



# FERRARI

## 250 GT SHORT WHEELBASE

### BERLINETTA

By David Seibert



Enzo Ferrari was a racer to his core, and the cars he created reflected that passion. To support his racing programs he built cars meant for the road, but even those cars were racers at heart: one of the very first of them won the Mille Miglia, Italy's great 1,000-mile open road race, in 1948.

Throughout the 1950s, as Ferrari grew, it built some cars better suited for touring than the track (the occasional four-seater, the Americas and Superamericas with their larger-displacement engines), but Ferrari's reputation was made by its race cars: Grand Prix cars, racing sports cars (think 250 Testa Rossa here), and dual-purpose sports cars—cars that could be driven to, as well as in, a race.

In the late '50s, the best of these was Ferrari's 250 GT Long Wheelbase Berlinetta. The "long" wheelbase measured 2600 mm, and the cars carried berlinetta coachwork—lightweight coupe bodies—from Pinin Farina or Sergio Scaglietti. The engine displaced three liters—250 cc in each of its twelve cylinders, providing the model's designation. While usable on the street, these were thinly disguised



Left: A publicity photograph used in Ferrari sales brochures showing the prototype for the 1961 250 GT SWB Berlinetta (serial number 2111 GT).

Right: Perhaps the first public view of the 250 GT SWB Berlinetta, shown during testing with the Ferrari Dino 246 Grand Prix car and transporter. This is the very first 250 GT SWB Berlinetta (1539 GT) that appeared in 1959 at the famous Aerautodromo in Modena. Note the lack of air vents in the front fenders.



race cars ideal for long-distance races and rallies; the model was nicknamed the “Tour de France” for its series of wins in that famous French event. For the 1959 24 Hours of Le Mans, Ferrari unveiled a new Pinin Farina design on the LWB chassis. The fenders were more rounded, there was less overhang in the front and rear, and a larger windshield and side windows made for better visibility. Only seven of these “Interim” Berlinettas were built because a striking new car, a true dual-purpose Ferrari, was introduced at the Paris Auto Show that October. This new car was the 250 GT Passo Corto—the famed Short Wheelbase Berlinetta.

For the SWB Berlinetta, Pinin Farina cleaned up the design of the Interim Berlinetta to fit the new chassis with its 2400 mm wheelbase. The body was shortened between the door and the rear wheel well, eliminating the rear quarter window, and giving a slightly sharper angle to the fastback roofline. The result was a taut design, with little overhang or excess. The Interim’s wider and taller windshield (which matched the new racing regulations for 1960) was retained, but the side windows now curved downward at the rear, to follow the fastback roofline. The window frame continued the rearward slant of the door, increasing visibility and making entry and exit just a bit easier.

In front, the traditional Ferrari “egg-crate” grille was continued, but it was a bit wider and its corners were somewhat squared off. A pair of Marchal fog lamps

bracketed the chromed Cavallino Rampante in the center of the grille. A low hood scoop was set into the hood, feeding cool air to the V-12 engine.

The fenders were integrated into the body, eliminating the separate peaked fender line of the Tour de France. A pair of small round taillights, a pair of exhaust pipes on either side, and a full-width thin bumper completed the tail.

The new chassis followed traditional Ferrari practice: a welded tubular steel ladder frame was produced by Vaccari of Modena. With its 2400 mm wheelbase, it was lighter than its predecessor. The independent front suspension used coil springs and Koni or Miletto shocks, while half-elliptic springs supported the live axle at the rear. The car that debuted at the Paris Auto Show initially used drum brakes, but then it and all subsequent SWB Berlinettas were fitted with Dunlop discs. Borrani wire wheels, of 15- or 16-inch diameter, were the only option.



Now owned by Joseph Barone, this 1961 250 GT SWB (2807 GT) is a lightweight competition berlinetta with an excellent racing pedigree, including participation in the Tour de France in 1961 and 1962.





Ferrari showed this 250 GT SWB Berlinetta (1771 GT) at the March 1960 Geneva Motor Show.

of that designation, but meant “luxurious,” for road use. This car would carry a steel body, with a full interior, door panels, sound deadening materials, and wind-up windows.

If a customer wanted to occasionally race his SWB, or perhaps do a few hill climbs, there were options: an engine with higher compression and more aggressive camshaft timing, six Weber carburetors might replace

the standard three, and a larger gas tank might have an outside “Monza” filler.

Those customers who had the right stuff, the right history, could order the true competition SWB. The body would be in light alloy and the frame tubes would be smaller, perhaps made of thinner steel. There would be no sound deadening, and sliding Plexiglas windows replaced glass wind-ups. The competition high-compression engine, designated the Type 168B, made extensive use of magnesium, and it was fed through larger valves by three huge twin-choke Weber 46 DCF3 carburetors.

The ultimate SWB was the Comp/61, riding on a special lighter chassis (the Type 539/Comp), carrying an alloy body with subtle changes (the windshield angled a bit more,

The engine was the latest development of that original V-12, now designated the Type 168. Displacement remained at 2953 cc, but that was about the only constant. Carburetion, camshafts, compression, and even materials varied, and depending on these choices, the engine could produce from 240 to almost 280 horsepower. Drive was through Ferrari’s four-speed all-synchro gearbox.

From the car’s debut in late 1959 to the last sale in February 1963, fewer than 160 SWBs were built. There were subtle styling changes over that period, and when one adds in the competition options and the full race cars, it is likely no two SWBs were completely identical.

A customer for a new SWB Berlinetta could order his car as a “Lusso,” which had nothing to do with the later Ferrari



Left: The first 250 GT SWB Berlinetta (1539 GT), an alloy-bodied Competizione model, as it is today.

Above: A typical Competizione interior found in alloy-bodied cars. This SWB (1905 GT) has wind-up glass windows although the out-and-out racer could order sliding Perspex windows from the factory. Steel SWBs, the Lusso versions, had the painted dashboard, rather than the black crackle finish.





for example), and powered by the highest specification Type 168B engine, putting out almost 300 horsepower. Performance, for 1961, was stunning: 60 mph came up in five seconds en route to a top speed over 150. Only 21 of these Comp/61s were built; they're occasionally called "SEFAC Hot Rods," a term Ferrari never used.

The 250 GT SWB's reign was brief; in 1962 Ferrari introduced the 250 GTO, developed from the SWB. In its three years, though, the SWB twice won the Tour de France, twice won the GT class at Le Mans (finishing third and fourth overall), and took numerous other wins, from Montlhéry to Monza to Riverside.

The Ferrari 430, one of the modern Ferraris just now ending its run, has set records for its production number as well as for class wins at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the 12 Hours of Sebring, and just about every other major race in which it competed. That's an impressive record, but nothing new for the marque. Fifty years ago the 250 GT Passo Corto — the Short Wheelbase Berlinetta — set the standard for dual-purpose Ferraris.

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Top left: A 1961 250 GT SWB Berlinetta (2839 GT) driven by a German race driver using the alias "Kurt" chases Sepp Greger's Porsche Carrera during the airfield race at Innsbruck, Austria, on October 6, 1963.

Top right: In its Mexican (not Italian) colors is the 1961 Competition 250 GT SWB Berlinetta (3327 GT). The competition cars are quickly identifiable by the large filler cap and the SNAP-type exhausts.



The 250 GT SWB Berlinetta Competizione (1807 GT) with Wolfgang Seidel at the wheel during the 1960 Gaisberg Hill Climb in Austria. Seidel was typical of the privateer entrants that kept Ferrari at the forefront of sports car racing in Europe in the 1960s.