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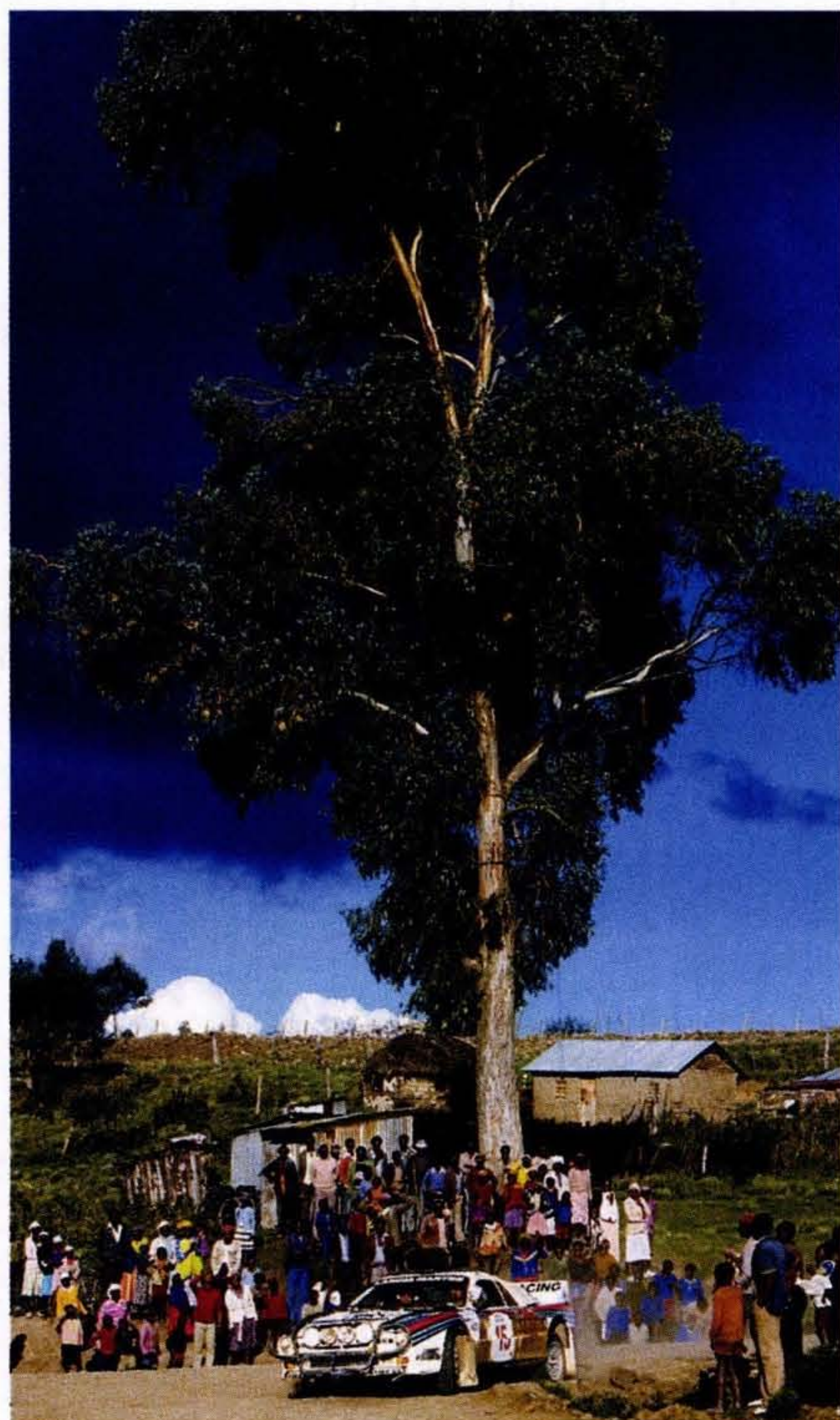
NUVOLARI'S SILVER ARROW – 480BHP AND ZERO GRIP!

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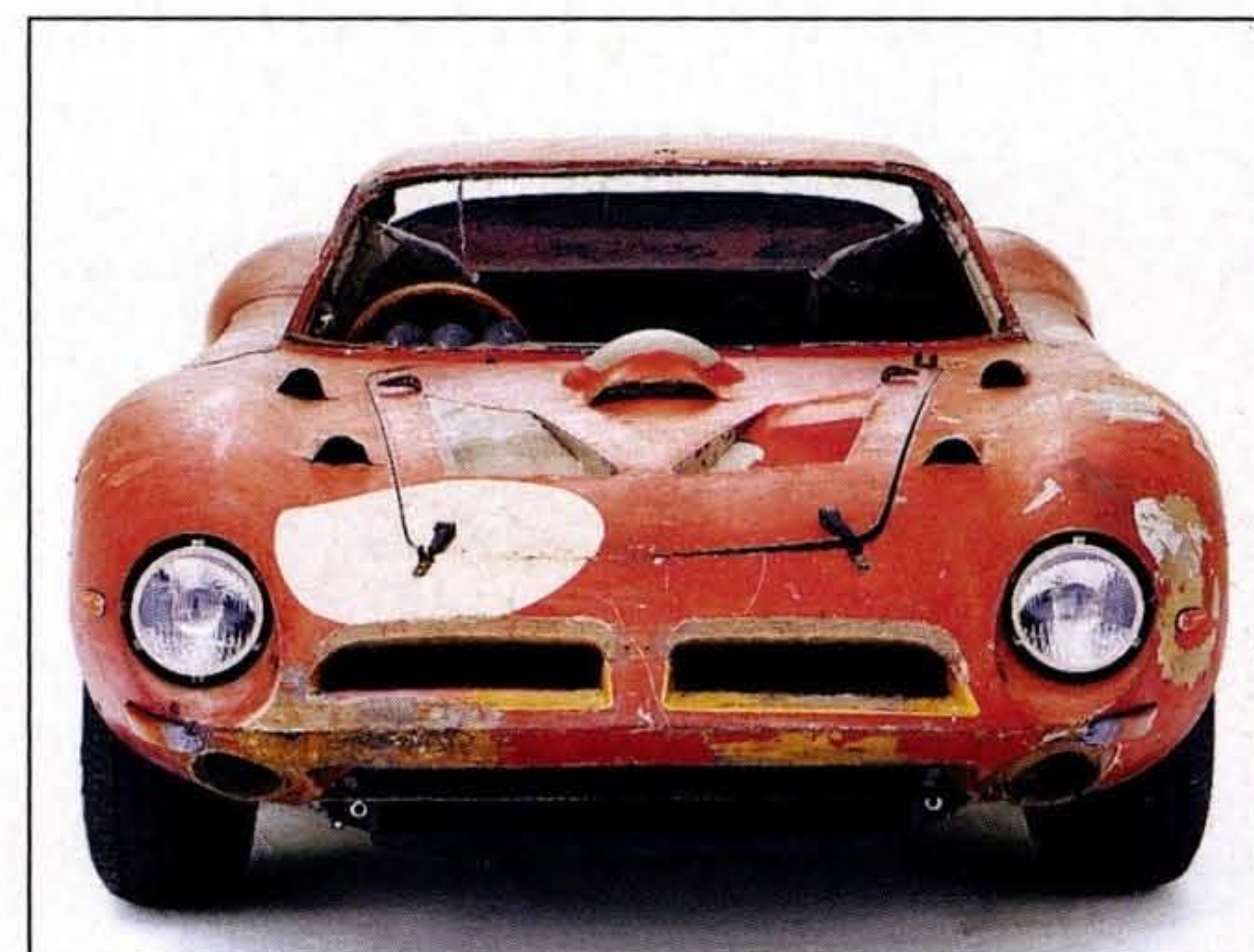
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African sunset Safari is now a historics-only rally. Savour its past with our evocative photos. Page 84



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BIZZARRINI EXPRESS

THREE DECADES AFTER BEING SOLD AS JUST ANOTHER LOT IN A LIQUIDATION SALE, THIS INCREDIBLE GT RACER HAS BEEN UNEARTHED. PAUL FARNLEY TELLS ITS STORY – AND THAT OF THE GENIUS BEHIND IT

IT'S ODD THAT RED PAINT FADES LIKE NO OTHER. VIVID and vibrant, and flat and flaky are but a few years of neglect apart. And this particular hue has been maturing for more than 30, crazing evocatively across a beautiful fibreglass 'canvas'.

Giotto Bizzarrini was an *Ingegnere* – engineer just doesn't hack it – with an artist's temperament: a bullish Tuscan with no time for red tape or red bills. Which is (probably) why his Livorno-based firm flitted from address to address, and wound up in receivership in 1971.

Responsible for a triptych of motoring icons, Ferraris 250 SWB and GTO, and Iso Grifo – oh, and Lamborghini's glorious V12 – it's indicative of Bizzarrini's nature that he was a key part of the disaffected group that left Ferrari to form ATS in 1962, thus missing what should have been his crowning glory, the GTO's official unveiling. What he really wanted, though, was to build cars bearing his name, for his z's to lightning-flash through a styly, 'jet age' badge. So what he *really* needed was a partner to take care of the money side – and to put up with his whims and caprices.

Enter Iso scooter magnate Renzo Rivolta. It was a big jump,

photography by James Mann

from three-wheeler 'putt-putts' and Isetta bubble cars to a world-beating luxury GT, but Rivolta was determined to make it – with Bizzarrini's help. His contracted freelancer, however, was planning an even bigger leap of faith. As the GM-engined Rivolta GT was still taking shape, Bizzarrini was badgering his boss to green-light a two-seater sportscar – and to race it. Rivolta loved life – fast cars, fast boats, etc – but he was a businessman first and foremost and racing simply didn't stack up. He would take a lot of persuading...

Incredibly, *two* very different Grifos appeared at the 1963 Turin Show: Bertone's beautiful A3/L road car and Bizzarrini's raw A3/C racer. The latter had wanted to build a mid-engined car, but Rivolta insisted that he use a shortened version of the GT's sturdy platform chassis. He agreed. But this was his last compromise. Back at his Autostar works, he mounted the small-block (5.3-litre) Chevy so far back in the frame that its distributor could

only be accessed via a lift-up panel atop the dash. He wanted all of the car's weight between its wheels; he wanted it stiff; he wanted it svelte.

Its aluminium, load-bearing, wind-cheating body, penned by Giugiaro from an original Bizzarrini sketch, and fashioned by Piero Drogo's Sportscars Modena concern, was a show-stopper: low, wide and super-purposeful. It *looked* a winner. Bizzarrini had got his way; Rivolta had been bullied, kept in the dark and eventually swayed. The boss was on board for that first season: 1964.

But semi-works status did not guarantee a big budget; Bizzarrini loaded the boot with spares and drove the car to Le Mans himself. He would drive it home, too, after 2560 miles that had exceeded expectation. Crewed by the Franco-Swiss combo of Pierre Noblet/Edgar Berney, the Grifo qualified 16th, ran 172mph along the Mulsanne

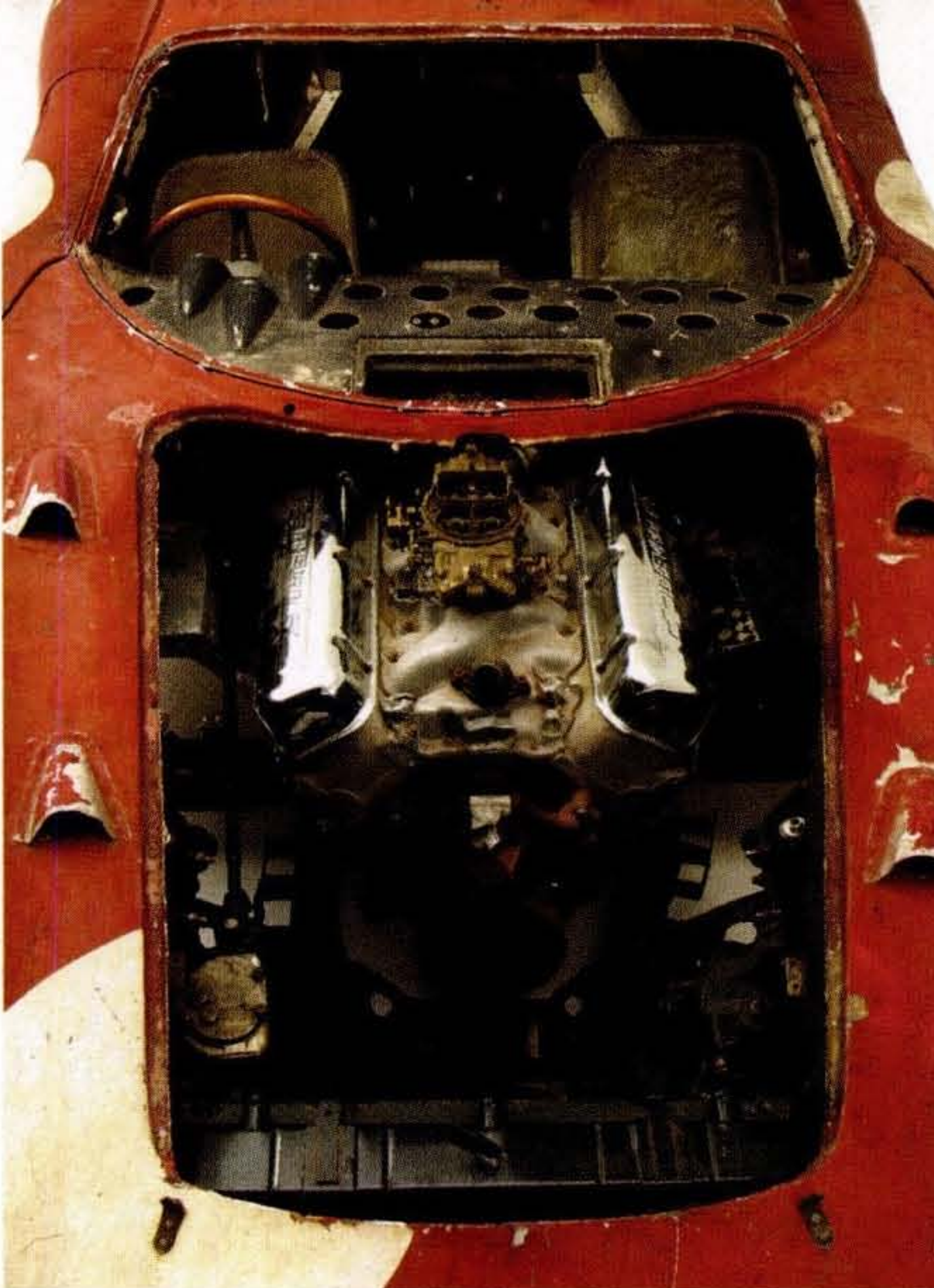


and finished 14th overall, fourth in class, despite losing two hours with a brake drama.

One year later the stats were: 24th in qualifying, 180+ on the straight and ninth overall, first in class, despite losing 30 minutes while a mechanic ran to the stranded car to show the driver where the switch for its reserve fuel tank was! But behind this result, courtesy of French pairing Regis Fraissinet/Jean de Mortemart, all was not well. After a disappointing performance in May's Nürburgring 1000Km, Rivolta had ended his association with a flawed genius: he could see the looming, huge financial input required to be competitive; Bizzarrini could not. He was handed enough parts to build 50 cars, and was left to his own devices: a recipe for brilliance and disaster, in unequal measure.

Backed by American enthusiast Mike Gammino, Bizzarrini set about constructing the mid-engined car he'd dreamed of: he put his heart and soul (and house) into it. The Corvette-engined P538 – the first chassis was fitted with a Lambo V12 – lasted just eight laps at Le Mans in 1966, having spun embarrassingly as Berney accelerated away from the run-and-jump start. And then the CSI changed the rules for '68: 3-litre Prototypes, with a stay of execution for Group 4 cars – so long as they did not exceed 5000cc and more than 50 of the model existed. Bizzarrini was crushed. He should have concentrated on his front-engined road cars, but the urge to race could not be denied.

This car, chassis BA4 0106, is what might have been – instead, its condition is testament to what happened. In 1966, Bizzarrini launched the GT America, a fibreglass-bodied car with independent, unequal-length A-arms



New Chevy 7-litre fitted; Jaguar steering box used

instead of a de Dion rear axle. 0106, the only right-hand-drive factory racer, partnered the mid-engined *barchetta* at Le Mans that year; driven by Sam Posey and Massimo Natili, it outqualified and outran it – but not by much, being disqualified after just three hours because of a piffling pitlane infringement.

"The car was very predictable with some understeer, and the steering effort was very reasonable," says Posey. "The driver sat low on the floor and there was great power. Overall, it was a damn good car. The big problem was a lack of development; it really needed a proper team to run it." Bizzarrini was relying instead on a group of students from a nearby university.

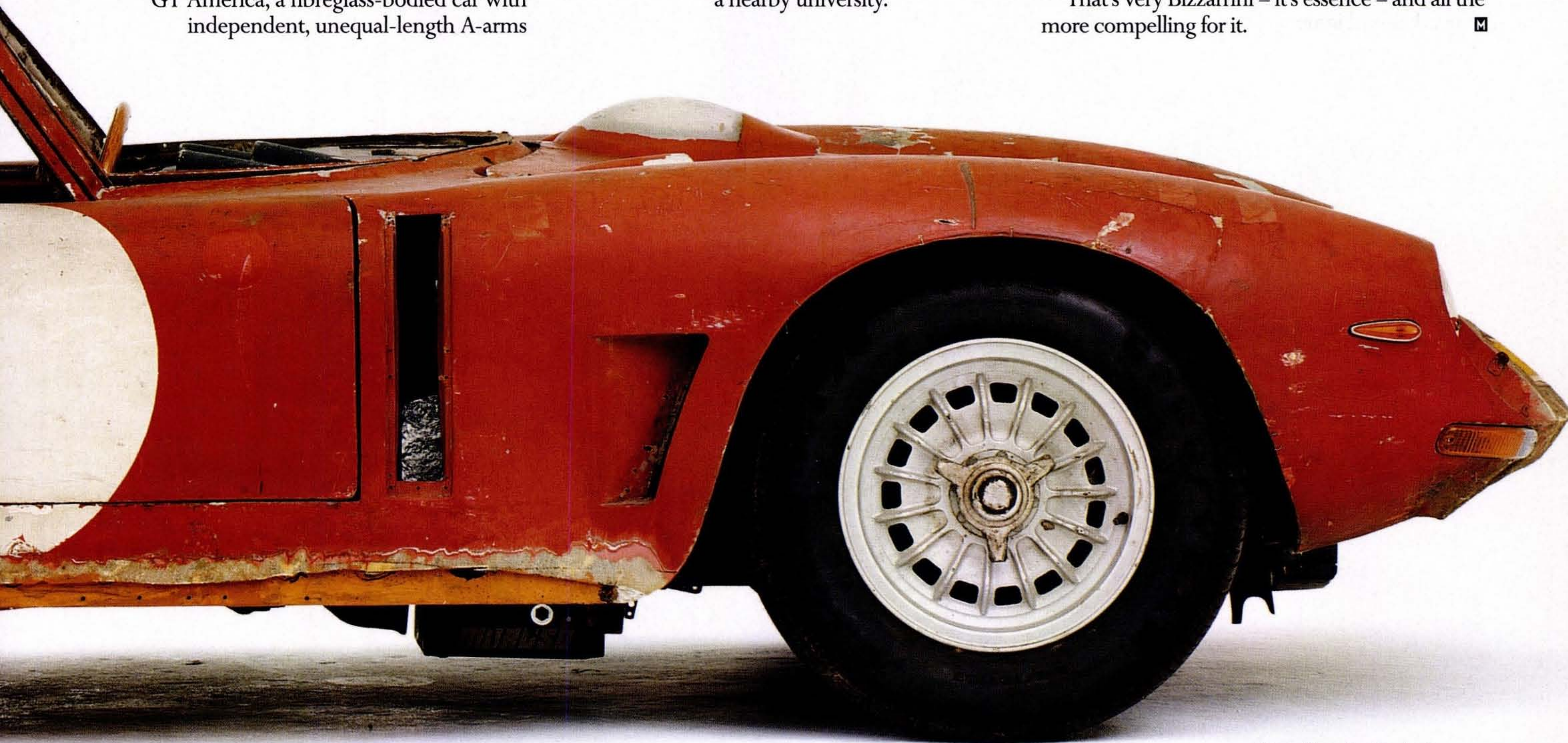
Weighing an official 1196kg, it was the lightest *berlinetta* that Bizzarrini had ever run, yet it was substantially slower than the original '64 Le Mans car. Funds were even tighter without Rivolta, and the team was descending into chaos: a lack of rain tyres had delayed 0106's race debut, having made a reasonable fist of qualifying, at the Monza 1000Km in April, while a collision with a farmer's Topolino on the way to the start of the Targa Florio in May wasn't exactly conducive to a good result; it blew a headgasket on lap two.

Bizzarrini pressed on into 1967, 0106 becoming the only one of his cars to be fitted with a 500bhp big-block (7-litre) Chevy. Despite the ugly vents, Perspex 'power bulge' and massive, ungainly oil cooler now besmirching its lines, this car is Iso fans' Holy Grail: the (alleged) 200mph Mulsanne racer...

There is no question that Bizzarrini's design had the potential to be the best front-engined GT car of its age. The reality, though, was far removed from that. *Autosport* described 0106's arrival at the Le Mans practice day in April thus: "A rusty car appeared on a rusty lorry." This is unlikely given the racer's construction, but the sentence still paints a picture. As did the stopwatch: it was way off the pace at the test, and suffered the ultimate embarrassment of being rejected by the race scrutineers.

Look closely at the car today, at the careless yellow overspray on its nose, the ragged ducts punched through its shell, the brackets upon brackets in its engine bay, and it becomes clear that the team was a hotbed of ideas bereft of a coolly clinical focus.

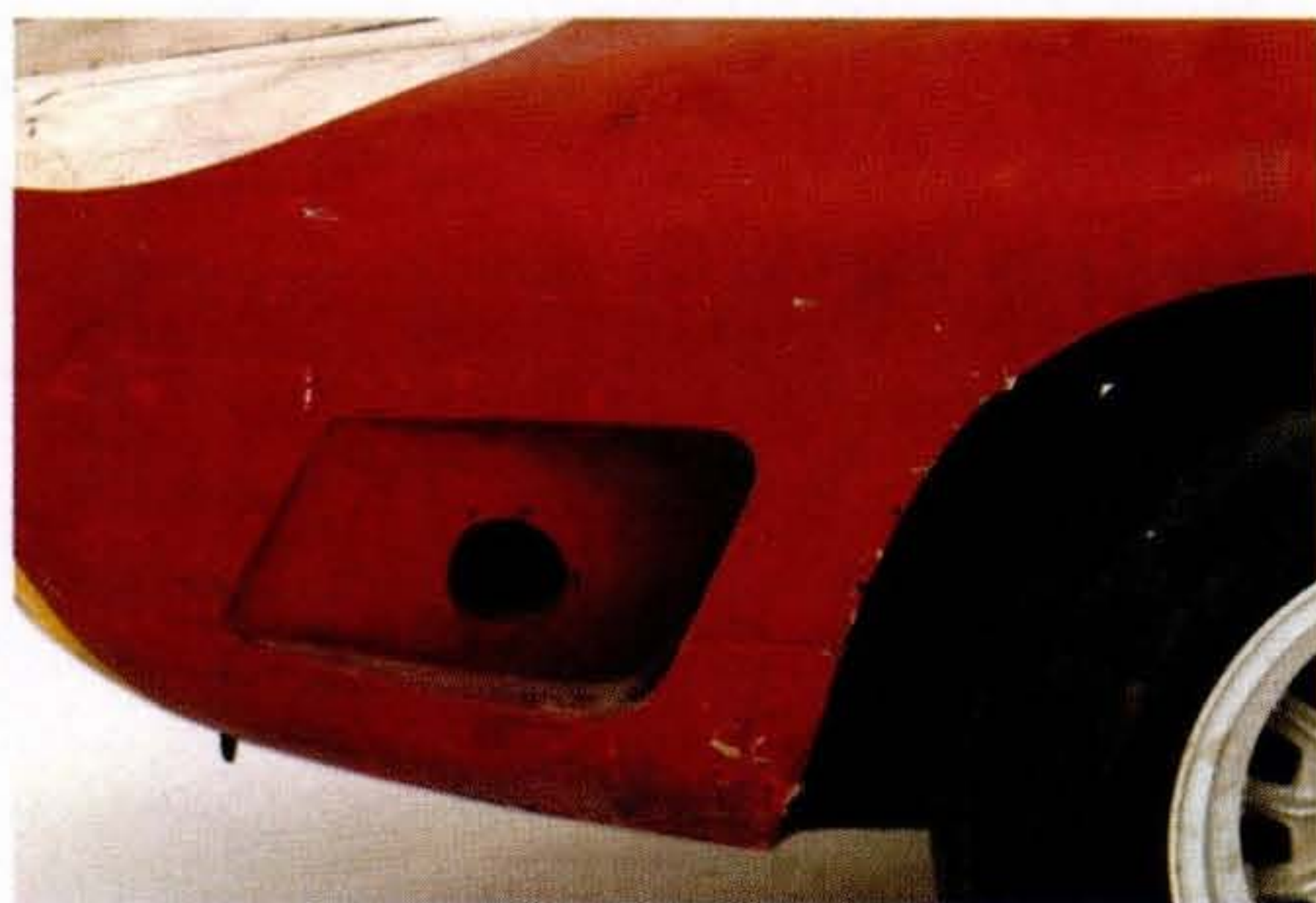
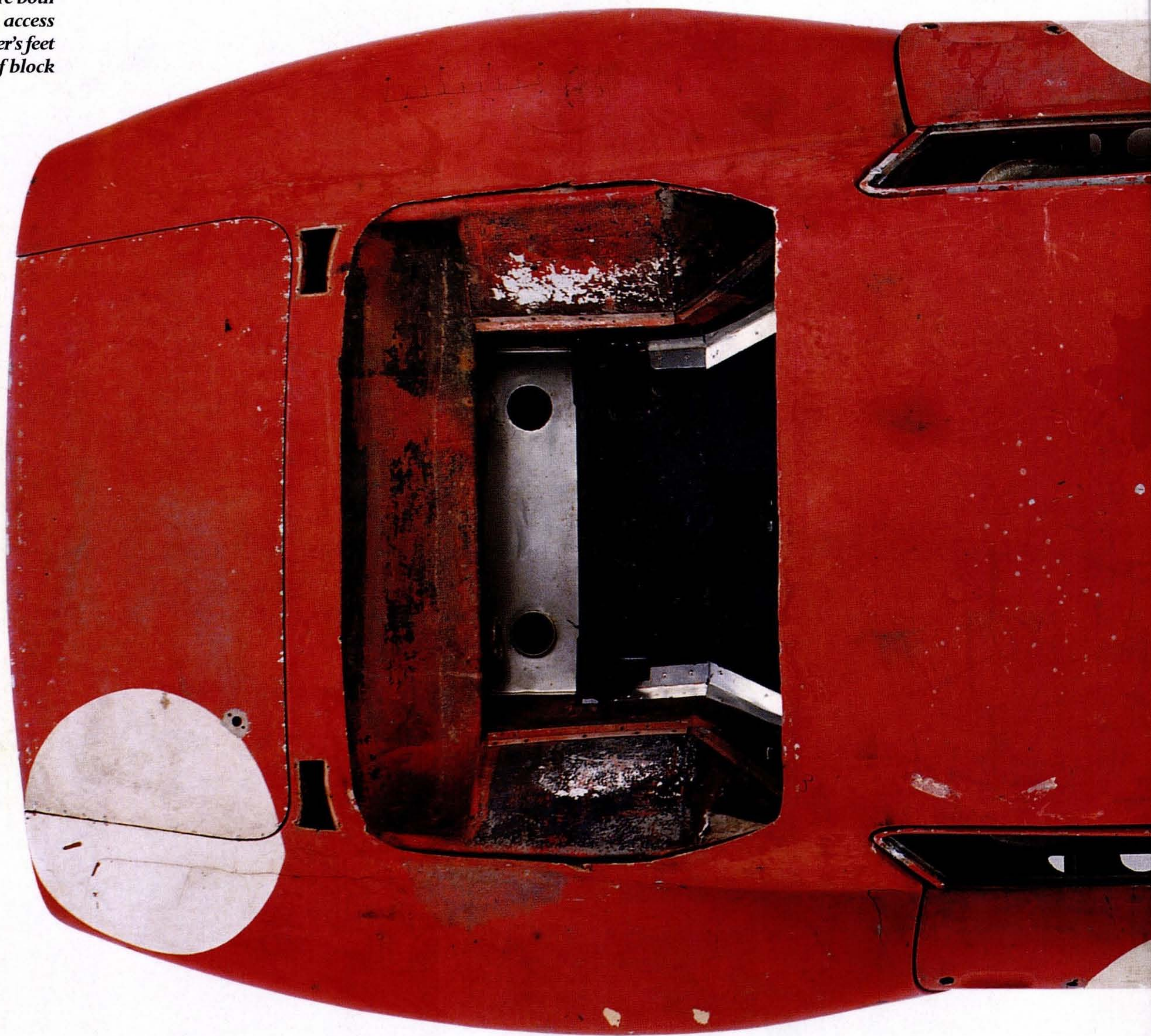
That's very Bizzarrini – it's essence – and all the more compelling for it. **M**



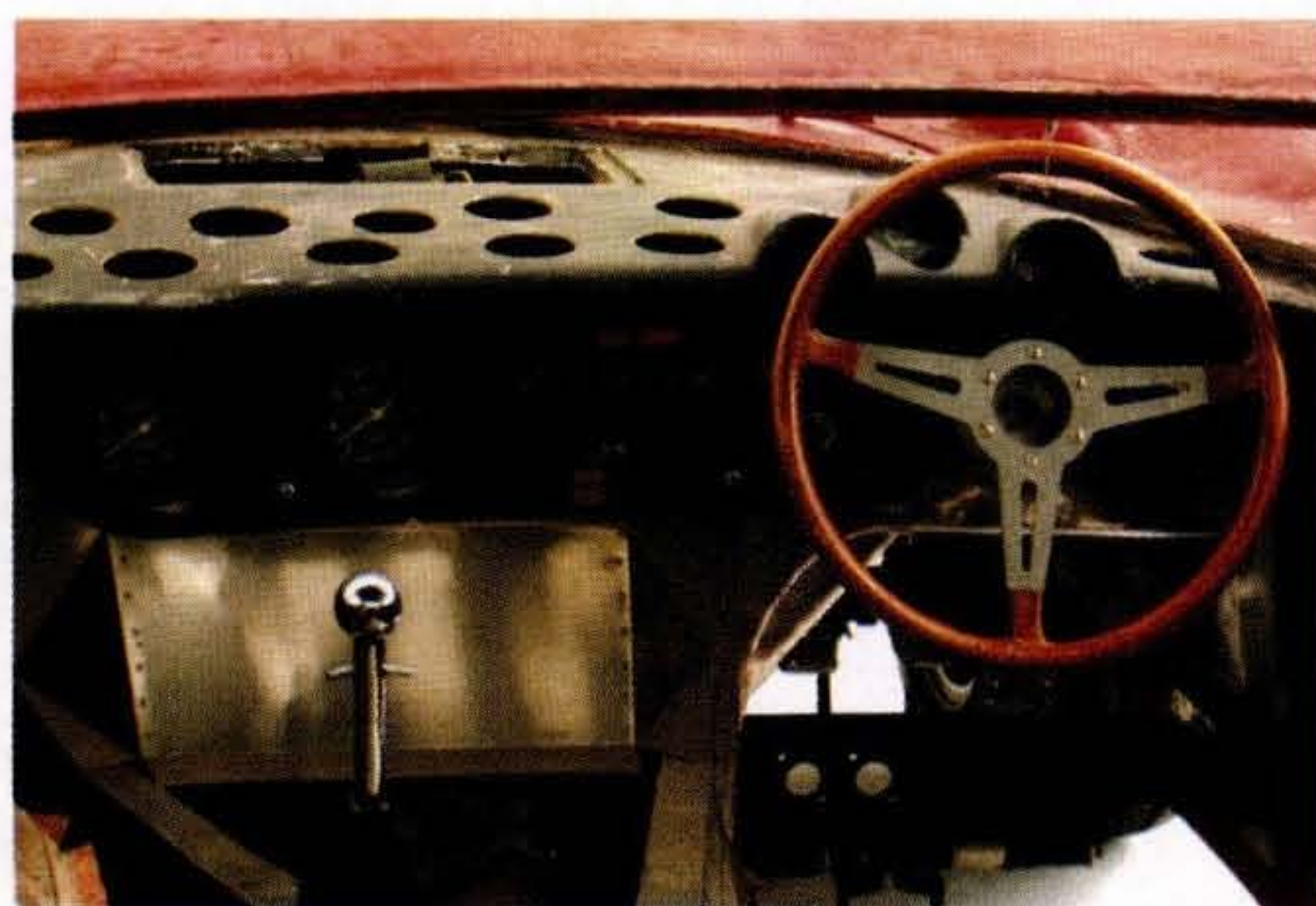
Heavily raked windscreen and offside sill are missing, but that doesn't prevent car from still being beautiful

BIZZA EXPRESS

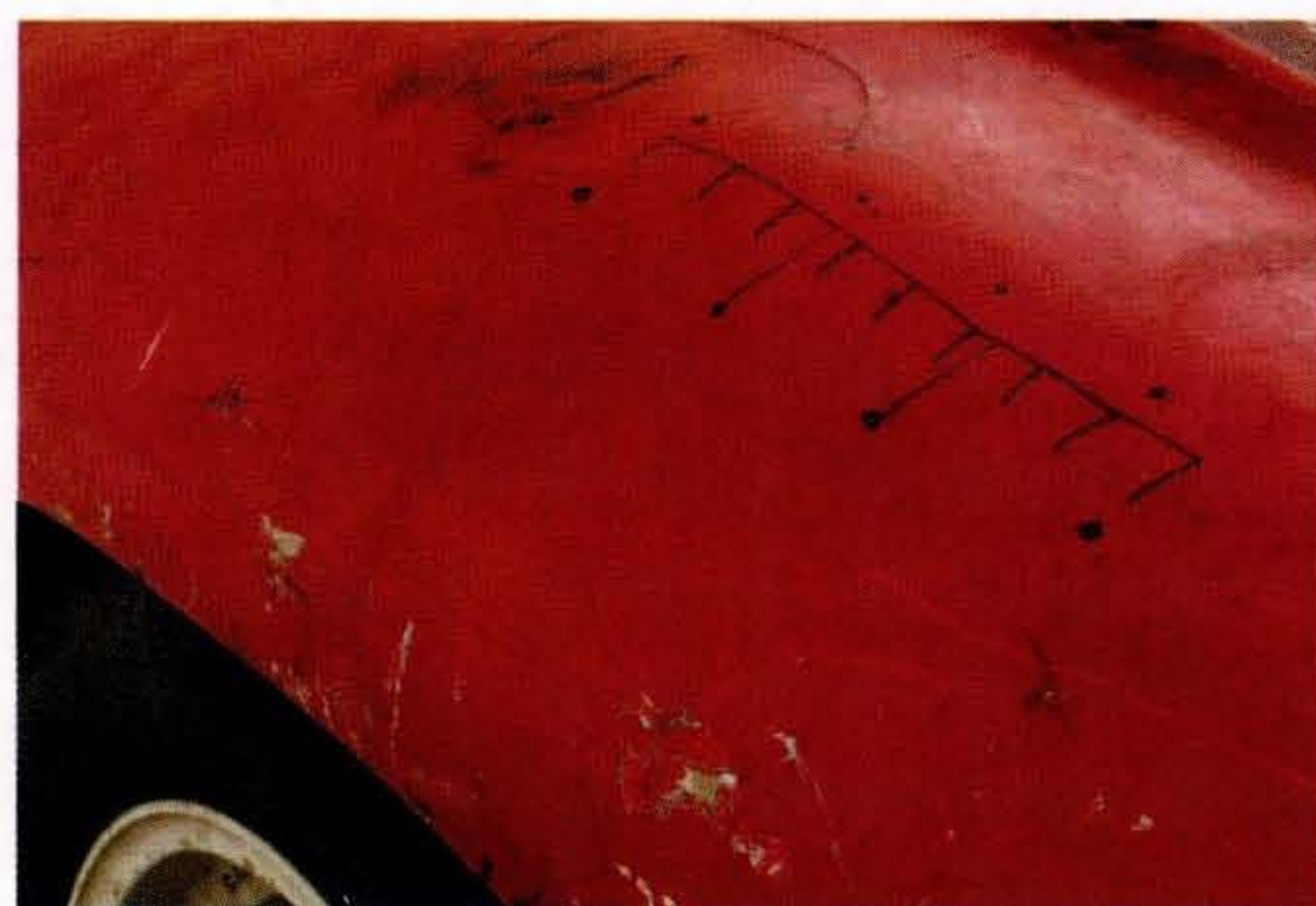
Bonnet and boot are both aluminium; note access hole to dissie – driver's feet level with centre of block



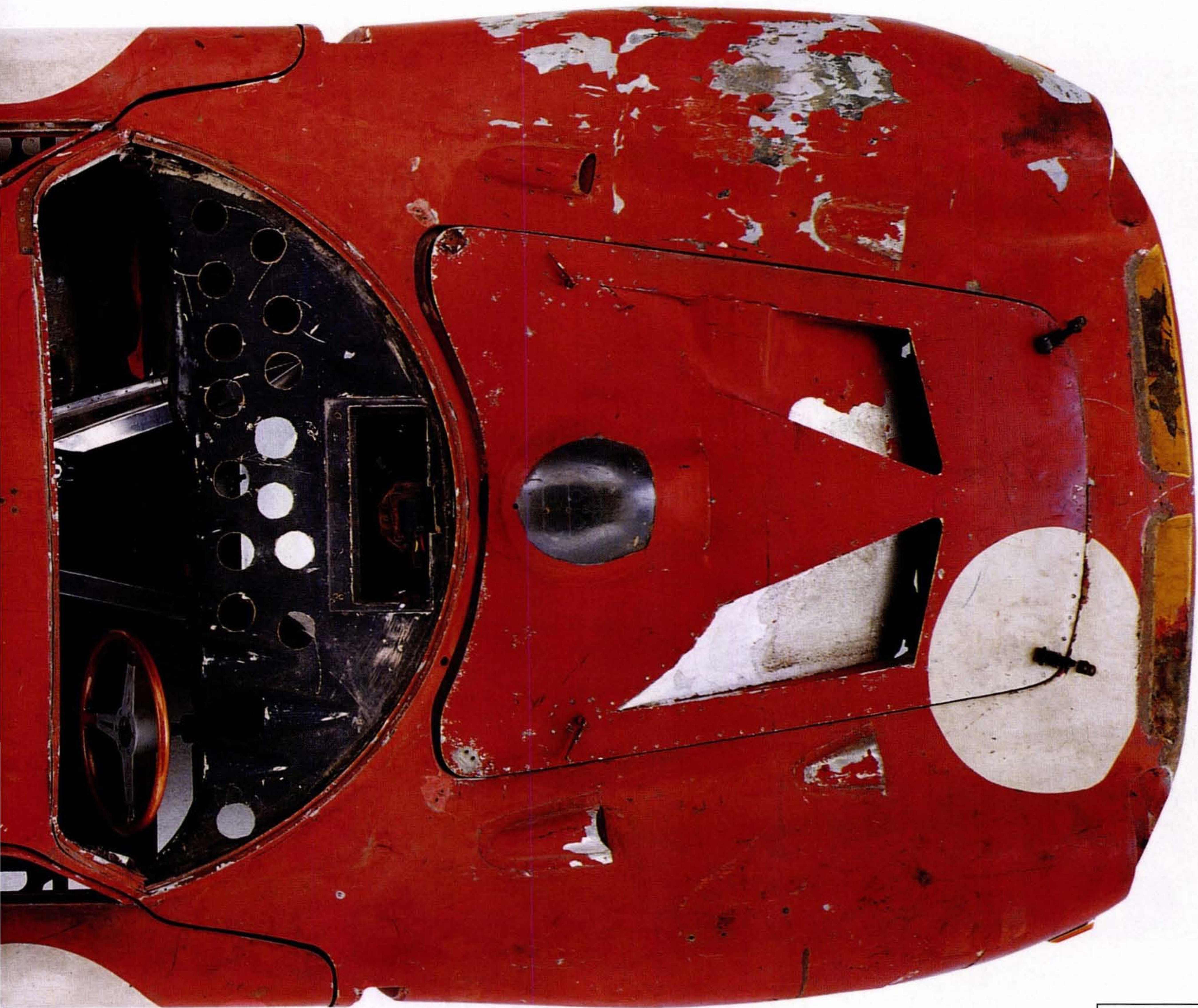
Ducts and vents increased along with engine size



Dash is fibreglass; demister holes; 320km/h speedo



Mysterious markings made on left-rear wheel arch



The car is to be auctioned by Christie's on December 2 at Jack Barclay Showroom, Nine Elms, London. Details on +44 (0)207 389 2851



Tank sits on rear parcel shelf, within wheelbase



Nose and wheels were sprayed before 1967 season



Fibreglass doors and aluminium window frames