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1963 Maserati 5000GT Coupe

Coachwork by Allemano

Chassis no. 103.026

In the company's own words, "Maserati's production has always been characterised by highly aristocratic and elegant performance cars," arguably the finest embodiment of these two most desirable attributes being the legendary 5000GT. An exclusive car even by Maserati's exalted standards, the range-topping 5000GT was custom built to special order only, recalling an era when wealthy connoisseurs would commission a preferred coachbuilder to body a factory-supplied chassis in their chosen style. 'List' price in 1960 was a staggering 7.5 million lire (approximately £4,300) which placed the 5000GT on a par with Rolls-Royce's contemporary Silver Cloud II. Commencing at '103.002', chassis were even-numbered up to '103.066', just 33 being completed between 1959 and 1964, making the 5000GT much rarer than its closest rival, the Ferrari 400 Superamerica, 47 of which were built in the same period.

The first 5000GT ('002') was commissioned by the Shah of Persia, a noted Maserati enthusiast, while other owners included FIAT boss Giovanni Agnelli ('008'), fellow car-maker Fernando Innocenti ('018'), American multimillionaire sportsman Briggs Cunningham ('016') and the Aga Khan ('060'). Bodied by Touring and premiered at the 1959 Turin Motor Show, that first 5000GT coupe became known as the 'Shah of Persia' model, and was followed by three more from the Milanese *carrozzeria*.

The bulk of 5000GT production however, was undertaken by Allemano (21 cars), with lesser contributions from Frua (three) and one each from Pininfarina/Scaglietti, Monterosa, Vignale, Ghia and Bertone. As is the case with other similarly hand-built, limited edition exotica of the period, no two 5000GTs are exactly alike, with even the 21 Allemano-bodied cars exhibiting detail differences.

Designated Tipo 103, the 5000GT was Maserati's first V8-engined Gran Turismo, its engine being descended from that of the ill-fated 450S sports-racer. Introduced in 1957 to challenge for World Sportscar Championship honours, the 450S proved fast but fragile, gaining victories in only two events, the 1957 Sebring 12 Hours and Swedish Grand Prix, before the works team cars were consumed by fire at the Venezuelan Grand Prix at Caracas that same year. This disaster, in conjunction with the crippling cost of developing the 450S and a change to a 3-litre formula for 1958, prompted Maserati to withdraw from racing.

Anxious to recoup some of its not-inconsiderable investment, the company deployed its new V8 engine for road use in the 5000GT, whose designer was none other than Giulio Alfieri, creator of the immortal Tipo 60/61 'Birdcage' sports-racer and the man responsible for developing the 250F into a World Championship winner. An all-alloy unit boasting four overhead camshafts, Maserati's state-of-the-art V8 was enlarged from the 450S' 4,477cc to 4,938cc for the 5000GT by means of increasing the bore size from 93.8mm to 98.5mm. Maximum power in road trim was 325bhp at 5,500rpm, with 326.5lbs/ft of torque available at 3,600 revs.

Early examples retained the race engine's gear-driven camshafts and quartet of Weber carburettors, though for road use the racer's twin-plug magneto-sparked ignition was replaced by single-plug coil ignition. After the first two cars had been completed, the engine dimensions were changed from 98.5x81mm to 94x89mm (4,941cc) in 1960. Later developments included Lucas fuel injection, increasing maximum power to 340bhp, and chain-driven camshafts. There were improvements to the car's 3500GT-based chassis too, a five-speed gearbox replacing the earlier four-speeder and four-wheel disc brakes (early cars had rear drums) becoming standard for 1963.

Chassis number '026', the car offered here, was delivered new on 16th January 1964 via Maserati agent Cornacchia in Milan and first owned by Dr Belponer, noted Maserati collector and president and owner of the successful racing team Scuderia Brescia Corse. The car was owned subsequently by rock-music legend Joe Walsh, who refers to it in a song. Formerly lead guitarist with The James Gang, Walsh left in 1971 to pursue a solo career before joining The Eagles in 1975, just in time to exert a crucial influence on one of the defining rock albums of the decade, *Hotel California*. The Maserati features in Life's Been Good, arguably Walsh's best-known single and a track on his 1978 solo album, *But Seriously Folks*. A hilarious satire on the shallowness of rock-music celebrity, Walsh's lyric includes the lines:

"My Maserati does one-eighty-five
I lost my license, now I don't drive
I have a limo, ride in the back
I lock the doors in case I'm attacked."

In actual fact, a 5000GT has a top speed of 'only' 175mph or thereabouts, but its true maximum doesn't scan as well! A former Pebble Beach Concours entry in 1999, '026' is finished in red with black interior and comes equipped with 450S camshafts. Comparable with the finest limited production Ferraris of the period, yet rarer still, this superb example of Maserati's biggest and best is worthy of the closest inspection.

Estimate \$150,000 – 180,000



