

A Targa To Remember

Ferrari showed up in Sicily as the underdog in the 1972 Targa Florio, but left having taken a surprising win. GIANCARLO ROSETTI looks at one of the most memorable sports car races of all time.

It's rare that Ferrari shows up to a race outgunned or outnumbered. In fact, there have been many instances over time when Enzo Ferrari elected not to participate in a given event rather than be embarrassed. Rumors abound that he even used his considerable influence to ensure that a race was canceled—if losing it would put an imminent championship at risk. No matter his strategy or reputed ruthlessness, he was, among other things, a master motorsports tactician, and he certainly proved it time and again.

One such instance where it appeared that Ferrari didn't have all the king's horses or all the king's men required to win was the 1972 running of the Targa Florio. How could a lone Ferrari 312 P/B hope to compete against four factory-prepared Alfa Romeos, each driven by an outstanding team of *piloti*? In that race, Ferrari's

huge hope rested primarily with one not-so-huge team driver, Arturo Merzario.

Ferrari's 3.0-liter 312 P and P/B sports prototypes deserve entire articles and books of their own—indeed, both have been written. [See *Forza* #32 for a development history of the 312—Ed.] The sports racer has its roots in the successful 312 Formula One car. It was designed to compete in the World Championship for Makes beginning in 1971, and did so through 1973. Though the basic chassis was constructed of steel tubing, a number of riveted aluminum panels contributed additional structural stiffness, making it at least a semi-monocoque design. Power came from a modified version of the F1 car's 3.0-liter flat-12, though the Italians often refer to this engine layout as a 180° Vee. In its initial 1971-spec configuration, the 312 rode an 87.4-inch wheel-



Arturo Merzario pilots the winning 312 P/B in one of the world's last true road races.



base and weighed in at just under 1,300 pounds.

Merzario had been involved with Ferrari's sports car team since prior to the beginning of the 1971 season (see bio below). He drove the original 312 P's maiden race in 1971, a 1,000-km enduro in Buenos Aires, teamed with Ignazio Giunti; an accident while leading ended their run and destroyed the car. Despite that

near-success, the P's rookie season was fraught with teething problems: A win in the first heat of a 500-km race at Imola at the hands of Clay Regazzoni, along with a first (Regazzoni/Redman) and second (Andretti/Ickx) at the season final at Kyalami were the only real bright spots in its debut season. But Ferrari's technical chief Mauro Forghieri and Competition Director Peter

Schetty saw adequate potential, learned what they needed to, and substantially re-engineered the car for the '72 season. Ten chassis, redubbed 312 P/B, were built for a group of drivers that would have to be considered an All-Star team if ever there was one: Mario Andretti, Jacky Ickx, Regazzoni, Redman, Tim Schenken, Ronnie Petersen and Merzario.

"I first met [Merzario] in

1968," comments Andretti. "I was called down to Daytona to do a test for Ferrari, because Arturo was not confident on the high banks. Arturo was a very accomplished road racer; [however] he'd never run a car that quick on the banks before. I had lots of experience there, testing with Ford for the Le Mans program and so on, so I went down and did my thing. We ended up being teammates

BIOGRAPHY

Arturo Merzario

Arturo Merzario was born in Italy on November 3, 1943 and came up through the sports car ranks during the 1960s. Besides his historic drive in the 1972 Targa Florio, Merzario also competed in two Formula One races for Ferrari that year. He contested nine F1 races for the Scuderia in 1973 before joining the Iso Marlboro team, managed by Frank Williams, for a full season's ride in '74. He drove for several different teams after

that before launching his own team in the middle of 1977. Merzario F1 contested the balance of 1977, as well as the 1978-79 seasons; the results were unfortunate at best, as the team never scored a single F1 point. Merzario competed in a total of 57 Grands Prix, scoring 11 championship points. He also twice competed at Le Mans, finishing second in 1973 in a Ferrari 312 PB.

One of Merzario's most notable accomplishments in racing took place outside of a race car; he was one of three

drivers who pulled Niki Lauda out of his burning machine after his terrible crash at the German GP in 1976, and is given the most credit for saving Lauda's life. After folding his F1 team, Arturo Merzario stayed away from racing from 1980 to 1994, but returned in 1995 to race in the Maserati Cup. He's since raced Italian Sport Prototypes, Ferrari Challenge and in the International Sports Racing Series with considerable success. He remains a popular contestant at historic race meetings in Europe.

[in 1972]. And we stay in touch. He's a very happy-go-lucky individual; a really nice guy." Mario reflects, then laughs: "I remember he loved America. That's why he always wore a cowboy hat. That was his trademark, everywhere he went. He wouldn't take it off! The Little Italian Cowboy..."

Ferrari's master plan was that three chassis and six drivers would be entered in each race, while at least another three chassis were back in Maranello being refurbished for the next event. It was an expensive, logistically complicated proposition, but it ensured that three factory-fresh cars were always at the ready. Though the driver roster varied a bit depending on the event and individual schedules, Ickx and Andretti were usually paired up due to their virtually identical physical size and the fact that they preferred very similar vehicle setups.

Ferrari's success during the 1972 season is well documented, but like the Targa's 72.9-kilometer circuit, it was not without a few interesting twists. The team posted victories at the Buenos Aires 1,000-km, a stunning 1-2 at the Daytona 6-hour, another 1-2 at Sebring, then wins at Brands Hatch, Monza and Spa. Even though the season had just reached the halfway point, Ferrari's championship looked secure. It was not yet clinched, though, which brings us to the Targa.

The Targa Florio was unlike any other race. Its approximately 44 miles of public roads presented challenges different from those of any other race course. As thoroughly accomplished as Ferrari's amazing driver roster was, its cumulative knowledge of the tricky and often treacherous Targa course was minimal. Again considering that Ferrari held a strong lead in the championship, Schetty didn't need to field a full three-car team; in fact, he could have elected to skip the race entirely, handing it to arch-rival Alfa



(Opposite page) Before the race, Alfa Romeo team members examine their 33TT3s in the pits. (Above) Merzario at speed. Note the variety of lines etched onto the road.

and still maintaining a comfortable cushion.

But this wasn't some obscure race run in a far-off country. This was Italy. This was the Targa Florio. And Ferrari belonged there, even though it's been said that Enzo himself had lost interest in the venue, preferring modern, high-tech racing circuits to old, anachronistic relics such as Monaco and the Targa. Nonetheless, Maranello's brain

trust elected to field what it felt to be its best shot: one car, driven by two drivers possessing adequate road/rally-type experience.

Team boss Peter Schetty gave the rest of the team leave, retaining Merzario to pilot the lone 312 P/B, serial number 0884. S/n 0880—which had originally been 312 P s/n 0878 and was later updated to P/B spec—was used for practice and testing. For a second driv-

er, Schetty went to Ferrari's corporate parent Fiat and borrowed himself a rally expert in the form of Alessandro Munari. "Sandro" raced quite successfully for Lancia; in fact, he had just come off a win in the prestigious Monte Carlo Rally. He was used to memorizing the intricacies of a difficult course and dealing with the many road surfaces he would encounter on the Targa.

What Munari was not used



(Above) Second-place Alfa Romeo driven by Marko and Galli. **(Opposite page, top)** Merzario brings the 312 P/B across the finish line, winning by only 16.9 seconds. **(Opposite page, bottom)** Teammates Merzario (right) and Munari share the victory champagne and wreath.

to was the 312 P/B. While his Lancia rally racers were small cars powered by engines not putting out even 200 horsepower, the 312 was wide and flat—and its 3.0-liter flat-12 wailed out 450+ hp. Fortunately, he adjusted quickly, and reasonably well.

As mentioned, Ferrari's only—but very real—competition came from Alfa Romeo. Porsche's 917 would have certainly been an impressive match

for the Ferrari and the 33TT3 Alfas, but Porsche was heavily involved in the Can-Am series and preparing for Le Mans. The Targa came down to an all-Italian scrimmage. Even though Ferrari had been taking the cane to Alfa in the first half of the Makes season, Alfa came to Sicily armed for war: Alfa brought four factory TT3s, driven by Vaccarella/Stommelen, de Adamich/Hezemans, Galli/Marko and the

team that had to be considered the favorite to win, Elford/van Lennep. Vic Elford was a previous winner of both the Targa and the Monte Carlo Rally. But unlike Munari, Elford was completely comfortable with his ride. Elford had given the Ferraris a run for their *live* several times throughout the season, though he'd yet to beat them. Doing so for Alfa on Italian soil would be particularly sweet.

The 312 P/B required, or at

least received, very little revision in preparation for the widely varying conditions it would encounter during the race. What it did receive was mostly in the form of a 10mm ride height increase and possibly some wider wheels in front.

It seemed to work: Other than one off-road excursion by Merzario, most likely due to brake fade, practice was relatively uneventful. Arturo set the fastest time at 33 minutes 49.1 seconds, followed by Vic Elford in one of the Alfas and Munari third quickest at 34:30.5. While a deficit of nearly 40 seconds is an eternity in a typical road race, that increment isn't so imposing when spread over 44 miles. Considering Munari's lack of familiarity with the car, it was an impressive performance.

May 21, 1972 dawned clear and hot; the heat would affect both driver and equipment longevity. Cars are flagged off in 15-second intervals at the Targa; Elford started first (starting positions weren't strictly by qualifying times) with Merzario taking the green flag second, followed by 73 more competitors.

The much-anticipated match-up between Elford in the lead Alfa and the lone Ferrari never materialized. Arturo was set to run the first three (of 11) laps, but Vic's Alfa was out with a holed oil sump about two-thirds of the way through the first lap, improving Merzario's odds against the Alfas to 3-to-1. Merzario was in command, and led the three remaining Alfas by about two minutes at the end of the second lap. Munari took over at the beginning of the fourth lap; shortly thereafter, the Vaccarella/Stommelen Alfa suffered an engine failure.

The odds would continue to improve when the de Adamich/Hezemans car was involved in an accident at about the same time. Munari, the rally driver, drove the unfamiliar 312 smoothly, if not as



quickly as Merzario, though Helmut Marko was able to pass for the lead in the remaining Alfa during his stint. Shortly thereafter came a miscue that nearly cost Ferrari the race.

Reportedly, Munari saw a pit board for one of the Alfas and mistook it for his own. He pitted a full lap early to the surprise of the entire Ferrari team, which was not expecting him. After the cobbled pit stop, Merzario got back into the car to begin the sixth lap.

He drove as if possessed. Within two laps, he had made up the time Munari had lost to Marko's Alfa, recaptured the lead and built up about a one-minute cushion before his next pit stop. The sweltering heat was tiring drivers and wearing out equipment all too easily, so the decision was made to switch drivers every other lap. Munari took over the controls with the car in the lead and had a less dramatic—and faster—second

A Special Place For Ferrari Drivers, Including Enzo

TO ITALIANS, the Targa Florio has always been more than a race. It was a proving ground, a gladiatorial trial, a theater for domestic and international warfare. Just as knights fought in defense of their Lords through the middle ages, *squadre* and *scuderie* battled through three-quarters of the 20th century on the circuits of the Madonie mountains.

Despite the Italian tendency toward chauvinism, the race's founder was an internationalist. Vincenzo Florio, heir to Sicily's largest fortune (from shipping, arms and wine), drove a French Panhard in the 1903 race where he bested Fiat's champion, Vincenzo Lancia. Two years later, he drove a Mercedes 120HP in the race that bore his own name, the 1905 Coppa Florio, though it took place near Brescia, far from his native Sicily. He believed no other terrain matched the beauty of his rugged homeland and vowed to bring his trophy (changed from the Coppa cup to the Targa plate) home to his beloved Madonie mountains. He convinced his friends in the influential French press, who agreed to advertise the new event on the condition that Florio improve the roads and build a straightaway. A little clout goes a long way in Sicily, so within months he had the roads he needed, mostly unpaved but serviceable.

The first Targa took place on May 6, 1906, but fell prey to shipping strikes in Marseilles and Genoa—of the 30 cars that registered, only 13 made it to Sicily. So the 1907 event served as the race's real inauguration, with 51 cars represent-

ing all the great marques of Europe. Felice Nazzaro won in the big 7-liter Fiat 28/40 HP after driving for more than eight hours at an average speed of 33.5 mph.

By 1919, the Targa Florio was the race of Italy, and one of the greatest races in the world—the Indianapolis 500 was two years younger, and neither the 24 Hours of Le Mans nor the Mille Miglia had yet been born. Twenty-one-year-old Enzo Ferrari, working as a test-driver for Milan car builder CMN, purchased a company car for his first race at Parme-Poggio di Berceto. Jazzed by his performance—he finished fourth in class and 11th overall—he took the car to Sicily for the Targa Florio, held that year on November 23. The course ran four times around a sinuous 108-kilometer track, and miserable rainy weather turned the roads into rivers of mud.

The CMN suffered mechanical difficulties, but Enzo's own inexperience probably contributed to his lackluster performance. Enzo claimed he finished ninth; in reality, the timekeepers had all gone home by the time he arrived more than ten hours after the start (the winner finished in less than eight hours).

Enzo published a tale of being delayed by *carabinieri* blocking the road so former president Vittorio Orlando could finish a long-winded speech; later writers claimed that Orlando could not have been where Enzo said he was; Enzo's approach to the finish was probably blocked instead by the competitors and course workers returning to the hotel.

In 1920, Enzo redeemed himself on

the same 432-kilometer course, this time behind the wheel of an Alfa Romeo 20-40. His good friend Ugo Sivocci had brought him to Alfa from CMN where they'd met (Ugo's CMN had finished seventh in the 1919 Targa).

Weather conditions that year were similar, even though the race had moved up a month to October. Even on the muddy track, Enzo posted the fastest lap, rounding the 108 kilometers in 2 hours 5:39, and came in second overall.

In 1921, Alfa Romeo entered four cars, the first time a "works team" as such entered the race. Alfa was showing off their new technology (many of their competitors were in reworked pre-WWI racers) with Enzo, Ugo, Giuseppe Campari and Antonio Ascari behind the wheels. Three of the four Alfas finished well, with Campari third, Sivocci fourth and Enzo fifth. It was a tight race right up to the finish, with only eight minutes separating the winning Fiat from Enzo's fifth-place Alfa after more than seven-and-a-half hours of intense driving.

Enzo did not fare as well in 1922. The Targa had been moved up to April, and like the 1907 event, the 13th edition attracted a wide field of top-level drivers from all over Europe. Alfa Romeo entered four of their new 4200cc E.S. Sports against Mercedes, Austro-Daimlers, Steyrs, Italas, Fiats and French Ballots. Antonio Ascari earned Alfa's best finish in fourth place; Sivocci came in ninth, Campari 11th. Poor Enzo could manage only a lowly 16th. —Genevieve Obert

stint. Two laps later, Merzario got back into the car after its final pit stop. Merzario would finish the race, and it was his to win or lose. Only one Alfa remained in the way.

Though Merzario had about a two-and-a-half minute lead, Helmut Marko was gaining ground in his Alfa. Arturo was tired, having driven an extra lap, and was nauseous from the heat. At the beginning of the final lap, Merzario was ahead by just 40 seconds—but in reality it was more like 25, since he'd started

15 seconds ahead of the Galli/Marko Alfa. The race appeared to be slipping away.

But this was the most Italian of situations: a fiercely competitive Italian driver in what by all counts was a jewel of an Italian race car, vying for the win in Italy's most important sports car race. Just as a tired and apparently beaten football team often finds one last drive within itself and scores during the final two minutes of the game, Merzario responded to the cheers of the village crowds and the passion of

the moment, finding enough inside himself to keep driving to the finish. The Ferrari crossed the line, and then all Merzario, Munari, the team and the crowd could do was watch the finish line and the clock. If Marko could come across within the next 15 seconds, the day would belong to Alfa.

But according to the official timing reports, it took 31.9 seconds for Marko to bring the screaming Alfa V8 home; deduct the 15-second starting differential and the Ferrari

wearing no. 3 won the Targa Florio by a mere 16.9 seconds after 444 miles of racing. "And the crowd went wild..."

Think about it: An overwhelmingly challenging race course. 4-to-1 odds. A victory margin of just 16.9 seconds, the closest in Targa history. And a winning average speed of 76.14 miles per hour that stands as the race's quickest ever. Not a bad day for a brilliant red Ferrari, a borrowed rally driver and one Little Italian Cowboy. ●