

342 America Lineage

By Jim Weed

By 1949 the fragility of the 1.5 liter supercharged Colombo engine was apparent. Enzo Ferrari employed Aurelio Lampredi to design a larger normally aspirated engine. Lampredi designed a 3.3 liter engine that would soon increase in size to power a large variety of Ferrari Formula One, Sports Car and customer luxury cars.

Throughout 1950, 1951 and 1952 Ferrari built a number of customer sports cars. The most popular would be the 340 America. Twenty-four examples were produced and they competed all over the world. Strong and competitive they earned a good reputation for reliability.

Early in 1953 Ferrari created a “civilized” version for a more discerning client from the 340 America. This new model called the 342 America was built with a longer and wider wheelbase to provide a more luxurious ride. It had a fully synchronized four-speed transmission utilizing a single dry-plate clutch for smoother engagement. Each of these cars received special bodywork with custom details.

Of the six chassis, one was built by Vignale as a cabriolet, all the others were built by Pinin Farina. Two cabriolets and three coupes each sporting different details were custom built by Pinin Farina for discerning customers. One of the coupes going to Enzo Ferrari himself.

Although limited in number the 342 America paved the way for future exclusive models. Several of the features pioneered found their way into the next sports car series, the 340 MM, 375 MM and the ultimate 375 Plus.

Further development would create the successful 375 America/250 Europa series that would move Ferrari towards greater customer production.

The greatest accomplishment would be future development of special short-run production “Specials” like the Superamerica series that began in 1956 with the 410 Superamerica and continued well into 1966 with the 500 Superfast.

The 342 America is the first important step in Ferrari creating high-performance luxury customer cars directly adapted from his racing machines. If there is a connection to be found between the two the 342 America clearly is the beginning.