

FERRARI PRE-PURCHASE EVALUATION PART 1

Interior and Bodywork

by Tom Meadows

Whether you are interested in buying a Ferrari for investment, as a driver's car, or as a car to drive and maintain yourself, the most important part of the anticipated purchase is to be able to effectively evaluate the overall condition of all aspects of the car.

If you are buying it as an investment, the pre-purchase evaluation will ensure the quality of the investment and protect you from buying a car with problems that will cancel out its appreciation potential. If you are buying it as a car to drive hard on the track or for regular road use, the inspection will tell you what you need to know to insure that the car will provide you the safety you need for high speed road and track work. If you are buying it for your own use and expect to service it yourself, a proper inspection will keep you from getting too far out of your budget or technical expertise.

Experienced evaluators of Italian exotic cars will usually give you the same perspective on this part of the purchase: There is absolutely no substitute for having an experienced professional involved in this part of the process. By the same token they will tell you that their opinions on the car are usually formed in the first five minutes of the inspection and the next five hours are merely a means of proving to themselves, and the customer, what they have already concluded. During that time they will effectively quantify the dollar costs of what their initial opinion has told them.

Over the past 34 years I have evaluated a wide array of Italian sports and racing cars. Every car I look at adds new knowledge to the process. I am going to outline how to go about the Ferrari evaluation process. The procedures I use have some unique aspects that reflect some of the more interesting experiences I have had in the field. The process is identical whether the car is valued at \$100,000 or \$3,000,000.

Many shops offer evaluation services

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this is not always a viable solution. The owner may not want the car to leave his premises or the owner may want to observe the process and be available to answer questions. This is where a professional evaluator equipped to travel can come into play.

I use what I call the "Deal Killer Triangle" rule when doing evaluations. The three points of this triangle are interior condition, bodywork condition and mechanical condition. If all three are bad then the car is a total restoration project that will eat up your time and money at a furious rate, and significantly delay the driving experience, in some cases by months stretching into years. This is a "deal killer" in my experience. With this triangle in mind I am going to focus on the interior and bodywork evaluation at this time and reserve the drivetrain analysis for a separate presentation.

Both the evaluator and the seller needs to be properly prepared for the process. Your initial contacts with them when scheduling the inspection should emphasize the need for the car to be thoroughly cleaned, an accessible workspace to examine the car, a fully charged battery, a full gas tank and a compilation of all the paper records that document any aspect of the car's history.

In addition any and all spare parts, saved worn out parts and the like that go with the car should be available for examination. The old parts can be used as support for the repair receipts, and often times extra parts that come with the car can offer significant value to the overall transaction. Making sure of these simple details in advance can save you hours of work or needless delays once you begin the inspection.

The first part of any evaluation is to sit down with every piece of paper that comes with the car. Examine the paperwork and place it in chronological order. This will easily demonstrate changes of ownership, changes of shops or mechanics, and define gaps in the vehicle's scheduled services.

A very good understanding of the car's records, which can often take a full hour to properly absorb, is important. It will, more

than likely, be necessary to refer back to the records as indicators are found of service done improperly or incompletely, or undocumented service. In many cases the owner will be able to add more details or fill in gaps in the service and repair records.

It is very common for crashed cars to include no documentation of the actual bodywork and paint process, and this is where professional evaluation skills come into play. There may be documentation of some crash repairs yet examination of the car will show greater damage than is included in the body shop bill. But more often, you will find no records of body and paint work, despite clear indicators of crash damage and repair to the car.

Once you have a solid grasp of the service records the next step is to walk around the car, sit in it and give yourself time to absorb its overall character. Think of yourself as a little boy who is being allowed to sit in a Ferrari for the first time without any worries or sense of hurry, and just enjoy the experience. At this point check for the original owner's books and examine their condition. Replacement books for some models can be expensive and condition is very important for these items. Often overlooked service records or other important items are tucked into these books. During this process small details will begin to stand out.

I have seen detailed printed checklists that some evaluations provide, and while these give a good road map of how to look at the car, written notes will always be necessary to fill in the gaps. This is the time to start a checklist on a clipboard, because as more and more details catch your eye it is very easy to forget one or two. This is also the point to note the indicated mileage, whether or not it is in KMH or MPH, and if the general interior condition reflects the mileage shown.

Then undertake a serious inspection of the interior, which may be the easiest part of the job. First establish if the interior is original in the truest sense of the word: the one the factory supplied with the car at delivery.

If not, then the question is how accurate are the replacement pieces. In many cases the replacements are perfect and will have a positive influence on the car's value. Low grade restoration work has the same negative effect as a deteriorated original interior in that the replacement costs are equal.

With proper maintenance Ferrari factory leather work will last for several owners. Unmaintained leather will look good up to a point, and then will deteriorate quite rapidly. If it is a low mileage car that gets driven seldom, it may look quite good but can deteriorate quite rapidly with regular use. Signs of this type of aging are a lack of pliability in the leather, cracking of the leather's surface, and the sure indicator, seam failure. The seams can fail due to thread deterioration, or if the thread holds, failure of the leather itself. Once a car gets to this point it is time for a new interior as anything you do is more damage control than actual repair. Many older interiors have been re-sprayed or surface dyed, and while this improves the looks, it is virtually impossible to regain the original surface texture.

From a valuation standpoint, it is important to realize that in a \$35,000 308 GTB, a \$5,000 interior replacement cost is significant, but in a \$1,000,000 car this cost will have significantly less impact on its value.

Leave the interior and take a serious look at the bodywork. Do a simple walk around of the car, making notes as you go. Then get a chair and just sit and examine the car in detail from all sides. I usually give about ten minutes to a side, taking notes as I look at the car. It is amazing what this approach to inspection will bring out to the eye.

If possible, get a bucket of water, a sponge and chamois and carefully wash the entire car. No soap is needed as the true purpose of the wash is to put you in physical and visual contact with every inch of the bodywork. This is the most fail safe method I have ever used to find virtually every imperfection in the body work. Trained hands are sensitive to surface irregularities that the eye can easily miss. As the water sheets over the bodywork, variations in the contours of the surface are magnified. Poor body work, pits in the finish, and deteriorating paint will stand out clearly due to their effect on the capillary attraction of the water. Take notes as you wash and dry the car and add them to your earlier ones.

If possible inspect the insides of the bumpers and the paintwork surrounding their mounting points, both of which can be easily overlooked. Inside the bumpers will reveal the condition of the original chrome, the quality of any re-chroming, and more important, repair damage to the mounting brackets that can indicate undisclosed accident damage. Check the bodywork where it wraps around underneath the car as this is where many body shops forget the detail work, and signs of repair or repaint can be easily found.

All the rubber seals should be inspected for fit, damage, serviceability, and paint over-spray which can indicate repaint or repair. Open the vehicle's hood, trunk and doors, and check for water leakage from the washing operation, noting the areas of leakage. The area of leakage should be carefully reinspected for related rust or carpet damage. If the car has a lift-off top panel, remove it and carefully check for leaks in that area.

Regardless of any signs of leakage, remove the floor carpets and padding if possible, and inspect for floor rust. Rust inspection cannot be overemphasized and any indication of bubbling, surface rust, paint degradation and the like should be noted. A very thorough re-examination of the rocker panels should be done at this time, in addition to the prior inspections.

Look over the glass in detail for windshield wiper scratches, sandstorm damage, hazing, and chips or small cracks. Check to make sure the side windows go up and down smoothly. If equipped with electric lifts, that the lifts fully open and close the windows without undue straining.

Check the hood, trunk and doors for proper closing without undue effort and inspect all the latching mechanisms for signs of misalignment and related damage. The last part of this inspection is to check the various panels for fit, gap and proper alignment. Ferraris have a wide range of fit standards depending on the era, so you are not looking for German quality here, but for clearly obvious problems. Oftentimes crash repair will become apparent by discrepancies in these gaps which reflect poor panel repair or reconstruction.

The last part of the inspection is to examine the paint closely and determine its age and condition. If the paint on a car looks bad at night it will look really bad in the daytime. That's an easy rule of thumb to go by if you are thinking of writing that check after the sun goes down. Using different lightings, such as sunlight or fluores-

cent lights will often reveal color discrepancies from a bad paint mismatch over repair work. High quality polarized sunglasses will also help spot problems the eye does not normally see.

A trained eye can determine if the finish is lacquer, enamel, catalyzed enamel or one of the newer base coat/clear coat systems. Depending on the car in question some of these common finishes may be correct and some of them will be incorrect. Any competent body shop can make a tired paint job look better to help the sale, but the results will only hold for a few months. The time you spent earlier just looking the car over from all four sides will now come into play when looking for paint issues. Paint is more often than not a simple judgment call and individual experience in this area is all that can be relied upon.

This portion of the evaluation process will easily consume two or three hours and should never be rushed. This is the time to take a lunch break and let your mind absorb what you have learned. After lunch you can re-evaluate what you have seen and you may find that there are several areas to re-examine or require further notes.

One of the benefits a professional evaluator has is the luxury of being emotionally detached from the process with his main goal being to ensure the most complete evaluation possible for his client. For a prospective buyer doing his own evaluation this part of the process is by its very nature, discouraging, as you will be actively seeking out all the flaws in the vehicle. The hardest part of this process will be to separate yourself from your emotional interest in the car in order to allow you to objectively perform a complete evaluation.

By now you should have a very clear perspective on the condition of the interior and bodywork, a full set of known maintenance and repair records in hand, and your own notes and observations to support your perspective. You are ready to continue to the next part of the process which is evaluating the chassis, its supporting suspension and the drive train, which we will address in a future article.

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