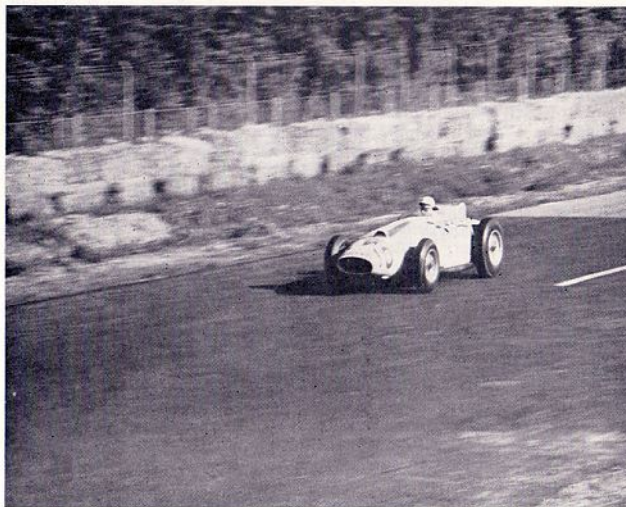


## The Eldorado Maserati

by Joel Finn

At the Monza banked track in 1957, a group of American Indianapolis cars and drivers put on a tremendous 500 mile racing show, with only Jaguar on hand to uphold European honour, albeit with very outclassed and unsuitable machinery. Maserati had entered a 450S with the engine reduced in size to 4.2 litres, but it proved uncompetitive during practice and was withdrawn. All the other European manufacturers and drivers boycotted the event claiming Monza was unsafe and citing a lack of competitive equipment. Nonetheless, the event proved to be highly popular with the fans and a repeat was rescheduled for 29th June, 1958, with bags of prize money promised.

Though the financially ailing Maserati firm had officially dropped out of both Grand Prix and sports car racing in early 1958, Orsi, Bertocchi, Alfieri and Colotti all believed they could field a suitable machine for the 1958 event if a sponsor could be found to underwrite the expense. They formulated a design and went shopping for a sponsor. After some predictably byzantine negotiations, Signor Zanetti of the Eldorado Ice



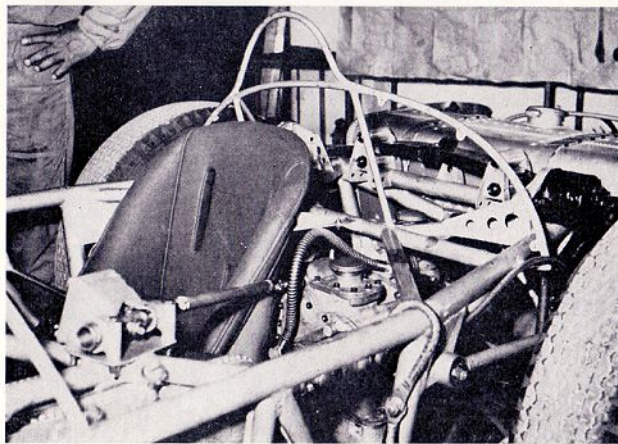
*Photo: Jesse Alexander*

*Eldorado—Moss at speed during second heat of Monza race*

Cream Company, a large and publicity hungry Italian firm, agreed to foot the bill. Stirling Moss signed on for the driving chores and is believed to have brought along additional funds via his sponsor, British Petroleum.

Typical of Maserati efforts, the finalisation of negotiations left them barely a month to build the car, and a frantic effort ensued to get the job done. From start to finish, the Eldorado is reputed to have taken only 20 working days, it being completed barely a week before the race.

The 420M/58, as the Eldorado project was designated by Maserati, consisted of off the shelf components modified as necessary to meet the particular characteristics of the Monza track. The chassis design could be considered a marriage of 250F and 450S as it followed the Grand Prix space frame concept, but was composed of both round and oval steel tubing of very substantial nature as utilised on the road racer. The front suspension was pure 450S but featured stronger steering arms and track rods to cope with the rough surface of the banked Monza track predicted to add a considerable extra strain. The rear suspension followed typical Maserati racing practice of a transverse leaf spring and de Dion axle assembly. The brakes would seem to have been taken intact from a 1957 250F "lightweight", with the hubs modified to accept American built Halibrand cast aluminium wheels as Alfieri reasoned that the lateral stresses of the Monza banking would prove to be greater than wire wheels could tolerate, though they were not actually installed until just

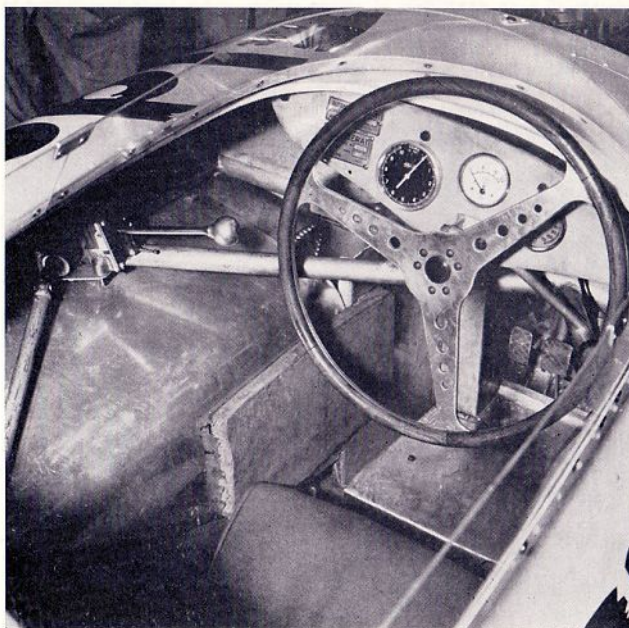


*Photo: Hans Tanner*

*Rear end layout of the Eldorado was very much like 450S. Note ridiculous roll-bar*

before the event. The Ferrari entry at Monza later proved his thesis to be correct when its wire wheels broke up under the strain.

The motor, taken from the 1957 sports car Monza effort, also pure 450S, was reduced in size to 4.2 litres total displacement, keeping the 93.8 mm. bore, but with the stroke shortened from 81 mm. to 75.8 mm. It retained the normal four dual throat Weber 451DM downdraft carburettor setup, now re-jetted and re-tuned to run on alcohol. Power output in this guise was reckoned to be in the 430 h.p. range. As all the Monza turns were to the left, à la Indianapolis, Maserati followed the typical American practice and offset the motor some four inches to the left. Power was taken through a specially modified clutch and open drive shaft back to a two speed trans-axle of the 450S type with a shortened case, featuring direct drive without any differential. The gearshift gate was mounted high up and to the left of the driver, the lever protruding out almost horizontally toward the steering wheel.

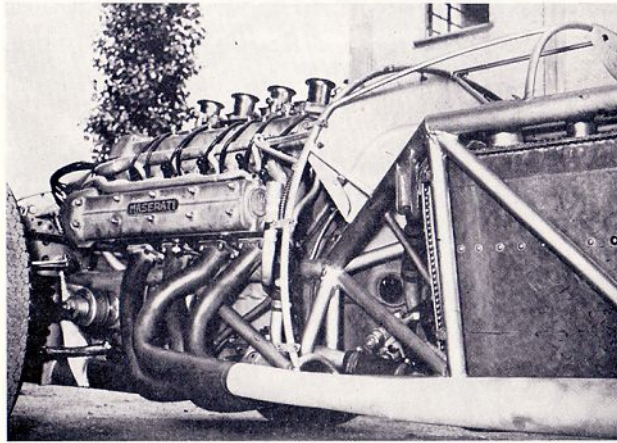


*Photo: Jesse Alexander*

*Cockpit showing two speed forward shifter and dash layout*



The body followed normal Maserati Grand Prix practice, excepting that it had a long snout and prominent tail capped by a large and likely unfunctional fin. Following Indianapolis custom, all the American racers were gaily painted, and emblazoned with sponsors names, logos and slogans in contrast to the dull European Grand Prix cars of the period. Seeking maximum publicity, the Eldorado was similarly done up in immaculate white with the company name and logo liberally displayed all over. Nowadays all racing cars seem to be mobile billboards, but the Eldorado was probably the first European car so done and provided something of a shock to their compatriots.

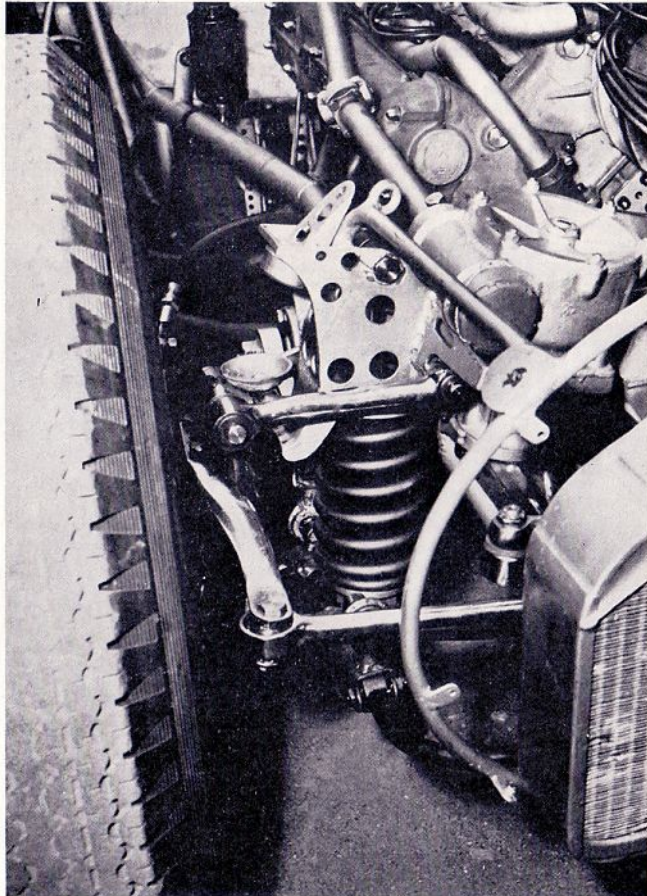


*Photo: Hans Tanner*

*Eldorado engine detail. Monza 1958*

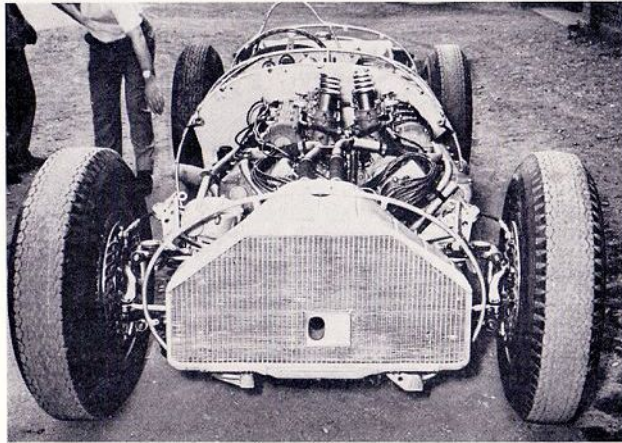
The completed Eldorado received chassis and engine number 4203. For the sake of the record, numbers 4201 and 4202 were assigned to the 4.2 litre 450S motors bought by Tony Parravano and intended for his never realised Indianapolis project. These engines were later to be run at Indianapolis, but I will review this usage in a subsequent article.

At the initial Monza practice sessions, the Eldorado appeared quite stable, though not as fast as the American cars. Bertocchi did much of the test driving and seemed to enjoy the chore immensely! Moss, on the other hand, according to contemporary comments, was completely terrified of the car and track, doing rather poorly in comparison to the Americans and the Ferrari entry driven by Musso. Carroll Shelby was on hand as back-up driver to Moss, but his practice laps in the Eldorado were few and not particularly rapid. Musso stood everyone on their



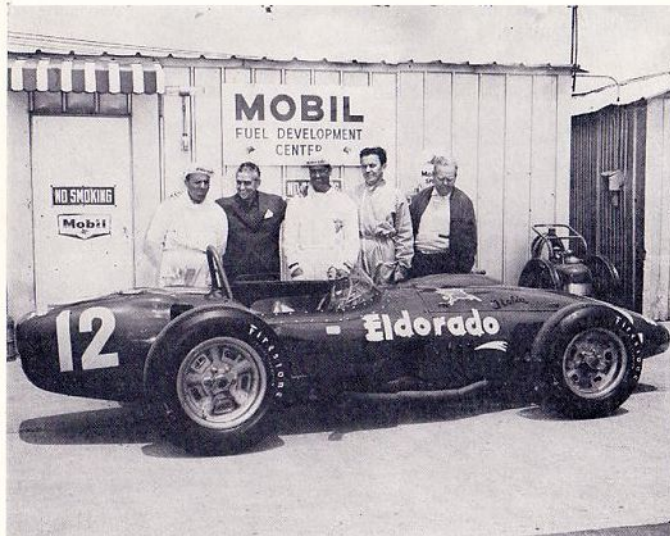
*Front end detail of the Colorado*

*Photo: Hans Tanner*



*Photo: Hans Tanner*

*Eldorado chassis head-on. Note engine offset to left*



*Photo: Indianapolis Motor Speedway*

*Eldorado on display, Indianapolis, May 1959. Bertochi on left and Ralph Liquori in middle*