



# GT heaven

It's motoring nirvana for *gran turismo* man **Martin Buckley**, but does he pick Maserati 5000GT or Ferrari Superfast?

PHOTOGRAPHY **TIM SCOTT**



**H**ere they are, together at last. The most elite Italian hyper-boutique GTs of the 1960s. Near-mythical. Exquisitely couture. Fast in an epic way.

Today, in the haze of a Cotswold afternoon, the 5000GT and 500 Superfast look – and sound – fabulous together. The Allemano-bodied Maserati is the simpler, more brutal shape, with instant authority in its assertive nose and long, flat bonnet. The Pininfarina Ferrari is long and sensual, a conventional beauty with curves you want to caress.

They sound pleasingly different. The V8, fuel-injected Maserati barks and snaps with the intemperate feel of a racing car flexing its muscles, whereas the Ferrari's V12 growl is silken and confident.

Superfast versus 5000GT! We're cruising through country towns and it strikes me that some people don't even look. Don't you realise, pregnant lady outside the Co-Op, that these were the last coachbuilt, limited-production cars to be offered by the two greatest names in Italian exotica? Nothing else was available for those who required race-car performance combined with GT comforts, and their huge price-tags inspired as much awe as their legendary potential for speed. That the £11,500 Ferrari cost £2000 more than a Rolls-Royce Phantom V Limousine in '66 shows what a rarefied universe it inhabited. Maserati didn't even bother listing the 5000GT in Britain, but in Italy its Lire7.5m list price bought two Mercedes 300SLs. Both cars were only ever built to order, expressly to appeal to the tastes and mores of the wealthiest individuals in society – special international clients who could afford a car that combined

### FERRARI 500 SUPERFAST

**Sold/number built** 1964-'66/36

**Construction** steel body, tubular steel frame

**Engine** all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 4963cc V12, with three Weber carburettors

**Max power** 400bhp @ 6500rpm

**Max torque** 304lb ft @ 4000rpm

**Transmission** four-speed manual with overdrive or five-speed, driving rear wheels

**Suspension: front** wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers f/r

**Steering** worm and roller

**Brakes** discs, with twin servos

**Length** 16ft 6in (5029mm) **Width** 5ft 10in (1778mm) **Height** 4ft 3in (1295mm)

**Wheelbase** 8ft 8in (2642mm)

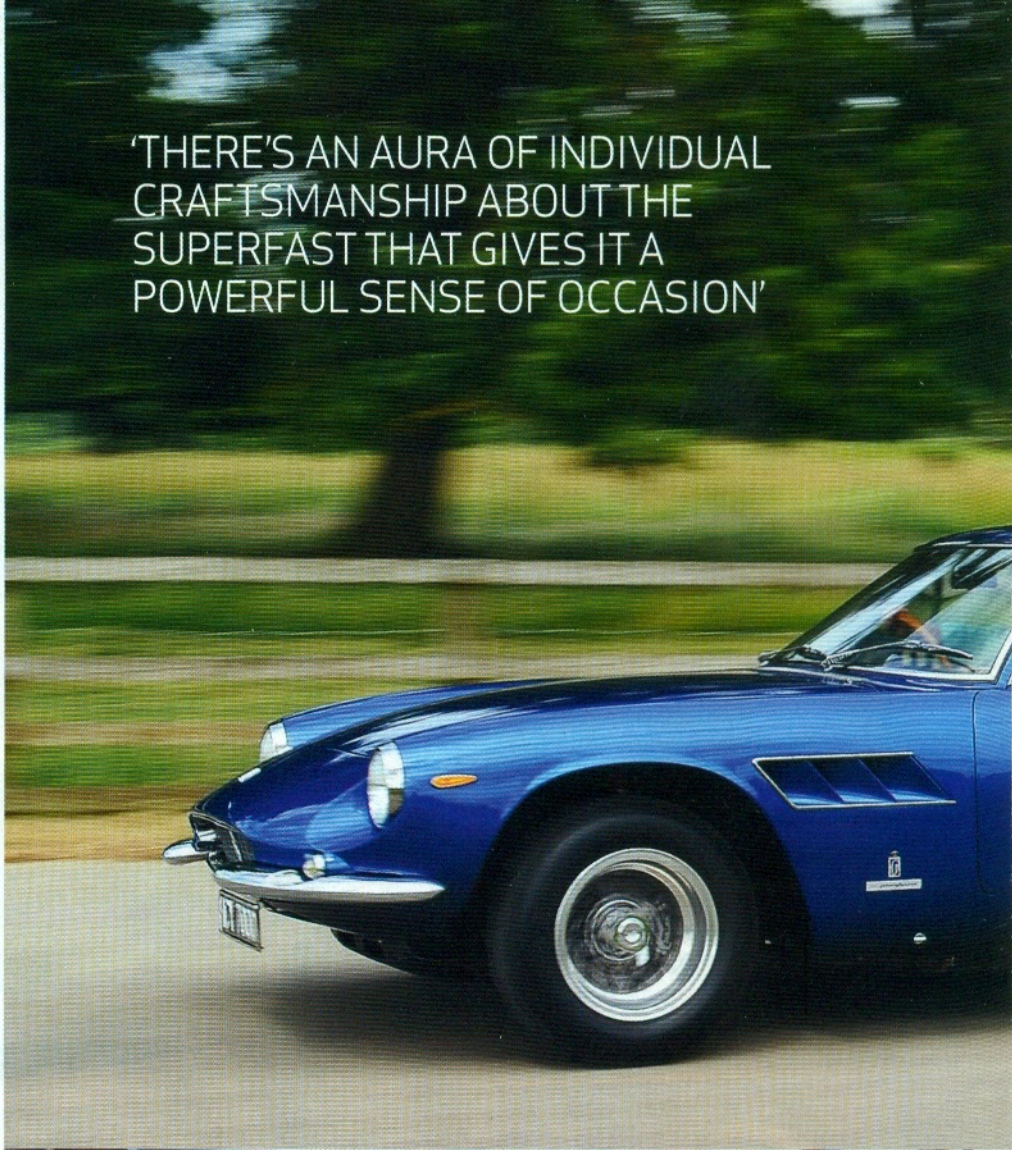
**Weight** 3076lb (1395kg)

**0-60mph** n/a **Max speed** 173mph **Mpg** n/a

**Price new** £11,519

**Price now** from £500,000

'THERE'S AN AURA OF INDIVIDUAL CRAFTSMANSHIP ABOUT THE SUPERFAST THAT GIVES IT A POWERFUL SENSE OF OCCASION'



Clockwise, from left: hand-finished perfection to the 500's body; crackle-black cam covers with triple Webers nestling in the centre of the vee; richly trimmed cabin is just the place for celebrity clients to relax on 150mph-plus cross-continental jaunts; slender, elegant shape hides the Ferrari's bulk



## Superfast origins

The 500 Superfast was always a Pininfarina project and all 36 examples built between 1964 and 1966 came with this body. The 330GT was built on a production line, but Superfasts were truly hand-built and each owner received personal attention from Pininfarina – or sometimes even from Enzo Ferrari himself. Finish and even rust protection were better than the 'production line' cars. The tradition of large-engined, limited-edition Ferraris went back to the 340 America and developed through 342 and 375 America models and on to the 4.9-litre Superamerica. All of these had derivatives of the long-block Lampredi-designed Grand Prix V12 engine with its fixed cylinder heads.

The immediate predecessor to the 500 Superfast was the 400 Superamerica, built between 1959 and 1964. This was really a completely new model, with a 4-litre version of the Colombo V12 boasting the latest details such as spark-plugs positioned outside the vee



uncompromised power with supreme luxury. In fact, both cars were targeted directly at royalty and celebrities: even the brochure for the Ferrari proclaimed that it was destined to be a car for 'sovereigns, performers and great industrialists' – people who did not have to ask the price. To the potential Superfast or 5000GT customer, an 'ordinary' Ferrari or Maserati was quite simply too pedestrian, too commonplace. Like many of the world's rarest and most extravagant vehicles, each 5000GT and 500 Superfast would come to be identified by the name of the individual who commissioned it, be it the Shah of Persia, Peter Sellers or a property tycoon.

With their heady (unsubstantiated) 170mph-plus top speeds, tiny production runs and vast prices, the 5000GT and Superfast were truly in a class of their own. They were born to a world of gilded hand-built exclusivity and effortless glamour that has always made a comparison irresistible but, until today, impossible to engineer (unless you were the Aga Khan who – inevitably, perhaps – owned both). This one came together, following years of idle plotting (with no realistic hope of it ever really happening), after just a couple of e-mails. Martin Chisholm happened to have the ex-Jack Durlacher 500 Superfast in stock, while Andy Heywood of Bill McGrath Maserati currently has in his custody a 5000GT formerly owned by Joe Walsh of The Eagles.

Stockbroker Jack S Durlacher ordered Ferrari chassis 6661SF through John Coombs, but when it turned up in the Maranello Concessionaires van Coombs found so many faults – poor brakes, rust, noisy engine – that he sent it back. Despite

Maranello Concessionaires supremo Colonel Hoare's offer of a complete respray at Harold Radford's, Durlacher – who seems to have been surprisingly sanguine about the deal otherwise, considering that he'd just bought the world's most expensive production car – wouldn't accept the 500 and instructed Coombs to order another one. Enzo Ferrari himself pushed through the build on Mr Durlacher's second Superfast, but it was still nine months before it turned up.

This car is the one Durlacher rejected, although it went on to have a happy life with seven subsequent owners including Le Mans-winner Richard Attwood. In the metal, I'm not sure that the Superfast is an especially beautiful Ferrari, but I still love it, and always have. It's unashamedly big for a start – almost as long as a Silver Shadow – but more importantly there is an aura of individual craftsmanship about the car, a feeling that its huge seamless panels have been teased out over a wooden master buck by squat Italians (perhaps under the critical eye of Mr Pininfarina himself). It gives a powerful sense of occasion. Look at how the front wings form one huge panel with the nose; see how the fine shutlines of the bonnet barely interrupt the sweep of steel up to the base of the 'screen.

Blu Chiaro with tan leather seems to have been a popular livery with the eight British Superfast owners. It flatters the car's soft curves and elegant detailing: those slender bumpers protecting each corner, the jewel-like tail-lamps. The Ferrari looks squat and self-assured on its deeply inset Borrani's, massively shod (for the '60s) with round-shouldered 205-section tyres.

and coil valve springs. The extra capacity was achieved by employing a bigger 77mm bore.

These cars came with a variety of different body styles, but it was Pininfarina's 13 Coupé Aerodinamico 400SAs (above), developed from his Superfast show cars dating back to 1956, that established the basic outline of the 500 Superfast. Launched at the Geneva show in 1964, its shape was refined with a truncated tail, exposed rather than covered headlamps and clean flanks devoid of fussy mouldings. For the first time on a coachbuilt, big-engined Ferrari, a standard closed body style was established. There were no one-off specials.

The chassis was derived directly from that of the 330GT, but the Superfast's 5-litre engine was unique, a combination of the long-block V12 architecture with 108mm between the bore centres (common to the Lampredi engine) with the removable cylinder heads of the Colombo V12. This Type 208 unit yielded 400bhp at 6500rpm and Ferrari claimed a 173mph top speed, although this was never independently verified. It established a superiority over the 330GT which, with the 4-litre engine, had rendered its Superamerica predecessor irrelevant.

The Superfasts were built in two series, over a period of 28 months. The first 25 cars had a four-speed gearbox with electric overdrive, the final 12 a five-speed transmission contemporary with the Series II 330GT. The only visual difference was the treatment of the air outlets on the front wings plus, inside, suspended rather than floor-hinged pedals.

'THE 5000GT WAS SOLD TO THE INEVITABLE ARAB SHEIKS, ACTORS AND NO LESS THAN TWO MEXICAN PRESIDENTS'



### MASERATI 5000GT

**Sold/number built** 1959-'66/32

**Construction** steel body, tubular steel frame

**Engine** all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4935cc V8, with Lucas mechanical fuel injection

**Max power** 325bhp @ 6500rpm

**Max torque** 304lb ft @ 4000rpm

**Transmission** five-speed manual, driving rear wheels

**Suspension: front** double wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bars f/r

**Steering** recirculating ball

**Brakes** discs all round, with servo

**Length** 15ft 7in (4670mm) **Width** 5ft 7in (1700mm) **Height** 4ft 4in (1320mm)

**Wheelbase** 8ft 6in (2600mm)

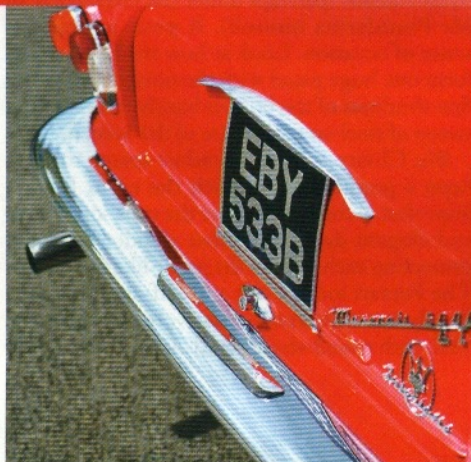
**Weight** 3642lb (1652kg)

**0-60mph** 6.5 secs **Top speed** 172mph

**Mpg** 15 **Price new** \$12,900

**Price now** from £500,000

Clockwise, from far right: elegant Nardi wheel with swept arms; 'Iniezione' badge for S11 cars with Lucas system; lurid green cam covers and added complexity mark out fuel-injected cars; replacement for Allemano's distinctive wraparound rear screen was made in a bespoke run by Pilkington





Change down, crack the throttle open and the accompanying noise has you batting off the clichés with the thick end of a thesaurus as the Superfast lunges forward, engulfing you in that animal sound of deep-lunged combustion as 12 cylinders – each the size of a Chianti flask according to Enzo Ferrari – instantly take their cue from three twin-choke Webers.

Within the context of a large car, one with what you would have to call traditional suspension (even by the standards of 45 years ago), the Superfast is pretty viceless, even rather good on smooth surfaces. It tells you everything that's going on, then leaves it to you to get it all in order so it is best placed to emerge graciously the other side. It's just that little bit too big, that little bit too heavy to ever let you completely disregard your inhibitions, yet there is something deeply satisfying about guiding the Superfast spiritedly through some favourite curves, riding on the torque of that silken turbine through gear ratios ideally plotted to make the most effortless use of the potential. Romp between corners in fourth and fifth, slice into third and feed in just enough power to kill the understeer, feel the wood rim of the Nardi wheel slide between your fingers as it self-centres and you'll note that your horizon remained fairly level, your position in the generously dimensioned seat stayed firm.

Of course, the high-g geared 400bhp Superfast is really all about big roads, big destinations and motoring as a glamorous event and adventure. For that, there can still be few better places to be. It had such a huge speed differential over almost any other car in the mid-'60s that many owners must have regarded it, in the days when roads were much less crowded, as a fantastic time-saving tool in the early years of motorways.

One could say much the same of the 5000GT but there is certainly something edgier about this car, which is more severe both in looks and in feel. Compared to some of the gruesome efforts perpetrated on this chassis, the Allemano body is a model of restraint. It looks imposing, distinguished and powerful, with only a richness of detail and finish to distinguish it – to the untrained eye – from lesser species of Maserati.

Inside, again, there is little to differentiate it from the six-cylinder siblings of its day. Touring's 'Shah of Persia' 5000GT featured gold-plated dials and switches, fine wood and an extraordinary steering wheel with spokes that echoed the trident badge. This one is luxurious, with its black leather and those swift, wrist-chopping electric windows, but there is nothing as effete as ergonomics in evidence, just a wooden Nardi steering wheel and beautiful instruments set in a dashboard of leather and brushed stainless trim. So the 5000 doesn't pander to your weaknesses. We don't use cup-holders in the serious world of the 5000GT: this is a cabin where you absorb the distance in steely-eyed concentration.

Sold new to a Signor Belponer in January 1964, chassis AM103.026 went to a second owner in the USA early on. Joe Walsh bought it in the '70s, but it spent 20 years of its life with collector Ken McBride in Seattle. It was sold in 2000 to a UK collector, but nobody knew it was here. "It came from States with this paintwork," says Heywood, "having been in the 5000GT class at Pebble Beach in 1999."

The car has been at McGrath's for a while now, and a mechanical refurbishment has just been finished: "Whoever rebuilt the engine last

## 5000GT history

Just 32 5000GTs (or 34, depending on how you interpret the figures) were built from 1959-'66. Within that run, eight coachbuilders were hired and two distinct technical specifications can be identified but, like the Ferrari, the basic chassis architecture was that of an existing model, in this case the 3500GT. The 400bhp V8 engine, built for the unlucky 450S sports-racer, was a 90° quad-cam 4½-litre unit. Its career had been cut short when sports-racing regulations outlawed engines of over 3 litres in 1958.

Engineer Alfieri's first act was to increase the V8's swept volume to 4937cc. The compression ratio dropped to 8.5:1, but the helical gear drive for the camshafts – giving precise timing – was retained, along with roller cam followers, hairpin valve springs and twin distributors. The 450S was dry-sump, but in the GT Alfieri went for a wet sump and a separate belt-driven oil pump. Giving 340bhp on four twin-choke Webers, the V8 was placed in a strengthened 3500 chassis with a Burman steering box. Servo-assisted



disc/drum brakes were deemed adequate, and the V8 was mated to a four-speed ZF gearbox.

Only the first two 5000GTs had 'pure' 450S specification. Already Alfieri had devised a second-series car, with capacity increased to a less oversquare 4941cc (smaller bore, longer stroke) in an attempt to flatten the torque curve. The noisy gear drive for the cams was replaced by Duplex chains, and more conventional helical valve springs and cup-type tappets were used. Perhaps most significant was the adoption of Lucas fuel injection in place of Webers, which dropped power by 15bhp (to 325) but improved drivability. It followed the same principles as the 3500GTi, but with an eight-cylinder metering unit at 100psi and high-capacity injectors. Second-series units had green cam covers (in magnesium alloy, like the sump) and fuel-injected 5000GTs adopted later 3500 improvements – principally a five-speed 'box and discs all round.

Touring of Milan did the first three 5000GTs (above), but other coachbuilders soon warmed to its themes of power and luxury. Pininfarina built a muscular coupé for Fiat boss Gianni Agnelli, while Bertone, Michelotti and Ghia bodied one car apiece. Monterosa built two, similar to the Touring design, and Frua did three 5000GTs that signalled his ideas for the Quattroporte.

It was Allemano that built the lion's share, however, with 22 cars from October 1961. This body, styled by Giovanni Michelotti, was the most conventionally attractive and became the 'standard' 5000GT, with its own brochure, and was sold to the inevitable Arab Sheiks, actors and no less than two Mexican presidents.

The cabin is highly cultivated and refined. The handsome five-dial binnacle could be a blueprint for Farina's later efforts on the Lancia 2000 Coupé and the headlining is classic quilted Pininfarina. In terms of equipment there are few distractions or complications. You could order air conditioning, power steering and rear seats but this car doesn't have them, only a rather basic period radio and electric windows. It is the finish that is deluxe, rather than the specification.

I drive the Superfast with all of its fluids warmed. The steering is heavy at low speeds (the lock is awful) and you guide the car with big crude sweeps, but Ferrari gave you a large steering wheel so you can put plenty of leverage on the beautiful wooden helm, which is well placed in relation to the assertive-looking gearlever that juts from the console. The brakes, clutch and steering are harmoniously meaty in their requirements, but the sense of effort falls away as the speed builds. Slight vagueness becomes absolute straight-line stability. Now, you can guide the Superfast with small hand movements, changing gear with a mere flick of the wrist as each ratio hits home with emollient precision.

My 1966 *World Car Catalogue* tells me that the Superfast will easily nail the speed limit in second gear, but you hum along very well using just two thirds of the available 6500rpm and you can stroke it quickly up to three figures without really trying. It cruises relatively quietly, so you can sit back at 110-120mph, gazing down the long swathe of bonnet, eyes occasionally flicking to the dials or checking out a switch or lever detail that is Lancia or Alfa Romeo in origin.

Citroën Ami headlamps blend seamlessly into the relatively conventional front-end styling of the Maserati. In contrast, the Ferrari looks low and lean



time got their dimensions wrong, because every time the crank went round it took a little chunk out of the liners. We made a new crank, rods, liners, pistons and valves." Compared to the later V8s, Heywood feels that the Lucas fuel-injected unit is less productionised and more like the six-cylinder Maseratis in the way that it's built: "You can't take the heads off *in situ* because it has head studs rather than bolts, and you can't put the manifolds on after you've put the heads on. Also, the throttle is odd: it's a thick push-cable with lots of potential for sticky throttles – so we will probably convert it to a linkage."

Although visually similar – apart from the lurid green cam covers – to the V8s Maserati built for its series production models in the '60s and '70s, the 5000's engine feels different. It's grumpy and edgy and a little ragged low down, like a racer, and with a powerful urgency to its throttle response thanks to its fuel injection, a technology Maserati pioneered on its road cars in the early '50s. All of the controls – steering, brakes, gearchange, clutch – require man-sized inputs and driving the 5000 turns out to be a bit of a workout in the glassy cockpit. You have to hang on to the slim, cool wheel in corners because the seats don't embrace the torso much and, on a twisty road, the 5000 feels its size.

The steering is low-geared, smooth, but not especially heavy once you are moving, and that throttle is so responsive that it takes a while to learn how to move with the car, to relax a bit. You pour it discreetly into slow corners that seem beneath its dignity, open the throttle a bit to help it through and cancel out the understeer, then

taste the delicious promise of those slightly mean, slightly unkempt horses as the 5000 punches out. That rising thunder is a V8 noise, yes, but it's a complex weave of race-hardened brutality and the lush burble of a motor launch.

It rides well, this big two-seater, but its chassis – a rugged collection of oval tubes – doesn't seem altogether stiff. It is now that you begin to remember that this suave '60s body hides a 3500 chassis. Like all Masers of this era – through to the early '70s, in fact – the 5000's underpinnings are an international melting pot (Dunlop discs,

## 'THE FERRARI IS MORE ACCOMPLISHED, BUT THE MASERATI HAS AN ELEMENT OF INTRIGUE'

Salisbury axle, ZF steering and gears) of quite ordinary components that, somewhere along the line, add up to more than their sum total.


Striding out on to a bypass, the V8 makes that loud, expensive, resonant growl, simultaneously locking on to the horizon and then reeling it in with a greedy lunge as third gear flows into fourth. It is a red-toothed noise that makes you think of burly, oil-stained '50s racing heroes grappling with the unforgiving 450S. Even at 40-years old, this masterful car's rightful place is the outside lane and, as you select fifth in the ZF 'box, it becomes obvious that as little as 3000rpm

will give a 100mph cruising speed. Thus, with the full 7000rpm available, the claimed 170mph-plus should be well within its grasp.

So there we are: an ambition fulfilled, another beast slain. I'd probably take (very) early retirement now if I had the money to buy these two fabulous cars. The market has traditionally rather undervalued them, given their extreme rarity: even at somewhere around half a million each the Superfast and 5000GT are still not expensive buys in the realm of ultimate exotica.

Which would I take home? Trouble is, if I came down in favour of one I would immediately regret it and want the other so, in a way, I'd have to have both. They would almost complement each other rather than cancel each other out.

The Ferrari, overall, is probably the more accomplished car. More refined, more usable – as if that matters with cars such as these – while the 5000GT has an additional element of intrigue about it that is difficult to define.

Perhaps the Maserati just gets the nod, simply because it is not a Ferrari. By some process of inverted snobbery, is it therefore automatically more desirable? Certainly there is something quietly noble and authoritative about a Maserati, one of the older ones at any rate. If these are the ultimate in elitist transport from a forgotten sub-genre of big-banger, big-buck luxo-supercars, then perhaps the Maserati, so aloof and mythologised, has to be the one. But only just. 

Thanks to Andy Heywood at Bill McGrath Maserati ([www.classicmaserati.co.uk](http://www.classicmaserati.co.uk)) and Martin Chisholm ([www.martinchisholm.com](http://www.martinchisholm.com))