





# 375

mm

SIMEON FOUNDATION  
AUTOMOBILE MUSEUM

**Rarity is next to Godliness in collectible cars. Of a handful of Ferrari 375 Mille Miglia spyders built, perhaps two escaped the ravages of competition. Incredibly, chassis no. 0412 AM**

**SPORTS CLASSIC** | **remained hidden in a California garage for most of its 37 years on the planet. John L. Stein and photographer David Gooley visited the scarlet heirloom.**

THE COMPETITION LIFE of your average Ferrari 375 Mille Miglia spyder was short, a lot shorter than the lives of most race drivers in 1954. Giuseppe Farina broke a 375 Plus into three parts in the 1954 Mille Miglia. Tony Farravano's Mille Miglia caught fire and burned at Sebring. And in Buenos Aires, an unknown Argentinian driver rolled his 375 MM to inaugurate a long series of crashes the car would endure during its career.

There are other stories, plenty of them. At one time or another, nearly all of the 16 Pininfarina-bodied 375 MM spyders built were raced, blown up, crashed, or were issued new engines, gearboxes, and even serial numbers by the Ferrari factory according to need. Road racing was and is a rough and tumble sport. Without question, this hard-edged existence builds history and character into the cars that survive. Yet another type of character is equally present in cars that do not compete.

This is the story of such a car. Ferrari 375 Mille Miglia no. 0412 AM is the equivalent of the Southern Colonel who wears, but has never used, a sword. What makes this most impressive is that the 375 MM was a competition car, built in extremely limited numbers primarily for privateer racers. It was fast, expensive, and — for a short while in the quickly evolving sports car world — highly competitive.

Like many sports cars, this particular Ferrari passed through several owners before landing in the hands of someone who fell in

love with it. That man was young microelectronics engineer Jeff Jeffrey, and the year was 1960. Several other gentlemen, including actor William Holden, had owned 0412 AM and then passed the baton for one reason or another. Only one other 375 MM is known to exist in such a virginal state.

Competition bred, the 375 Mille Miglia started life as venomous and capable as an eight-foot diamond-back. Young Aurelio Lampredi designed the Mille Miglia's fabulous V12 engine after World War II, and its superior performance soon fueled a demand for the V12 in Grand Prix, road racing, and GT cars alike.

And what an engine Lampredi had conceived. It remains as classy and alluring today as it was when introduced in 1950. Designed to beat the peaky, thirsty 1.5-liter supercharged Alfa straight eights in Formula One racing, it first appeared in 275 form, then 340, 375, and 375 Plus; in other words, 3.3, 4.1, 4.5, and 4.9 liters of displacement. (Ferrari model designations, at least in the early years, were directly linked to combustion chamber volume. Thus, each of the 375 MM's 12 cylinders displaces 375cc, for a total of 4.5 liters.)

Lampredi's engine uses a narrow 60-degree Vee configuration, with its single overhead camshafts driven by chains and its two valves per cylinder opened by roller cam followers and rocker arms to reduce friction and improve longevity. Each camshaft also drives its own magneto, each one a giant affair

sticking up between the engine and thin firewall.

The 340-horsepower engine is as long as it is lovely, fully occupying the 375 MM's generous four-foot engine bay. Atop the all-aluminum engine are triple four-barrel Webers, which ingest high octane gasoline through huge fuel rails and from a tank that holds better than 45 gallons.

## 30 YEAR AFFAIR

Mr. Jeffrey's 375 MM is not restored. At least, not in the Pebble Beach sense of the word. Yes, the engine has been rebuilt. The body, or most of it, has received a new layer of paint. And the upholstery has been replaced. Otherwise, the 375 MM is just as it was when Jeffrey first laid eyes on it 30 years ago.

As it has for decades, the 375 MM lives in an Orange County, California, suburb as conservative as the Ferrari is wild. The modest ranch-style homes are closely spaced with small yards. Major thoroughfares, and a nearby freeway, are separated from the houses by brick noise walls. It is your average *Wonder Years* neighborhood. Except that one of the two-car garages on the block contains a crimson Ferrari. And not just a 308 GTS or a 246 Dino, either. The priceless Mille Miglia that rolls out of the modest structure is as much an anomaly here as would be a Frank Lloyd Wright mansion.

The man behind the wheel knows it, but one gets the feeling he'd rather have things another way. To now-retired Jeffrey, the 375 MM is an old friend, pure and simple. The irony is that he bought the car almost on a whim. In 1960, Jeffrey was a young hotshot engineer and bachelor who liked sports cars and recognized the Ferrari for the engineering marvel it is. After a short wrestling match between heart and conscience, a comparative field trip to the Jaguar store, and a visit to his credit union, Jeffrey became the ecstatic owner of one used Ferrari 375 MM. At \$6,000, it was nearly half the price of a Los Angeles home.

## BLIND DATE

Now Jeffrey has graciously agreed to let us drive his car, but it's not been an easy deci-

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sion for him. Imagine having Hunter S. Thompson show up at the front door for a blind date with your daughter. Softly, Jeffrey suggests that he take the wheel first to demonstrate the car and to give us some field training. A decent idea.

The Mille Miglia, of course, is right-hand drive. In 1954, Ferrari's road racing pilots felt they could

better tell how close the car was to the edge of the road if they sat on the right, presumably so their right elbows could feel for rock walls and fence posts. Jeffrey drops into the simple bucket seat, centers the tall gear lever, and turns the ignition key mounted on the transmission tunnel. In the quiet of the old garage, the tick-tick of the fuel pump acts like a shot of adrenaline. He pushes the starter button and the motor whirs slowly as a dozen 9.0:1 pistons slide into motion. Then all 12 cylinders seemingly fire at once, and the Mille Miglia's four black tail pipes spill out a cry that is pure emotion.

To the imagination, it is the sound of the Mille Miglia, the sound of the Italian countryside, the sound of peasants cheering close to a narrow road. It is the sound of racing tires rushing along rough macadam and the dull *thwack* of pebbles striking aluminum, the shriek of a V12 erupting in song, the harmony of a French horn concerto. It is the sound of adventure.

Jeffrey depresses the clutch and the throwout bearing jingles like Santa's sleigh bells. His left hand jerks the aluminum shift knob left and down to first, and one foot deftly moves the stiff pedal. This is not an easy car to drive. It is rough and unrefined, and the controls expect you to do the work, to provide some intelligent input. So many cars today take care of us. They have zero bump steer. The steering is light and there's enough caster to self-

center the wheel after each apex. The brakes are responsive and strong. The transmissions have synchros and double synchros for easy gear changes. Give a smart chimp a week at Skip Barber's driving school and you've got yourself a winner.

But don't put him in a 1954 Mille Miglia Ferrari. It shares more with the US Forest Service's 1972 Ford F350 pickup than with any new BMW M3. But Jeffrey knows how to do it. His freckled hands find their familiar places on the wood-rimmed wheel, accurate to the millimeter. He double clutches each gear change quickly and with precision, and his left hand reaches instinctively to the turn signal paddle switch between the seats.

## FUEL STOP

After this fuel stop, we will get our chance. How incongruous to pull into a shiny Unocal station. Where are the galvanized dump cans, the Italian mechanics smoking in sweaty overalls, the pit boards streaked with chalk? A young attendant saunters up, warily. This looks interesting, he's thinking. But it could be a hoax. There are so many pretenders. "Ferrari, huh?" he finally ventures.

Jeffrey answers shyly as he must have a thousand times before. "Uh, huh," he says. He loves his car, but doesn't want to flaunt it. The attendant is still unsure. There are no Ferrari decals, just big numbers left over from this year's Mille Miglia. Finally he states his piece: "It looks like the Shelby."

We find our way to Santiago Canyon Road, a nearby two-lane stretching into the coastal mountains, while the Ferrari warms its 14 quarts of engine oil, its water, its gearbox and differential. The big Veglia tach is good for 8,000 rpm, and 3,000 rpm marks the beginning of the Ferrari's awesome ripping canvas wail. There's a wonderful powerband, too — nearly 4,000 rpm wide. Jeffrey suggests keeping the engine above 2,500, as the big Webers work better at speed. So does the rest of the car. A squeeze of the throttle transforms this rolling museum exhibit into a dizzy-





TO THE IMAGINATION, IT IS THE SOUND OF THE MILLE MIGLIA, THE SOUND OF THE ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE, THE SOUND OF PEASANTS CHEERING CLOSE TO A NARROW ROAD. IT IS THE SOUND OF RACING TIRES RUSHING ALONG ROUGH MACADAM AND THE DULL THWACK OF PEBBLES STRIKING ALUMINUM, THE SHRIEK OF A V12 ERUPTING IN SONG, THE HARMONY OF A FRENCH HORN CONCERTO. IT IS THE SOUND OF ADVENTURE"



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ing time machine. Pick a gear, pick a planet. The 375 MM is still awesomely fast. We use up two-thirds of the speedometer's 300 km/h face in a few heartbeats. Thirty years ago Jeffrey trailered the Mille Miglia to Bonneville, removed the mufflers, and ran 165 miles per hour down the salt.

Ahead lies an open road and the intoxicating sweep of the hand-formed aluminum hood, air scoop, and front fenders. Long and beautiful, they reflect the midday sky and clouds on a vast field of scarlet. There is so much input, so much noise. Least is a surprisingly smooth and quiet engine, laboring like a workshop full of sewing machines. Beside us is the whine of the 4-speed gearbox, churning beneath a rough sheet metal tunnel. And behind the comfortable headrest and rear cowling, the musical note of choice for our automotive century, a V12's exhaust.



**ABSOLUTE ORIGINAL**  
So much of this car is absolutely original. The steering wheel, of course, with sweat and dirt rubbed into the fine wood grain. A surprisingly clear Plexiglas wind-screen. The yellow prancing horse horn button, chipped but intact after 36 years and 36,565 kilometers. And the chromed switch gear, and gauges that run neatly along the modest dashboard, and the wiring looms that reside beneath it.

There is even a bit of rust on the original gear lever. How much more authentic can you get? It's an honest gear lever, strong and straight, with no H-pattern embossed on the ball end. Only a heavy, metallic feel uncompromised by Nylon bushings. It's also not easy to make a clean shift either up or down, although Jeffrey could do it neatly in his sleep. At least some Ferrari traits have not changed since.

We're in the middle of third gear on a tertiary road leading away from Santiago Canyon. Highway crews laid pavement down where the terrain allowed it, and so the road swings and dips at nature's will. It's narrow, perhaps a bit too narrow to feel comfortable in the Ferrari. This is a big car, and it has a long wheelbase to go with it—over 102 inches—although the track is conservative at 52 inches. The combination of right-hand drive, the reluctant gearbox, and a sudden clutch, and the sheer value of the thing make this one jaunt to be taken earnestly.

Most surprising is the brutish steering action, which goes a long way toward explaining why Juan Manuel Fangio, Dan Gurney, and many other drivers of the era were shaped so powerfully. This car wants to be mastered, it wants a willing pilot that can say with certainty where to turn in, when to countersteer, how much throttle to use. If you don't lead this beast, you're not really dancing.

Okay, so we're wallflowers on the Mille Miglia's dance floor. Anyway, we have to wait for photographer Gooley, who has obviously stopped to wait for us somewhere else. It's a nice enough day to be lounging inside a red Ferrari spyder by the side of a country road. We're actually at the edge of

a small town, parked beneath a couple of big oak trees. A sweet, late summer grassy smell drifts to us and mixes with a smell of hot engine and gearbox oils, and horses. Fifty feet away is a training pen and in it, a young girl leading a chestnut mare around on a lead. The horse runs in circles around the girl, nearly prancing.

Even as Jeff Jeffrey's Mille Miglia was being built in 1954, the 375 MM's days were numbered as a competition car. For the 375 Plus was already being built. In essence it was the same car, but with a more powerful 4.9-liter engine and a superior De Dion rear suspension. The 375 Plus would win numerous races, including the 1954 24 Hours of LeMans, before being replaced by the faster 410 Sport with its twin-plug ignition, and the original Testa Rossa, Ferrari's swan song for front-engine competition spyders.

In each case the new Ferraris proved superior, raced and won, and eventually proved inferior to somebody else's new car. Such is inevitable with racing. Meanwhile, as the Testa Rossa, the GTO, the rear-engine P Series, and the 512 and 312 came and went, Jeffrey's beloved 375 MM sat quietly in his garage, awaiting engine work and another chance at the world. It would sit like this for over two decades, and perhaps just as well. While sports cars were progressing from wire wheels to aerodynamics to multi-valve engines with computerized management systems, the red Mille Miglia spyder could only have become less impressive and less important. Not to mention dented, damaged, or burned to the ground in the process of doing what sports cars do.

It seems appropriate that the Mille Miglia would be reintroduced to the world in the 1990s, and not just to museum-goers. If Mr. Jeffrey has his way, yet another generation of car lovers will get to see, hear, and feel the presence of what was once among the world's best sports cars. A presence that will be decidedly authentic. Because you're most likely to see Jeffrey and the 375 MM at the Mille Miglia, at a concours d'élégance, or just out playing in the mountains above Los Angeles. Both enjoying their respective retirements, no doubt.

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