

SANDRO MUNARI

THE RALLY DRIVER

The 1977 World Rally Champion and three-time Monte winner divulges his Stratos secrets

INTERVIEW Massimo Delbò // ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHY McKlein

SANDRO MUNARI is not a man who smiles easily, as is the tradition of Venetians. They are taught, from a young age, to be serious, to work hard and that only by making sacrifices can you be successful. But when he hears my first question about the Lancia Stratos, his eyes soften and a smile appears instantly. Munari, now 75, is revered as one of the greatest rally drivers ever, the best to master the Stratos – which, back in the 1970s, was the ultimate rally weapon.

'I remember very well the first time I saw the Stratos,' he says. 'It was the original Bertone prototype, with the wing shape [the Stratos Zero]. It was beautiful to look at but totally wrong as a rally car. Then Cesare Fiorio had the best idea ever: he asked every member of the racing team to write down one or two ideas on how the car should have been made. Everybody suggested something; I personally requested an engine with 300bhp, without knowing that with this last wish I would become a bargaining chip. Cesare Fiorio wondered what I would do with so much power, and I simply replied: "Give it to me, I will find a way to do something with it!"

'I was simply bored by the lack of horses in the Fulvia. Our competitors were the Porsche 911 and the Alpine and, before every rally, we had to perform a "rain and snow dance" so I could hope to win something. Ferrari was asked for its Dino's new engine, and *Il Commendatore* agreed, asking in return that I would race the Targa Florio with his 312P. How he thought a rally driver, accustomed to the 160bhp front-wheel-drive Fulvia, could race a 460bhp rear-engined prototype remains a big mystery to me. But he was right!

Early Stratos development was problematic, with terrible roadholding and a total insensitivity to any adjustment. 'I created the Stratos, I did it with my stubbornness, because I'm a hard head,' says Munari.

'For the very first drive, Gianpaolo Dallara, Mike Parkes and I were in Corsica testing. It was an absolute disaster, with the car being impossible to drive. The Stratos was reacting every time in a different way, shifting from under- to oversteer without any apparent reason, irrespective of the set-up. My report says that the car felt like it was hinged in the middle, with the front and the rear travelling in opposite directions.

'The real problem became the fact that, instead of fixing what was wrong, some manager decided that the car was right, and that we weren't able to do our work, and we lost some months with a car that was impossible to drive. We were very close to dumping the whole project when we had the idea of a last test in Spain, at the Costa del Sol rally. Due to budget limitations, a car was shipped with Mike Parkes as technician plus two mechanics. I went away testing the last modifications on tarmac and the car was as bad as always. I still remember coming back to the van with Mike anxiously waiting for my response. It took me few seconds to answer: "Mike, we are still in deep shit!"

'I knew that, with this answer, the Stratos project could have been over. But then came →

Right
Munari celebrates at the end of the 1977 Monte Carlo Rally, which he won (for the third time) on his way to winning that year's Drivers' Championship.







'IT WAS LIKE DRIVING A SPACESHIP. PERFECT FROM THE VERY FIRST METRE'

the idea. We never had the car on dirt roads. We thought, let's try, just once, for personal curiosity. We put on four gravel tyres and I went on a dirt road close by. It was like driving a spaceship. I never felt something so amazing. It was absolutely perfect from the very first metre. I come back with a smile as big as the windshield telling Mike: "Give me a car like this on gravel and we are set."

'Finally they provided the more rigid hub-carriers we had asked for since day one. Then the Stratos became irresistible. It was, and still is, the perfect rally car: it is fast, but absolutely reliable, and exciting to drive. Its strongest quality is its handling. I don't remember a single time – and I'm probably the human being who spent the most time behind the wheel – when the Stratos reacted unpredictably.

Above
Munari kicking up dust in North Africa on the 1976 Moroccan Rally. He finished third on this occasion, behind a pair of tough, if low-tech, Peugeot 504s.

'The trick was easy: point the front where you want using the steering and forget about the tail, because it will somehow follow. As soon as you are on the right line, do not move the steering anymore, and keep everything balanced and lined up using only the gas pedal, under- or oversteer at your own convenience, knowing that everything will always happen in a very smooth way. It worked on snow, tarmac, dirt and even on the circuit.'

Sounds easy, but other great rally drivers always admitted that Munari was the best Stratos driver. How does he explain it? 'At a certain level, there is not a better driver than another, at least technically speaking. What still makes the difference is sensitivity. In the Stratos the limit is so high that it is impossible to reach it every time. The fastest driver is the one who feels it best, and can get closest to it. Maybe with the Stratos this is simply what happened to me.'

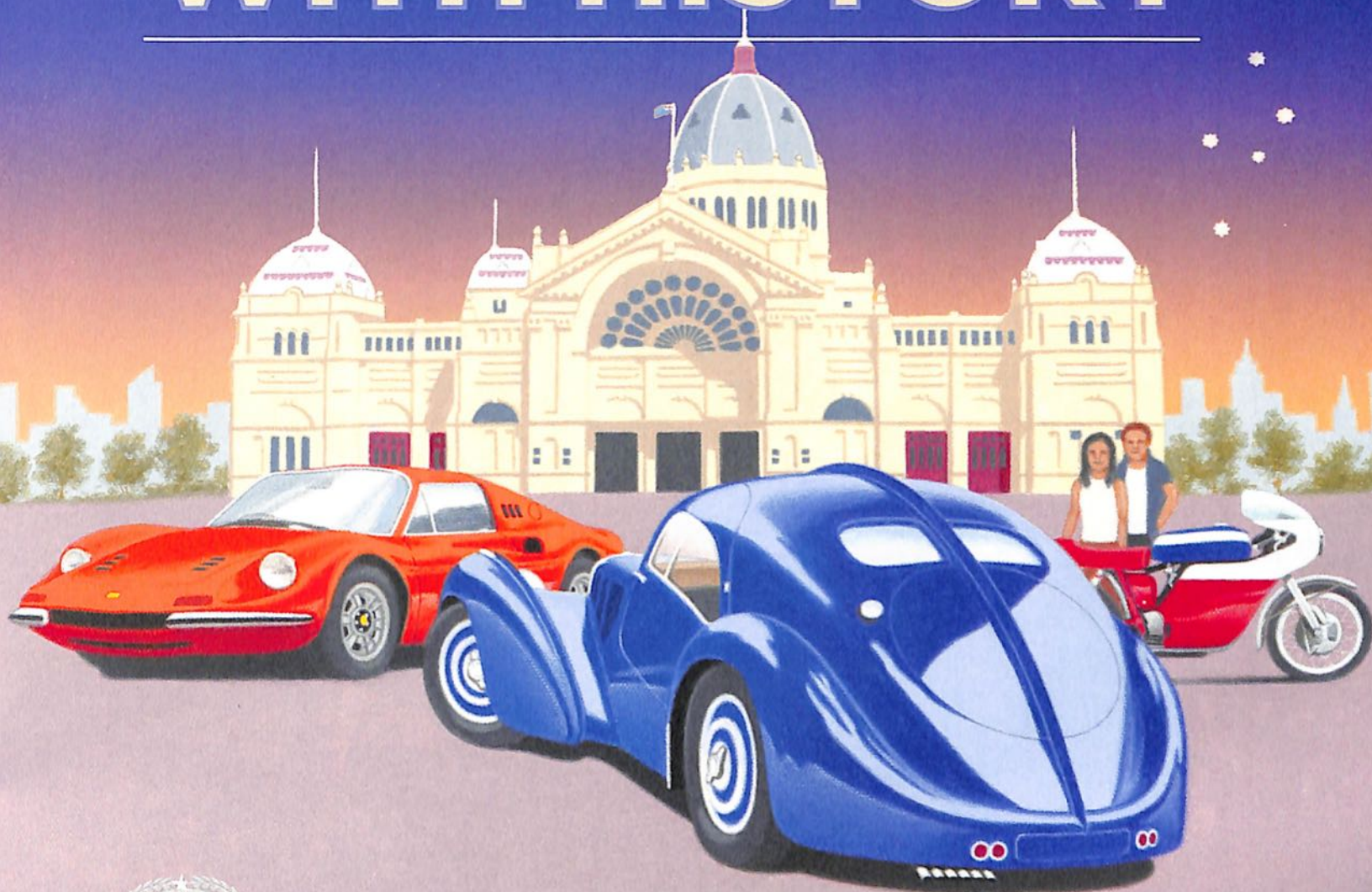
The only important rally victory missing in the Stratos portfolio is the Safari Rally. Was the

Stratos too extreme to win such a hard competition? 'Nothing is more wrong than this. The Stratos was an almost perfect machine and could have won the Safari too. If it didn't it's because of an incredible run of bad luck. In 1975, at the beginning of the last day, I was first by more than 90 minutes over second-placed Ove Andersson with his Peugeot 504.

'Then, 400km from Nairobi, I got another flat, the third of the day, at the rear. I had already used the two spare tyres, and tried to contact the assistance crew. The only way was to use a radio bridge through the aeroplane, where Fiorio was. After many futile attempts, we put a front tyre on the rear to preserve the differential, the co-driver [Lofty Drews] on the back to help lift the front, drove the 10km to the end of the dirt road, and left Lofty hitchhiking a passage to Nairobi to come back with the assistance. We waited forever for a car to pass... and in the end I was second. I'm still wondering where the aeroplane was.

'Just to say how good the Stratos was, at the start there were 84 cars, including three Stratoses, and by the finish only 11 had survived. We were the only team that did not lose a car in the whole rally. In preparing them we only had to add an oil-bath air filter to prevent the dust getting into the engine, and we led for 4500km out of 5000.'

HORSEPOWER WITH HISTORY



MOTORCLASSICA

The Australian International Concours d'Elegance & Classic Motor Show

23-25 OCTOBER 2015 • ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING MELBOURNE

50 YEARS OF THE SUPERCAR / 50 YEARS OF DINO / 50 YEARS OF SHELBY MUSTANG
/ 70 YEARS OF MV AGUSTA / 50 YEARS OF THE BUGATTI CLUB AUSTRALIA

EXPERIENCE NEW & CLASSIC CARS AND MOTORCYCLES / FOOD & WINE / RESTORATION & MAINTENANCE / TOURING DESTINATIONS
/ ART AND COLLECTABLES / CLUB DISPLAYS / COLLECTOR CAR AUCTION / SPECIAL GUESTS

TICKETS ON SALE NOW AT MOTORCLASSICA.COM.AU



THEODORE BRUCE



CESARE FIORIO

THE TEAM MANAGER

He's the man it wouldn't have been possible without. Now he talks to Octane

INTERVIEW Massimo Delbò // ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHY McKlein

CESARE FIORIO managed the Reparto Corse Lancia from the very beginning. Under his reign, it won everything. Now 76, he is retired and lives in Puglia, southern Italy, where he manages a *masseria* (a beautiful farm and hotel) at which people relax, eat and drink – and sometimes talk about cars.

'The Stratos was a need. My job was to win, and we were doing miracles with the Fulvia, a car born for ladies to drive on their shopping trips. One day I called enough, and went asking every member of the team their wish list for a new rally car. It was then quite easy to make the correct technical specification, and Bertone and Gandini did their job in creating a beautiful shape to envelope everything. We asked Ferrari for an engine and, thanks to our

good relationship, we got it. Then, looking at the team, I saw the best rally driver of the period. I felt very safe – and I was very wrong.

'What I did not consider was the political war that a certain group of Fiat middle managers would wage against me and the Stratos project. These people were still upset with me because we destroyed them in races before the Pesenti family sold the Lancia company to Fiat, and tried to stop the project [instead pushing the idea of the X1/9] with technical obstacles. I had to ask for help from senior management, involving Mr Agnelli in person, to solve the situation, and this was the hardest part of the whole Stratos project.

'It is important to underline that the decision to kill the Stratos after few years of success and

Right and below
Fiorio leading the team on the 1975 Safari
Rally – ahead of a run of bad luck; in 1976
(Lancia's last Group 4 manufacturers'
title) with the works Stratoses.

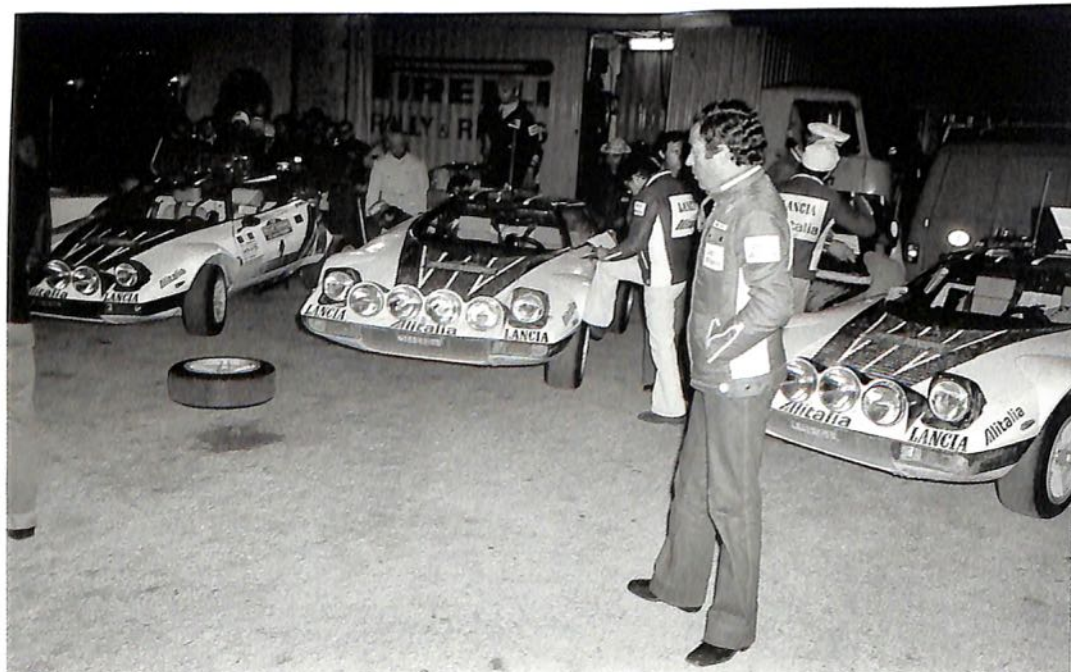
to promote the Fiat 131 instead came from a totally different idea. Racing departments are not created to allow people to enjoy racing, but are the weapon to sell more cars. With the Stratos we were so good that everybody else decided to withdraw from competition, and we needed competitors to beat to fulfil the sales managers' needs. The 131 was a perfect way to suggest to our competitors that we were, finally, beatable, having them coming racing against us, and still beating them with a car that was not created to be a rally killer.

'When we stopped the Stratos we knew that we were losing a fantastic car, capable of winning everything, everywhere, on gravel, racetracks and, in races such as the Tour de France, half on road and half on racetrack.'

So what are Fiorio's greatest memories of the Stratos? 'Take a seat and a good bottle, because I could go on forever,' he says. 'The Stratos was a racing dream come true, developed from a white sheet to win, and I have hundreds of memories connected to the car and to the racers who drove it. Lancia was the best team and, in time, we had all the best drivers. If I could live forever, I'd never forget the emotion and the feeling connected with the first victory at Monte Carlo, with Munari. We entered three cars, each of them a potential winner. The first evening, with still five days of racing in front of us, we'd already lost two of them because of human error. I spent five terrible days, with incredible stress, looking at Munari driving to victory, always fearing the worst. I still remember the relief, of both of us, after the finish line.

'I share with Munari the regrets for the lost Safari too. He is still upset with me, because when he called for assistance with the flat tyre, I wasn't there doing my job of forwarding the call to the assistance crew: we could have solved the problem in 20 minutes, and we had 90 minutes on the second car. He is right, but the race was two hours late, because organisers decided to regroup cars before the morning start. The helicopters I was flying in had to land before sunset, because that was the rule, and the pilot would have lost his licence if he'd carried on, and that is the reason why, when he had three flats in a row – I think he set a record! – I wasn't there.

'Like every general, I had my defeats. In one rally there was a special stage with a 12km dry road uphill, followed by a same-length iced downhill. I had the idea to arrange a pit stop at the top of the hill, to change tyres with a new





pneumatic gun capable of unscrewing the five bolts in one single operation. When we practised, our mechanic could do the job in about 40 seconds, and I was sure we could have wiped out our competitors, granting the Stratos another victory. I remember the excitement going up the road, to supervise the operation, and I was so happy that I didn't even feel the freezing cold while waiting. The first car arrived – and the guns blocked immediately.

'The temperature was below 20, and the air hoses got clogged with ice. I still remember the sound of the guns going from the typical

frrr-frrr to a quiet *gnee*, and the mechanics looking at me. We had to unscrew every bolt by hand and, while doing that, the second car arrived, then the third. We looked like a country service station during the holidays.

'I still remember the "nice and polite" words drivers were using about me. But the Stratos was so good that it survived this mistake too. I even owned one for a period of time. It was the very car Sandro Munari won the 1975 Monte Carlo in. But cars need to be taken care of, and after a while I sold it. I regret that, because it would be the perfect piece to put in the "motor room" in my *masseria*.'

**'LANCIA WAS THE
BEST TEAM AND, IN
TIME, WE HAD ALL
THE BEST DRIVERS'**





Clockwise from left
Go for the Stradale look (like this one from Hawk) or full-on rally livery (Lister-Bell in this case); New Stratos remains a Ferrari 430-powered one-off.



MARTYN GODDARD

THE UNREAL DEAL

They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. These are the cars that flatter the Stratos best

WORDS Brett Fraser

EVEN BEFORE STRATOS values climbed to their current £400,000 and more, the car's rarity created a market for good-quality replicas. Truth is, they were kit cars, but only in as much as you could put them together yourself from parts sourced from breaker's yards. Companies such as Hawk Cars, however, set about refining certain aspects of the Stratos, improving the fit and finish of the body panels and evolving the mechanical set-up. Hawk even went so far as to commission new windscreens and have new wheels cast – useful to owners of genuine cars, too.

Although Hawk will happily unite you with a Ferrari V6 to shove in the back of your replica, the company has also engineered its HF3000 and HF2000 models to accept an Alfa V6 (a popular choice) or a four-cylinder Lancia twin-cam. And rather than get dirt under your own fingernails, Hawk has an outside partner that can construct your car for you. Despite an unfavourable review on the *Top Gear* TV programme – which Hawk and the owner of

the car used insist was a misrepresentation – Hawks are held in high regard, as is reflected in the secondhand values (£40,000+) of well-made examples.

Since 2010 Hawk has had a rival in the form of Lister Bell Automotive. Like Hawk, Lister Bell has invested time and money in developing the Stratos further, using modern materials, construction techniques and computer design and analysis programs, with an emphasis on improving the driving experience and not simply replicating it.

Alfa V6s of 2.0- and 3.0-litre capacities are the mainstays of Lister Bell's engine line-up, but there's also the option of 3.0- and 3.2-litre Ferrari Mondial V8 power. Lister Bell has also re-engineered the engine cradle of its SLR to accept a Toyota 3.5-litre V6, as found amidships in the Lotus Exige and Evora. In naturally aspirated guise the motor produces either 275bhp or 330bhp; with a supercharger those numbers rise to 350bhp and 400bhp – enough to make you glad Lister Bell also redesigned

the suspension and offers brake upgrades.

Obviously neither the Lister Bell nor the Hawk are the real deal, but they look the part and, depending on the spec and who built them, offer a superior drive to the genuine item. And now that Stratos prices have gone, ahem, stratospheric, for most of us they represent the only way we're ever going to get near the genuine experience.

While that pair endeavour to emulate the original, in 2005 Christian Hrabalek tried to reinvent the Stratos with his Fenomenon project. Prodrive developed a prototype powered by a V8 engine, but attempts to attract funding to progress to a limited run of cars ultimately came to nothing.

However, inspired by Hrabalek's vision, in 2010 Michael Stoschek, the wealthy owner of an automotive supplies company, and his son Maximilian announced plans for the New Stratos. Stoschek commissioned Pininfarina to develop the car, which was based on a shortened Ferrari 430 Stradale, powered by a 532bhp 4.3-litre V8, and clothed in a carbonfibre body that paid modern homage to the spirit of the original (see *Octane* 121).

When the finished New Stratos was revealed to the press in 2013 it was rapturously received. 'We'll do a small production run,' proposed an excited Stoschek. 'Not on your nelly,' Ferrari harrumphed, even banning its suppliers from touching the project. And so the one-off New Stratos remains precisely that. **Car**