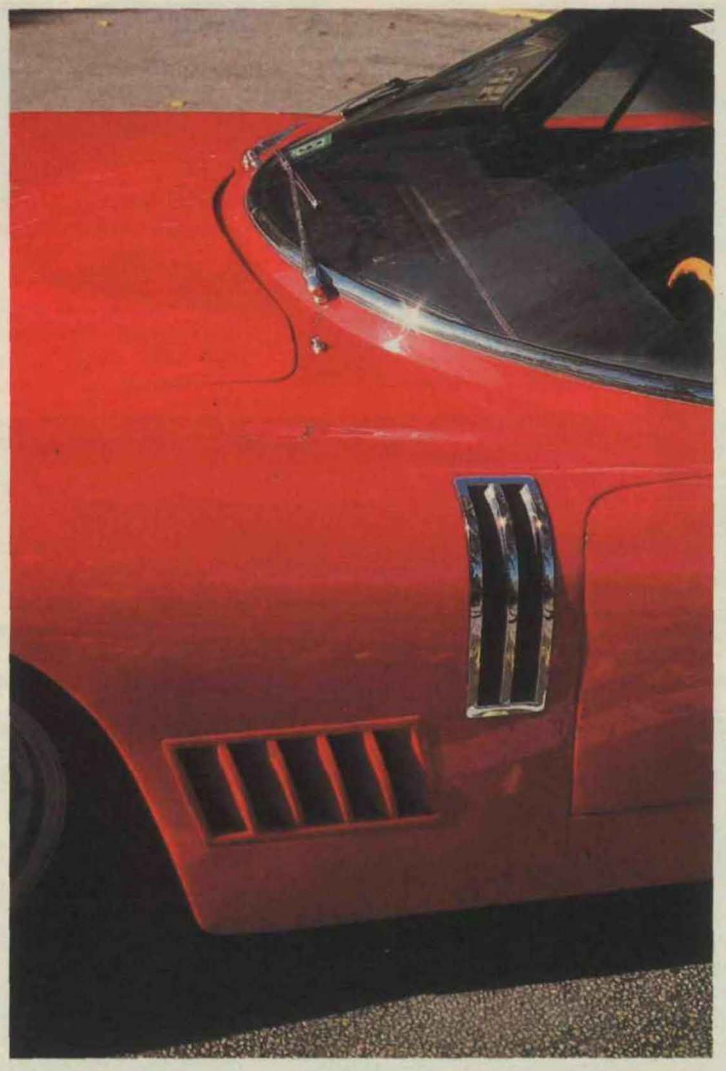
In the manner of a good number of sports racers built in the classic post-war era, Giotto Bizzarrini traded sound ergonomics in favour of style. And I am glad he did, because the cabin is endowed with buckets of character, the sort which today's efficient supercars miss. Visibility through the rear window isn't too good, the gear lever doesn't fall naturally to hand and the steering wheel obscures the main instrument cluster, but all of these are traits which equally apply to the F40 Ferrari, BMW 850i and Porsche 911 respectively. So who cares that this 30-year-old isn't quite up to scratch in the field of human comfort and convenience?

"So who cares that this 30-year-old isn't quite up to scratch in the field of human comfort and convenience?"

Incredibly stylish, the car is at the same time almost practical; this is one of the few exotics with a boot big enough to a swallow a sensible quantity of luggage. Admittedly, its ability to take a couple of medium-size suitcases, a squashy bag and a large camera box is aided by the skimpy space-saver spare wheel and tyre, but all things considered, this arrangement is an eminently good compromise, which goes part way towards justifying the GT badge.

Prepare for lift-off. Three prods on the throttle pedal to prime the elephantine Holley carburettor, light the blue touch

"... hints of Alfa and undertones of Ferrari..." Bizzarrini's outrageous forms are high-lighted by delicate detailing around the alloy panels.



paper and the ground shudders as the 5.3-litre Chevy engine, like Frankenstein's monster receiving its bolt of diabolical lightning, erupts instantly into life. Settling down to tickover, though, it sounds and feels like the good old Yankee stock-block that it is — solid, dependable, ready to go on for ever. Can't beat it.

The clutch pedal is firm, but far from heavy, and the four-speed synchromesh gearbox, with its stubby long-travel lever, is as fast and precise as anything you'll find south of Zuffenhausen. You do have to ensure that the lever is posted home firmly though, for fear of finding the wrong cog. With circa 365bhp on tap, though, what's really surprising is the Strada's supreme ability to meander at walking pace in heavy traffic without coughing or overheating.

But, and it's a big but, this GT was designed primarily as a racing car, which could also be driven on the road, and the 2in ground clearance means that the sump guard scrapes virtually everything on the road taller than a baby shrew standing on its hind legs. Things are not so bad away from areas stifled by 30mph speed limits, because the supple suspension evens itself out and begins to soak up bumps rather well, and almost inaudibly too.

The clever bit, of course, is that the engine's being so far back in the chassis gives almost neutral handling characteristics in both slow and fast corners. Slow in, fast out is generally the order of the day, feeding the steering lock in as smoothly as possible all the way. Get it right and the seat-of-the-pants feedback is tremendously rewarding. Get it wrong and... well, the Bitza doesn't really protest, it just sits there, tolerantly waiting for you to get your act together. And such is the immense grip from the Eagle GT tyres that it doesn't take more than an instant. Naturally, tail-end breakaway can be provoked in the lower gears by stamping hard on the extra-loud pedal, but only a complete dipstick would be a party to such unnecessary antics on public roads.

Out on the open road, the Bizzarrini really comes into its own in a big way. With 376lb ft of torque peaking at just 3500rpm, there's plenty of 'grunt' low down, but there's also lots of fun to be had all the way to the red line at 5800rpm. Bang the gear lever from third to top, floor the throttle and those gorgeous 15in cast-alloy, gold painted Campagnolo road wheels receive an unequivocal message from the engine — just get going, mate — which they pass on instantly to the fat Eagle tyre treads. The cacophony from the twin exhaust pipes is blood curdling, but this car's registration number says more about the noise inside the cabin than any words could convey. Incidentally, it pays to be ready when the power comes in on full throttle: the shove in the back is tremendous.

Contemporary road testers reckoned on a top speed of around 145mph, the benchmark figure of 60nph arriving from rest in a maximum of 6.5secs, but Alex Fyshe tells me that his car will easily reach 160mph. At high speed the front apparently goes "a bit light"; I have every reason to believe this but have no intention of finding out for myself.

It's a large, heavy car, yet the all-round disc brakes — outboard at the front, inboard at the rear — do their job of hauling the Bizzarrini down smoothly and progressively even from high speed. There's good initial bite and never any fade, but as one might expect the pedal needs a hefty shove. As there are electrically-operated windows fitted (the only part of the car worthy of contempt for self-indulgence), a little exercise for the right leg now and again is fair compensation. One thing is for sure: the steering is so nicely weighted that the arms and hands don't need flexing that often. This is such an easy car to drive, and so smooth, that you really have to keep a watchful eye on the speedometer.

Our fun over, the Bitza was returned to its hideaway and the dust sheets laid carefully over its pristine alloy bodywork. The big V8 was silent once again — deafeningly so! Time to reflect. In the 30 years or so since the Bizzarrini was conceived, the upper echelons of the supercar bracket have been populated by increasingly sophisticated machines. Cars like the Jaguar XJ220, McLaren F1, Ferrari F40, Porsche 959 *et al* — state-of-the-art elitists which go like stink and perform every motoring function better than anything else. They are all brilliant in their way. They've got everything the Bizzarrini has and, mostly, a lot more besides — except one very important thing: the unique flavour of 1960s magic. A decade which gave us some of the closest and most exciting motor races ever (Monaco 1961 and Le Mans 1969 to name but two), cars like the TZ Alfa, Lotus 25 and Porsche 917, MOTOR SPORT changing its cover picture from mono to colour — they were heady days. And just standing over the bonnet of the Bitza for a few minutes while the engine was cooling down, unashamedly breathing in the oil and petrol fumes, brought it all back in every glorious detail. I rest my case. My thanks to Alexander Fyshe for a most intriguing insight into a truly great Italian car.

L M