

**Juan Manuel Fangio arrives at the control checkpoint at Bologna during the 1956 Mille Miglia in s/n 0626. He drove solo for the 1,000 miles, in the cold and rain, and in this open car. A different breed.**



Image Courtesy Ronald Stern

The 290 MM sports racing car, with a 3.5 liter V-12 engine and a Scaglietti built body developed from the shape of the Mondial/Monza series, was produced in a small series of four models carrying chassis numbers 0606, 0616, 0626 and 0628, during early 1956. At this time, Ferrari's main sports racing car output was concentrated on the four cylinder models, which for that year was the 500 Testa Rossa.

Indeed from 1954, when the 500 Mondial model was introduced, the main sports racing car output from Ferrari had been with four cylinder models, with the Mondial being followed by the 735 Sport, 750 Monza, the 857 and 860 Monzas, the 500 Testa Rossa, 625 LM and the 500 TRC, the latter being a customer car for the 1957 season to Appendix C regulations. Ferrari returned to a more traditional V-12 engine for their mainstream sports racing models in late 1957 with the 250 Testa Rossa.

However, small series of V-12 engine models had been produced alongside the four cylinder examples. The 375 MM from 1953 carried forward into 1954, and evolved into the 375 Plus, with 250 Monzas the same year. In 1955, there was the 410 Sport, which didn't get to race until 1956, with the 290 MM being the main 1956 offering, evolving into the 315 S and 335 S for 1957.

The 12 cylinder models were normally Works entries for major races in the World Sports Car Championship, which in 1956 was comprised of five rounds - the Buenos Aires 1000 kms, the 12 Hours of Sebring, the Mille Miglia, the Nürburgring 1000 kms, and the Kristianstad G.P. of Sweden, between January and August.

In the first two rounds of the season, Ferrari honors were upheld by the four cylinder 860 Monza model, which took second overall in Argentina, after both 410 Sports suffered transmission failure (see *Cavallino* 157). At Sebring, the 860

Monzas were supreme, taking a one-two finish, with the Fangio/Castellotti car leading the Musso/Schell example.

The 290 MM made its debut in the Mille Miglia at the end of April, when the Factory entered a pair of them in the event, backed up by a pair of 860 Monzas. The 290 MMs were chassis s/n 0616 driven by Eugenio Castellotti, on race number 548, which was the overall winner, with the second example being chassis s/n 0626, which was driven by Juan Manuel Fangio on race number 600 to fourth position. They sandwiched the pair of 860 Monzas driven by Collins/Klemantaski and Luigi Musso, which were second and third respectively, in the final classification. As a point of interest, the race numbers in the Mille Miglia denote the cars' start time, i.e. "548" indicates that the car left the ramp at 5:48 am, making it easy for the organizers to calculate the total elapsed time for the car to complete the course.

The next race appearance for s/n 0626 was at the Nürburgring 1000 kms race in Germany a month later, which was the next round in the series. Here, it was driven by Phil Hill and Alfonso de Portago, and this was also Phil Hill's first European outing in a Works entered Ferrari, although he had previously had plenty of winning experience of the marque in the USA. He had driven a Luigi Chinetti entered and co-driven 340 MM Spyder, s/n 0324 AM, at the Reims 12 Hour Race in 1953, shortly after the Le Mans 24 Hour Race, which had been his European competition debut in an OSCA. At the Nürburgring, Phil Hill had been entered with Ken Wharton as co-driver, but the latter never took the wheel, as s/n 0626 was commandeered by the "senior" driver pairing of de Portago/Gendebien when their 290 MM, s/n 0628, was disqualified after de Portago went off the track on the first lap, and received outside assistance to get back into the race.

