

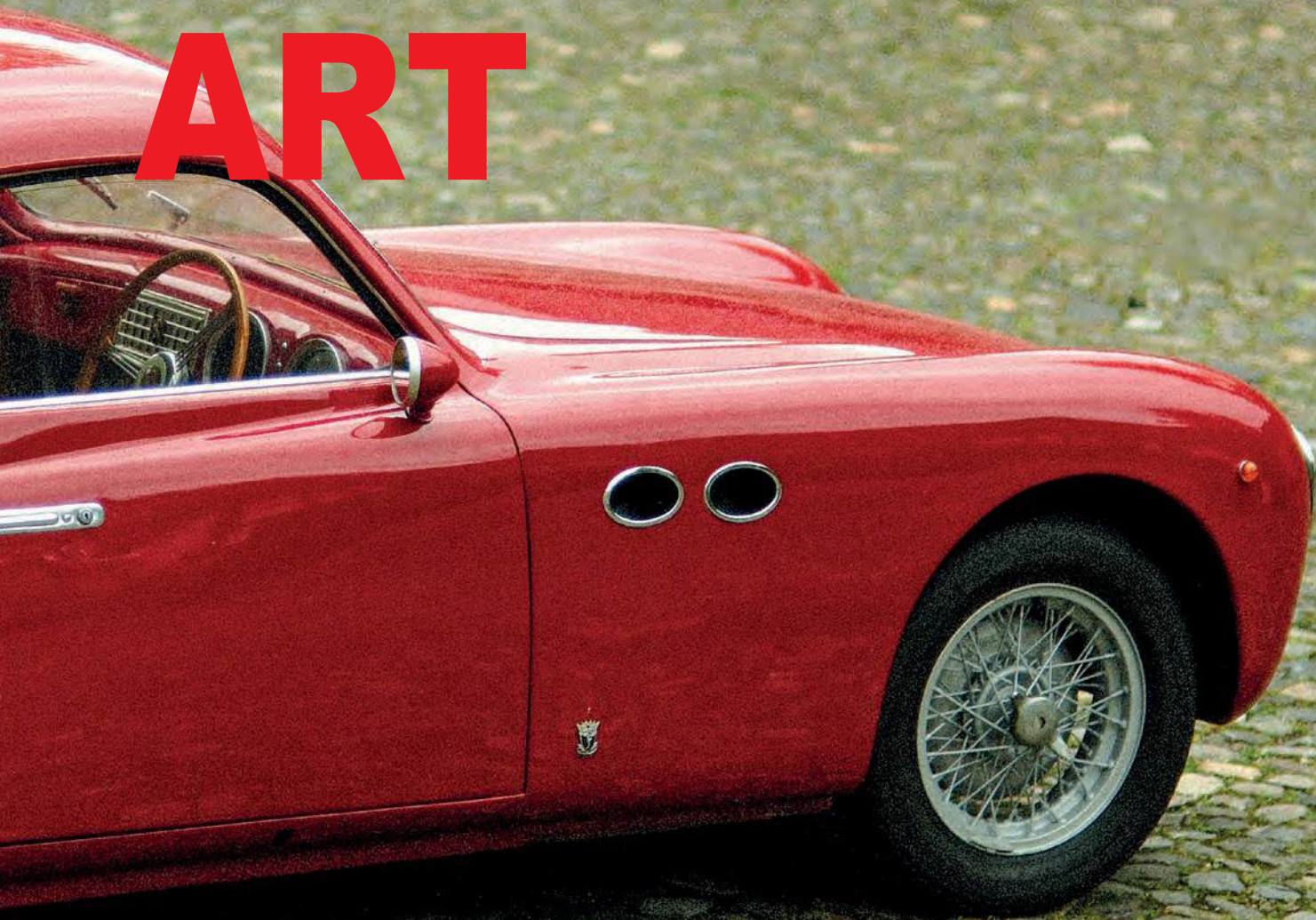
Cisitalia never really made it as a manufacturer, but the 202 Grand Sport is still a car for the ages. We took a test drive in a freshly restored model—and looked back on the company's turbulent history.

Text | Photos by Patrik Hellmüller



CISITALIA 202 GRAND SPORT

ITALIAN WORK OF ART



Ferrari and Cisitalia—two Italian automakers that both launched their first cars shortly after World War II. Both companies were led by charismatic men: Enzo Ferrari, born in 1898, and Piero Dusio, born in 1899. Ferrari is one of the most famous car brands today, while Cisitalia

, on the other hand, is known only to connoisseurs. Yet it was a close call, and the ibex from the Cisitalia logo could have been just as famous today as the Cavallo Rampante. After all, during the brand's brief heyday, illustrious figures were directly or indirectly involved in the development of Cisitalia's race and sports cars: Ferdinand and Ferry Porsche, Dante Giacosa, Giovanni Savonuzzi, Piero Taruffi, Carlo Abarth, Tazio Nuvolari, Battista

“Pinin” Farina, and Rudolf Hruschka—the list is not exhaustive, but it reads like a who's who of the automotive scene of that era.

A TRUE SPORTS CAR!

Be that as it may. Let's turn our attention to the Cisitalia 202 Gran Sport, which is ready for a drive today. The high-performance engine takes a few tries before coming to life with a hellish roar. Rowland Di Marzio carefully warms up the car. He restored the coupé for a Swiss collector. We set off for Regensburg. Within the first few meters, it becomes clear that this car was born of racing. The elegant bodywork may be deceptive at first glance, but the Cisitalia is no GT—it is an uncompromising sports car, loud and demanding. Conceived by two of the finest engineers of their time: Dante Giacosa and Giovanni Savonuzzi.



Dante Giacosa laid the technical foundation for Cisitalia and thus for the 202. He had already designed aircraft engines and the Topolino at Fiat. Dusio persuaded his friend, Fiat patriarch Giovanni Agnelli, to lend him Giacosa toward the end of World War II. With the Monoposto D46, Giacosa developed the first Cisitalia and, at the same time, the first post-war race car. Furthermore, the D46 can be described as the first production vehicle with a space-frame chassis; at least 31 units were manufactured. With the D46, Piero Dusio revived racing in the post-war era. The small Monoposto proved its worth, sometimes with company founder Dusio himself behind the wheel, and sometimes in the hands of drivers

CONSORZIO INDUSTRIALE SPORTIVE ITALIANA

Cisitalia was founded in 1944 by the enterprising entrepreneur Piero Dusio.

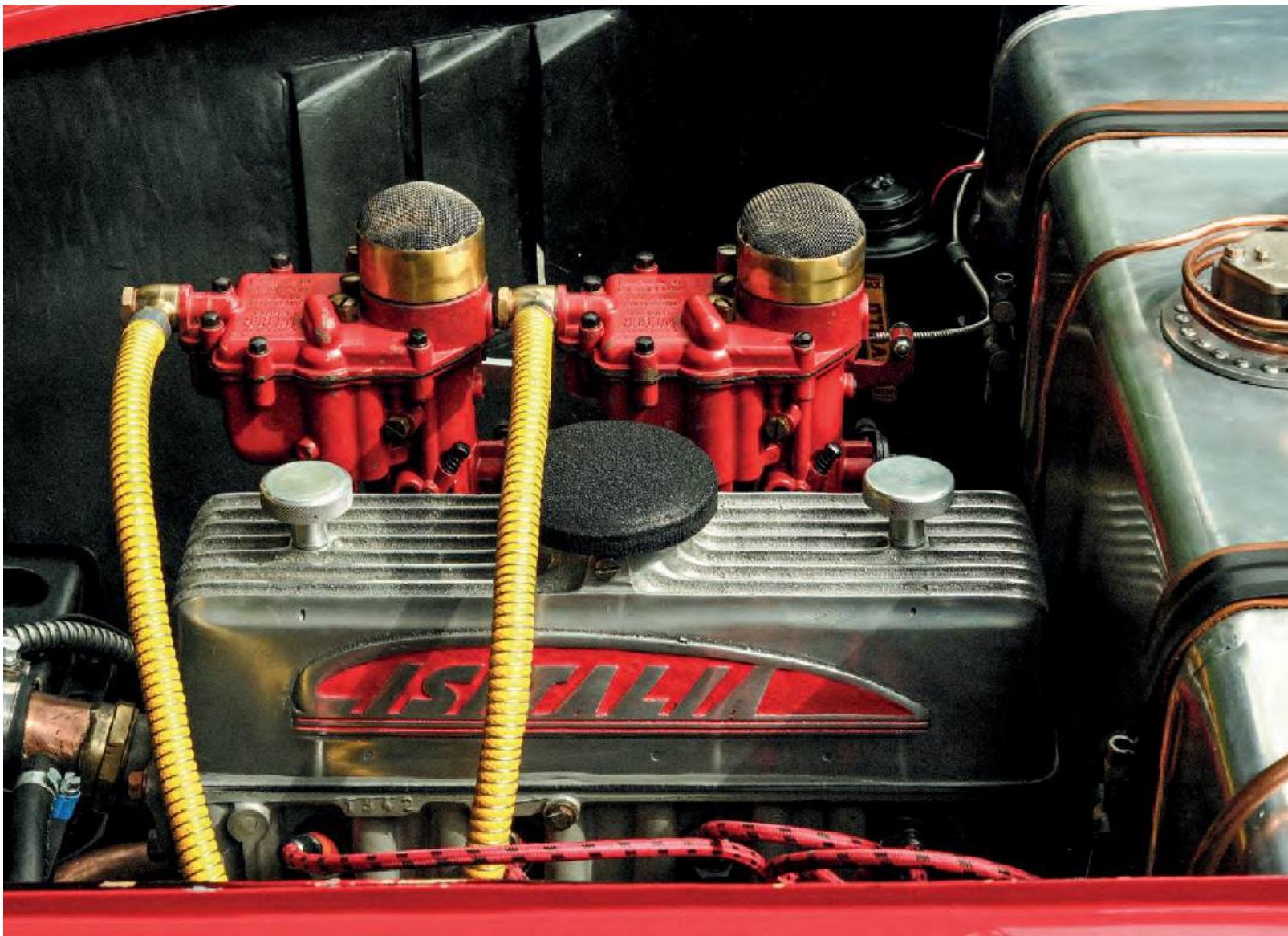




Blueprint for the modern sports car

The Cispitalia 202 Grand Sport paved the way for post-war sports cars.





CISITALIA 202 GRAND SPORT

Year of manufacture 1947–1952 | Engine 1089 cc, R4 | Power 60 hp
Torque 76 Nm at 3,500 rpm | Transmission: 4-speed manual, partially synchronized, rear-wheel drive
Length/Width/Height 3810/1450/1250 mm | Weight 830 kg | Top speed 160 km/h
Acceleration N/A | Production approx. 170, of which 53 were from the A series
Price approx. 36,000 CHF



such as Nuvolari, Cortese, Taruffi, or Chiron. Despite the young company's successful launch, Giacosa turned down the offer to become head of development. He returned to Fiat and recommended the talented Giovanni Savonuzzi to Cisitalia. Savonuzzi continued Giacosa's work with the same passion.

The Cisitalia 202 built on the success of the D46. Although it bears no visual resemblance to the Monoposto, it shares the D46's space-frame chassis, large portions of the suspension, and the performance-enhanced 1.1-liter Fiat engine. The engine block comes from Fiat, but Cisitalia has thoroughly reworked the internals: a different crankshaft, different connecting rods, different valves, and a cylinder head developed in-house. Additionally, Cisitalia has added dry-sump lubrication and an external oil pump.

A BLUEPRINT FOR AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN

With this racing technology, two Cisitalia 202 SMMs (Spider Mille Miglia) achieved the outstanding 2nd and 3rd places at the 1947 Mille Miglia. Nuvolari even nearly took first place ahead of the Alfa Romeo 8C 2900B Berlinetta Touring, which was twice as powerful. However, torrential rain on the final stage caused a wet distributor, resulting in a 15-minute forced break. Nevertheless, second and third place were considered a sensation—and the 202 SMM was henceforth called the “Nuvolari Spider.” But Cisitalia made a splash not only in terms of performance but also in terms of design.



Charming patina

Wherever possible, the original condition was preserved.

As is well known, the 202 Gran Sport was the first automobile to be included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Since then, Pininfarina—to whom the masterpiece is attributed—has rarely missed an opportunity to showcase the 202 Gran Sport as a design icon. Rightly so, one might say. However—and this is rarely remembered—the credit does not belong to Pininfarina alone, but at least equally to Giovanni Savonuzzi. He was not only instrumental in the further development of Giacosa's vehicle design, but also in the design language

Elegantly packaged racing technology

The perfectly sculpted design suggests a GT, yet the 202 is a demanding race car.



by Cisitalia. Savonuzzi must be regarded as a multi-talented individual. He was both an engineer and a designer and began his career in Fiat's aircraft division. After his time at Cisitalia, he worked for Ghia; later, he was responsible for the legendary concept cars of the 1950s at Chrysler, before helping to develop turbine engines there until Giovanni Agnelli lured him back to Turin.

But back to Cisitalia. There, Savonuzzi had already designed the spectacular 202 Spider and coupes for the Mille Miglia. He was one of the first to use the small wind tunnel at the Turin Polytechnic. Only Vincenzo Lancia had had the same idea before the war for his groundbreaking Aprilia model. Savonuzzi's race cars, with their striking fins, must have seemed downright alchemical in the mid-1940s. He not only pioneered aerodynamics but also paved the way for the pontoon shape with his designs: The MM-Cisitalia already featured headlights integrated into the body and a smooth side surface. Savonuzzi further developed this design for the 202 Gran Sport and passed it on as a sketch to Pinin Farina—at that time still written as two words. What Pinin Farina made of it, it must be emphasized, is masterful craftsmanship. With skillful refinements, Battista “Pinin” Farina created a work of art from Savonuzzi's rough diamond. The basic idea, however, goes back to Savonuzzi.

A FATAL DECISION

Although the bewitchingly beautiful Cisitalias could not technically keep up with the six-cylinder engines of Alfa Romeo and Maserati or the twelve-cylinder engines of Ferrari, they had prominent fans and advocates, including Italian director Roberto Rossellini, Henry Ford, and Prince Rainier of Monaco. Cisitalia had no shortage of orders; the outlook was promising. But Piero Dusio, accustomed to success and having achieved everything so far—whether as a race car driver, soccer player, textile entrepreneur, or car designer—wanted more. And so

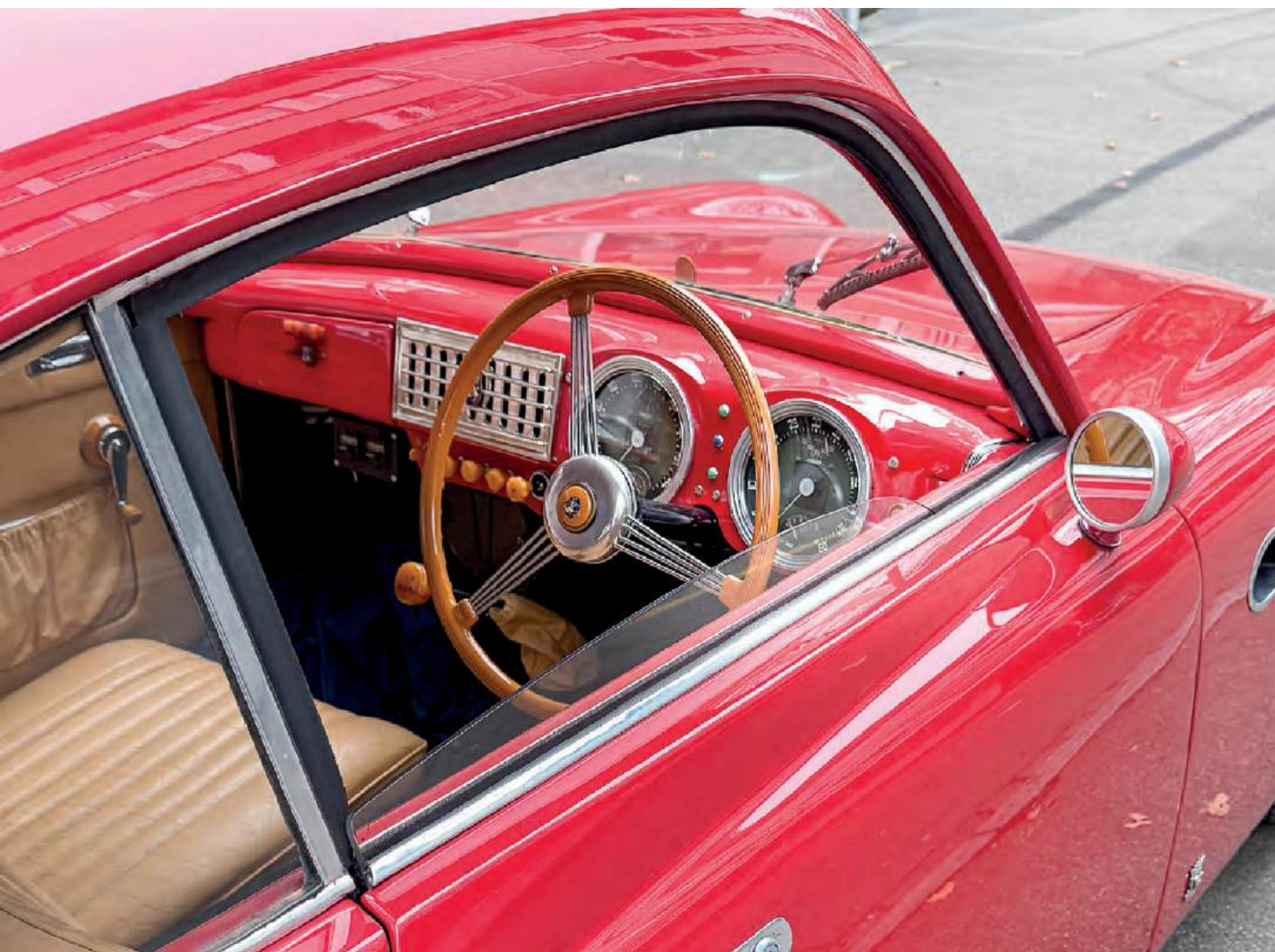


CISITALIA SPECIALIST

Rowland Di Marzio is the restorer of the Cisitalia on display. He is an authority when it comes to faithful restorations of Italian treasures. Shortly after completing his training, Rowland was already a partner at Touring Garage, the well-known classic car dealer. After parting ways amicably with Peter Rau to strike out on his own, he soon began working for Swiss collectors. Over time, it was primarily Rothschild banker Jürg Heer who filled Rowland's order books. Heer was arguably the best-known and most colorful collector in Switzerland at the time and a major player in the burgeoning classic car scene of the 1980s—until it came to light that, as head of credit at Rothschild, he had embezzled 55 million francs. While Heer fled, Rowland found himself in the investigators' crosshairs. He had nothing to fear regarding his accounting, but was left with a mountain of unpaid bills and had had enough of the restoration business for the time being.

He moved to Italy with his wife, where—way ahead of his time—he set up a solar energy business. Years later, when the couple returned to Switzerland, Rowland and his wife resumed restoring classic cars. While Rowland handled the technical aspects, his wife used her expertise and craftsmanship to restore the interiors to their original condition or carefully preserve them. The Cisitalia 202 is the couple's final joint project, as Rowland's wife is seriously ill. Consequently, the Cisitalia holds great emotional value.





Understated elegance in the cockpit

Until the 1950s, Italian cars had the steering wheel on the right side.

Savonuzzi's plea for a larger engine for the 202 went unheeded. Dusio focused on developing a super-racing car. It was designed by Ferry Porsche and Karl Rabe and was a further development of the Auto Union race cars that Porsche had developed before the war. Cross-border collaboration was difficult immediately after the war, and the Type 360's complexity caused costs to skyrocket.

Ultimately, the project was neither financially nor technically feasible for the company. The Type 360 led to a rift with Savonuzzi and sealed the end of Cisitalia. This is a greatly abridged version, as the chapter would provide material for an article of its own. It should simply be noted that it was ultimately thanks to Dusio that Ferdinand Porsche, who had been imprisoned by the Allies in France, was released early. The Abarth company, in turn, emerged from some of the Cisitalia vehicles and the exhaust systems developed by Savonuzzi, which the company founder left behind in Turin when he fled to Argentina.

Dusio continued to work in the automotive sector there, but was never able to replicate his earlier successes. Nor did the major investments promised to him by Argentine President Juan Perón materialize.

ONCE TO URUGUAY AND BACK

Let's return to our captivating protagonist, the Cisitalia 202 Gran Sport. In 1949, the coupé with chassis number 120 SC rolled off the production line in Turin and was registered in Uruguay by its first owner in 1950. It is one of 53 examples from the Series A. These vehicles, produced until 1949, are two-seaters, while the cars of the later Series B, with rear seats, offer space for four people. Little is known about the early history of our vehicle, except that the Cisitalia changed hands in Uruguay in 1978 and 1982. It wasn't until 1985 that the car was discovered by an Italian who bought it, exported it to Italy, and had it restored. In 1988, the 202 was sold to a Mr. Agnelli, a distant relative of the industrialist dynasty: the car remained in



Cisitalia



A design for eternity! It is only fitting that this car is on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

It remained in his possession and was actively used for most of that time. Agnelli completed the Mille Miglia five times in it and even won the overall classification in 1990. In addition, he competed in other events with his Cisitalia, occasionally participating in the Winter Marathon every year. Such demanding races took their toll. It is said that, with its last ounce of strength, the car was driven to the Mille Miglia Museum in Brescia, where it languished as an exhibit for many years. It is thanks to the current owner that this magnificent sports car was rescued from the museum dust. He owns an exquisite car collection and possesses several of the models that were presented in 1953 by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in an exhibition as the ten most beautiful cars in the world.

The Cisitalia 202 is the only car to have made it into MoMA's permanent collection. Therefore, a 202 was needed to complete the collection. To that end, the collector turned to Rowland, who discovered the car at the Mille Miglia Museum and organized its purchase and import to Switzerland. However, it was a real feat to breathe new life and grandeur into the Cisitalia. Rowland says: "The car was simply run into the ground." He knew that a tremendous amount of work lay ahead of him.

A SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATION ON THE BEACH

Rowland is a proven specialist who has been restoring Italian sports cars for illustrious clients since the 1980s. Above all, however, he is an idealist and a perfectionist. That's why he didn't rush blindly into the work, but first took plenty of time for thorough research. In the process, he discovered that the former specialists for Cisitalia had all passed away or were no longer active. However, he was able to track down an Italian specialist on the Adriatic coast who had restored several Cisitalias in the 1980s. However, the man, long in his eighties, was simply impossible to reach by phone. His wife had simply explained during Rowland's numerous calls that her husband went to the beach every morning and didn't return until lunchtime, at which point he wouldn't take any calls.

Rowland wasn't discouraged; he got in his car and drove to the Adriatic. As expected, he met the Cisitalia expert on the beach. There he engaged him in conversation: "We talked about the weather, the sea, and fish—just not about cars." It wasn't until the next day, once a mutual rapport had developed, that Rowland cautiously broached the real reason for his visit. By the third day, the ice



finally broken. Rowland sums it up: “Persistence, patience, and empathy paid off.” The elderly Cisitalia expert had incredible expertise; the tips he received from him were worth their weight in gold, says Rowland. He also received two specific parts that are no longer available: a water pump and the mount for the alternator.

Armed with the replacement parts and a wealth of new knowledge, Rowland felt ready to begin the restoration alongside his wife. While Rowland overhauled all the mechanical components and corrected some botched DIY work, his wife Barbara took care of the interior. The delicate plastic steering wheel alone took hours to restore. First carefully sanded down and then painted with several coats of lacquer, it is now a gently gleaming work of art. In addition, many small interior parts had to be restored and reconstructed. They had either been lost or damaged by the installation of rally instruments. The leather seats were cleaned and preserved. They appear to have been reupholstered during the initial restoration in the 1980s. Over the past 40 years, a fine patina has formed that blends beautifully into the overall look.

NOT PININ, BUT STABILIMENTI FARINA

The bodywork was also carefully restored. The paintwork, which dates back to the first restoration, was sanded down and polished. To do this, Rowland called on specialists in his network. Speaking of the bodywork—during the restoration, Rowland discovered that it had not been manufactured by Pinin Farina, but by Stabilimenti Farina. This was the company of Giovanni Carlo Farina, the older brother of “Pinin” Farina. Accordingly, Rowland replaced the misleading Pinin Farina logo—which had been affixed at some point—with the correct Stabilimenti Farina logo.

The bodies of the approximately 170 Cisitalia 202 Gran Sport models were manufactured by different companies—Pinin Farina, Stabilimenti Farina, and Vignale. Visually, the cars differed very little. There are numerous reasons for having three different bodybuilders. On the one hand, aluminum was in short supply in the postwar years. It seems plausible that Dusio commissioned whichever company happened to have sufficient raw materials at the time. On the other hand, it is quite possible that Dusio was not always so strict with his creditors, especially since his interest was increasingly focused on the Type 360. With three suppliers, liquidity bottlenecks could sometimes be circumvented.



Cisitalia

1946-1963

A FAILED VISION

The story of Cisitalia is, of course, that of the visionary and multi-talented Piero Dusio (1899–1975). The former Juventus Turin soccer player founded his own company at the age of 27, which primarily produced clothing, but also bicycles and tennis rackets, which were in demand at the time. Economic success came with a commission from Mussolini to outfit the Italian army with uniforms. With the resulting fortune, Dusio became involved in motorsports and successfully raced in the 1930s. It is doubtful whether Dusio actually founded Cisitalia—an acronym for *Compagnia Industriale Sportiva Italiana*—during the war, even though a race car concept already existed in 1944. Italian sources generally cite 1946 as the year of Cisitalia's founding, the year in which the D46, the first Italian post-war race car, was created. However, Dusio's downfall came with the Tipo 360 Grand Prix car, which debuted in 1949 and was co-developed by Ferdinand Porsche. That same year, Dusio was forced to relocate his operations to Argentina because, in return, dictator Juan Perón settled his debts in Italy. Cisitalia went bankrupt under his son Carlo but was reestablished. Together with Henry Ford, Carlo Dusio developed the Tipo 808 sports car using Ford technology, but it never went into series production. Based on the Fiat 600, the unsuccessful Turismo Speciale with Abarth engines was the last model produced before Cisitalia was finally dissolved in 1964.



Finally, Rowland opens the hood with a mischievous smile. Already impressed by the captivating bodywork and the lovingly restored interior, I am speechless when I look into the engine bay. The love and care with which this engine was restored is both touching and overwhelming. Here, it becomes impressively clear once again how Rowland di Marzio works. Throughout the entire restoration, he viewed the Cisitalia as the total work of art that it is. Of course, Rowland ultimately wants a car that functions flawlessly. Yet even in the engine bay, he makes no compromises; he does not simply choose the easiest or most efficient solution, but instead transports himself mentally to the Turin production hall of 1949.

With a meticulous attention to detail typically associated with model builders, Rowland has achieved the highest possible level of authenticity. If you look at the exhaust manifold covers, the fine copper lines, the yellow metal-sheathed fuel lines, the fabric-covered ignition cables, the iconic, carefully restored Cisitalia cylinder head, the Weber carburetors with their copper intake funnels and fine wire mesh—it is simply a work of art. This engine could easily be displayed as a sculpture at New York's MoMA! Today is no different from back then: this small, elegant automobile captivates discerning aesthetes just as much as it does sports drivers. Thanks to Rowland Di Marzio, the example shown here no longer has to eke out an existence as a sculpture, but will soon set off on new adventures with its owner.

The restorer and his work

Rowland has poured all his skill and a great deal of passion into the Cisitalia 202. Now the car is ready for new adventures.

