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Half-Cooked: This 308/GTO/Mondial racecar/streetcar is Ferrari Goulash

Eric Tegler  May 12, 2014  Cars You Should Know, Featured



You could argue all day about what to call this car. Ferrari purists may not consider it a Ferrari at all. Racers might not really think that it's an IMSA GTU-spec racecar. Ferrari 308, Mondial, and particularly 288 GTO owners might consider it an abominable mongrel.

Me, I don't care. Like its Washington DC-based owner, I just think it's a good time.

At first sight you'd say, "Look, it's a 288 GTO!" Then you notice the two single 512S-esque headlights, the flared wheel-arches, the Zeus fasteners, the black wheels, the cooling vents cut into the rear fascia/spoiler. This is a different beast, confirmed by the fact that when the driver gets out, he wriggles out the window over the door, *Dukes of Hazzard*-style.

Inevitably, you end up thinking, "Someone cut up a potentially \$1 million Ferrari to make it a track-day car?" Well, that's not what happened.



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This hybrid began life as a U.S.-spec 1980 308 GTSi – the very thing Tom Selleck sported around Oahu in as *Magnum P.I.* Through the 1980s, it spent its time on California and Arizona roads. But in 1990, it was exported to Japan. At that time, the Japanese Touring Car Championship was in full swing, featuring Supras, Skylines and Ford Sierras. Change was on the horizon however, and for 1993 the Touring Car Championship became JGTC (Japanese Grand Touring Car).

The first event of the season at Suzuka Speedway included an IMSA GT exhibition race with GTO and GTU cars from the U.S. The 308's Japanese owners decided they wanted to compete. So they handed it over to Japanese exotic car dealer, Art Sports, who had become the first non-European Ferrari F40LM race team. Art Sports converted the 308 into a full tube-frame racecar with 288 GTO body panels supplied by Arizona-based body converter, Jim Carpenter.



The fiberglass panels are fabricated from real discarded Ferrari 288 molds. However, rather than mounting the conversion panels on a 308 or 328 space-frame, these particular panels enclose a race-ready tube frame chassis. They were combined, as per IMSA GT rules, with the stock-block 308 2.9 liter V8, with suitably modified bottom and top end as well as MOTEC engine management. All that remained of the original 308 was its five-speed manual and its data plate.

The car was completed for, and ran in, the IMSA GT exhibition race. But rules changes almost immediately made it obsolete. For the next decade, the racer sat in a corner of Art Sports shop, pulled out occasionally for track days. In 2006 it was refurbished. The original race motor had by that time been cannibalized for spares so Art Sports substituted a "breathed on" Ferrari Mondial Tipo 105F 3.2 liter V8.



In 2011, the car migrated back to San Diego, purchased by a restoration shop which subsequently offered it for sale. Its present



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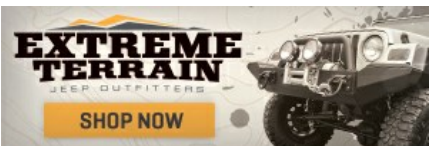
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owner, who has other Ferraris, was in search of a reasonably priced track day/street car at the time and heard about the 308-cum GTO racer through friends. He bought it in 2012, complete with its original 308 street title.

After shipping the car back east, he found that the wiring harness had been hacked into. The racer ran but not well. Off it went to Maryland-based Competizione & Sports Cars and to specialist, Ron McCall for a thorough sorting. In addition to the refreshed wiring harness, new fuel tanks were fabricated and installed as were Ferrari 360 GT Brembo brakes and added heat sealing around the rear bulkhead which prevents the rear mounted V8 from literally singeing your back.



The result is an appealing Frankenstein. The 288 body panels hide the 3.2 which enjoys forged pistons/rods and more aggressive cams. It's a revving motor which makes power and torque above 4000 rpm. At 9000 rpm it puts out 450 hp and 280 lb-ft. But, in the interest of longevity, the MOTEC system cuts the fuel off at 7200 where the dyno says it makes 400 hp. The engine runs on pump gas and while it's not stump-puller, the car's 2380 pound wet-weight means it doesn't have to be.

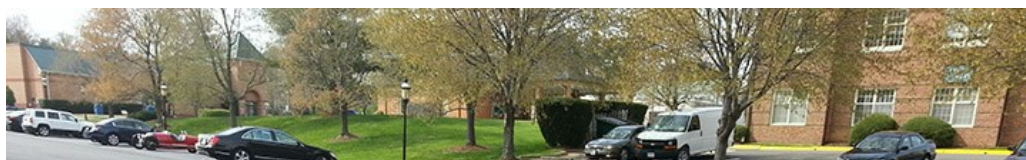
It does have to handle however and the 288 silhouette car is "probably the best handling car I've ever driven," its owner affirms.



A bespoke double-wishbone suspension coupled to 18 inch Neez (F40 supplier) wheels wrapped in eight inch-wide front/12 inch-wide Nitto DOT race rubber controls weight transfer. Paired with the mid-engine layout and stiff frame, the intended result is a neutral handling track terror that can be driven on the street. And because it's so light, its Eibach springs/Koni shocks are set for compliance.

The car doesn't comply with easy categorization. When at car shows or Ferrari gatherings, the owner says it generates three basic reactions.

"People think it's a GTO and I immediately tell them it's not. Some are disappointed. Purists get upset because they question converting a 308. They understand the tube-frame concept but object to the use of the 288 body panels. Then, you have a third group of people who just love it. Their outlook is that it's meant to be driven."





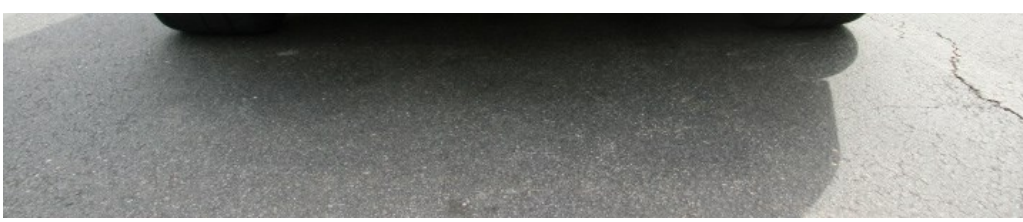
And the owner was gracious enough to briefly let us do just that. Throw your legs over the door frame, slither down into the OMP seat and you're presented with a pure racecar dash. To the right of the steering shaft (the wheel is perched on the dash, waiting to be affixed) oil pressure, fuel and speedometer gauges line up above a row of toggle switches adjacent to a starter button – on the other side, the fire extinguisher panel. A MOTEC digital dash is in place behind the steering wheel. Clip it into place, secure the four-point seat belts and you're ready to fire her up.



As if you need reminding, the start sequence relays the message, "this ain't a street car". You turn on the fuel, flip the ignition/fan/power toggles and hit the starter. The 3.2 barks to life and you instantly feel every vibration.

The triple disc clutch is touchy so getting away can be tricky. Don't plan on extended conversation or cranking the jams. All you hear is the 3.2, loudly. It sounds pretty good. Acceleration is moderate until passing 4000 rpm when a wave of torque rolls in. Glance down and you can see the pavement whizzing by through the gap between the door panel and roll cage. The fact that you're on the street in this thing is a hoot.





That said, it's not all adrenaline. There's more than expected play in the steering (tie rod ends?) and the brakes can be difficult to modulate before warming up. Grip is so big you'll have to hit the track to feel the limits. And even in 1993, the stock 308 gated gearbox would've handicapped the car in a race. You just can't rush it. The owner has the MOTEC traction control set quite aggressively. In second gear with about 3500 on the digital display I cracked the throttle and blurrrrrr! – the system cut spark and cut off my fun.

Fixing those things isn't hard. Finding a car this cool that alternately turns heads and frightens other drivers isn't. The owner has driven it about 150 miles at a sitting but that's not what you do with it (not if you like your hearing). This Goulash is for lapping your nearby road course or quick back road bombing on the weekend. It's half cooked and that's why it's cool.

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Sjalabais 104p · 21 hours ago +14

Wow, what a story! What I take with me is wondering how many hours of highly skilled labour this particular car has enjoyed.

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bluehillsmike · 20 hours ago +6

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Rust-MyEnemy 108p · 20 hours ago +10

I think it's exquisite, and tuff az phuq. I'm going to avert my eyes now in case it lashes out at me for looking at it funny.

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Scandinavian Flick ★ 111p · 20 hours ago +8

Amazing. I feel like this is the kind of crazy crap I'd do if I had crazy money. Almost as a counterpoint to the Bugatti article earlier, this is practical elegance. Aggressive lines that convey its purpose. I want...

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dead_elvis 93p · 19 hours ago +6

Dzus fasteners. They're good, but not god-like.

Reply 1 reply · active 18 hours ago Report

Sjalabais 104p · 18 hours ago +2

I happened to watch "300 - empire rising" tonight. Easy to see how ambition and reality might...eh...mismatch.

Reply Report

taborj 61p · 19 hours ago +4

This is awesome. I'd totally take that to the track every chance possible.

What I always wonder when reading about a "conversion" like this is -- what happened to the original, well, everything. You state they basically only used the engine, transmission and VIN from the original, so somewhere in Japan, at one point in time, there was a 308 GTS sitting around, no VIN, no engine and no transmission. But, presumably, everything else was

intact.

I like to think that the donor car was sold off, illegally and under the table, to someone from The Mid Night Club, who immediately put in a 1000+hp motor in it for blasting down the Wangan.

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 Tanshanomi (123p) · 18 hours ago +6  

I flat-out love it. If you can't dig this car, don't call yourself a car guy. You can call yourself a collector, connoisseur, purchaser or investor, or something like that if you wish, but if that's the case you're taking cars, life and yourself waaaaay too seriously.



Reply

Report

 GTXcellent (76p) · 18 hours ago 0  

love it. LOVE IT!



Reply

Report

 Irishzombieman★ (106p) · 18 hours ago +2  

I. Love. This. Car.
As a kid I watched every episode of Magnum, P.I. on their original aire dates. The 308/288 body style will forever be my favorite car, the thing I dream about when I wonder what it's like to be rich. If I ever get just enough money to buy a Ferrari, but not enough that I can quit my job, I'ma buy me a 308 and drive it on Mondays. That way Monday won't suck. Monday will be Ferrari day.

And I love that this car has been so thoroughly messed with for the purpose of driving it. And that all that messing about was done by motor heads. This car is fantastic.

I also love cars that piss off purists. I'd drive the crap out of it until the motor went, then put a small block Chevy into it. There is no cheaper horsepower on earth, and with the right exhaust, it could sound almost as good.

Reply

Report

 CABEZAGRANDE · 17 hours ago +2  

I actually kind of prefer the 288 converted 308s, because of the shorter wheelbase of the 308. It makes it look even more aggressive than the 288. This is something I've always wanted to do. I mean look at that thing! That is damn close to automotive perfection.

Reply

Report

 mdharrell (119p) · 17 hours ago +8  

I hate this car.

The fact that it qualifies for an antique plate makes me feel old.

Reply

2 replies · active 15 hours ago

Report

 FЯeeMan (97p) · 16 hours ago +5  

Your argument is inval...

Wait, I see your point. :(

Reply

Report

 smokyburnout (83p) · 15 hours ago +1  

The cutoff is only 20 years in CT, so they've started popping up on early 90s Civics already. They are at least updating the design for the first time in 50 years to reflect that people put them on things newer and less domestic than Model Ts

Reply

Report



wisc47 (87p) · 16 hours ago

+2

This isn't a Ferrari...calling it a Ferrari is selling it short.

Reply

Report



Van_Sarockin (111p) · 11 hours ago

+2

I like this a lot and think it's pretty handsome. Despite myself. I think I'm the only person on the planet that hates the 308. Thanks Magnum. This car eradicates most of the major styling cues, and gives it an entirely different character. Ferrari missed a trick, not doing this themselves.

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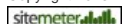
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