

OBSCURATI

CURIOSITIES FROM THE AMAZING WORLD OF ITALIAN CARS

Fiat-Siata 1500 Coupé Speciale by Gilco

Story by Richard Heseltine



When is a Fiat not a Fiat? When it's a Siata. Or a Gilco. The car pictured here could be labelled all three, but its history is mired in mystery. What is known is that it was originally commissioned by gentleman driver Ovidio Capelli. The Milanese Fiat distributor had taken over the running of the influential Scuderia Ambrosiana from Count 'Johnny' Lurani in 1949 and campaigned several cars under this banner. These included the first-ever Zagato-bodied Fiat 8V (Elio Zagato was another team member). This car, however, was something else entirely. It began life as a 1951 Fiat 1400 berlina, but emerged as more than a mere 'chop'.

First of all, the running gear was mounted in a bespoke tubular steel frame constructed by Gilco's Gilberto Colombo, a name more commonly remembered for making chassis

for Ferrari (and less so for assorted Ghia projects). Which carrozzerie bodied the car remains unrecorded, as does the identity of the company which tuned the three-bearing four-banger. The original engine, number 024073, was warmed over by Abarth or Siata depending on whose opinions you credit, but it reputedly wore Siata badging from new.

The car was first registered in Milan in March 1954, but Capelli never raced it. The 'Speciale' was acquired by Mille Miglia veteran Roberto Montali who fielded the car in that year's running. He and co-driver Bontempi Morici failed to finish. A year later, he teamed-up with Esildo Morici only to record another DNF. Tellingly, the car is referred to in period reports as a Siata.

The story moves on apace after the car was acquired by Al Maggiacomo, an American G.I. stationed in Germany. He bought the 'Mediterranean Turquoise'

coupe while visiting Milan in 1956. He paid \$2500 and proceeded to drive the car around Europe for several years before returning Stateside. The New Yorker continued to use it until 1963 when his teenage brother, future TransAm champion and NASCAR occasional Chauncey 'Jocko' Maggiacomo, removed the tuned Fiat engine and installed a Triumph TR3 unit and

corresponding four-speed 'box.

The car, by now registered as a 1957 Siata, subsequently passed through several owners before being acquired by Vermont's Dave DuBrul. The respected collector managed to locate two genuine Siata 1400 engines (they had their own engine numbers), one mildly modified, the other a full-house racing unit. In 1984, he moved the project on to Peter Voorhees who restored the car over a period of several years. Much of the chassis remained original, although new engine mounts were required before a period-correct unit could be reinstated. The aluminium body was also largely complete and, as such, required relatively little fresh panel-work.

The car – complete with tweaked 1669cc 'four' – was subsequently shown at numerous events including the 2010 Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance. It went on the block last year at RM Auctions' Monterey sale where it recorded the extraordinary hammer price of \$616,000. Not bad for a Fiat special, albeit a very special one.

