



Bellissima!

the ITALIAN AUTOMOTIVE RENAISSANCE 1945–1975

May 27–October 9, 2016

Ingram Gallery



This exhibition celebrates the visual dynamism and spirit of innovation characterizing coachbuilt cars, concept cars, and motorcycles produced in Italy during the post–World War II economic revival known as the Italian economic miracle (*il miracolo economico*), which encompassed not only automobiles but also architecture, fashion, and furniture. On loan from collections throughout the United States, the vehicles in the exhibition are among the greatest extant examples of Italian automotive design as it surged into international prominence.

During World War II, there was little need in Italy for innovative luxury vehicles, although Alfa Romeo surprisingly assembled a few 6C 2500 sports cars—occasionally with custom coachwork—for government officials and wealthy, influential civilians. Yet wartime work in aeronautics helped Italian engineers and designers become very familiar with principles such as lightweight body construction and streamlining, the use of sophisticated materials such as aluminum and magnesium, and powerful, high-revving aircraft engines.

At war's end, these innovations and enhancements, born out of military necessity, would be translated into automotive design and production. Unlike the Japanese, who did not have a substantial automotive history before the war, or the American auto industry, which had been converted to wartime production and was slow to offer totally new postwar designs, Italy had proven coachbuilders and automakers who were able to resume auto

production quickly. In the words of the designer Filippo Sapino, the Italian car industry “was like a giant, compressed spring” by the end of World War II, with the arrival of peace releasing its pent-up energy.¹

Italian automobile designers began to create sleek, low-slung *berlinettas* (coupes) that would win postwar races and inspire a legion of stunning road-going cars. New companies like Cisitalia and Ferrari used the resumption of auto racing as a platform to begin producing stylish, highly advanced road-going cars of great merit. Cisitalia began with lightweight racecars and then produced a Pinin Farina–designed, Fiat-powered sports coupe with a streamlined shape that captivated audiences wherever it was shown. For the first time, the hoodline was positioned lower than the front fenders, and a graceful roofline swept dramatically rearward in a shape that evoked the best aircraft practice.

Arthur Drexler, a highly influential curator at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art, praised this sleek new model, saying, “The Cisitalia’s body is slipped over its chassis like a dust jacket over a book. . . . Because the sloping hood lies between the two front fenders, it suggests low, fast power.”² In 1951, MoMA acquired a Cisitalia 202—the first car in its permanent collection—and has exhibited it from time to time over many years.





Enzo Ferrari ran the official Alfa Romeo racing team before the war. During the conflict, his company manufactured machine tools. After hostilities ended, Ferrari began building racecars with small but powerful twelve-cylinder engines. Encouraged by three-time Le Mans winner Luigi Chinetti Sr., his colleague in America, Ferrari built road-going chassis and retained Italy's finest *carrozzerie* (coachbuilders) to custom-build beautiful, sexy cars that soon caught the attention of wealthy glitterati, cinema stars, and influential industrialists. These clients relished the idea of exclusive, often bespoke automobiles, with powerful engines and advanced styling. Alfa Romeo, Lancia, Maserati, and smaller Italian carmakers soon followed suit; Ferruccio Lamborghini created a grand touring berlinetta that would rival Ferrari's.

With their startling designs and efficient manufacturing, Italian cars from the mid-century had an immense influence on the automotive industry around the world. The successful racing efforts of Alfa Romeo, Ferrari, Lancia, and Maserati ensured that Italian automakers dominated international competition. Lessons from racing were applied to the design of road cars, and Italy's auto industry helped pioneer an international styling renaissance. In 1954, *Road & Track*, America's top auto publication, declared, "The Italian influence leads the automotive design world. It remains consistent, commanding, spirited and graceful."³

Carrozzerie such as Allemano, Bertone, Boano, Ghia, Pininfarina, Touring, Vignale, and Zagato worked with carmakers in Italy as well as those in countries like England and Spain.

Italian coachbuilders designed and in some cases built bodies for makes like Nash, Hudson, Cunningham, and even Cadillac. Chrysler design chief Virgil Exner hired Luigi Segre and Carrozzeria Ghia to build a series of dramatically modern concept cars, like the Plymouth Explorer, Dodge Firearrow, and Chrysler Dart. The heavily promoted Forward Look styling intrigued American buyers and influenced many later production models.

Today, Italian cars from the three decades following the end of World War II, as well as examples from other countries with Italian-designed coachwork, are among the most valuable collector cars in existence. More than half a century after they were built, they intrigue and excite all who see them. In these galleries, experience and enjoy the creative connections that helped propel Italy to the global forefront of the automotive world.

KEN GROSS, guest curator

NOTES

1. Quoted in Winston Goodfellow, *Italian Sports Cars* (Osceola, WI: MBI, 2000), 46.
2. *8 Automobiles* exhibition catalog (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), 8. Drexler, who would become director of MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, curated four exhibitions devoted to cars during his tenure.
3. "Turin Auto Show," *Road & Track*, August 1954, 18.

ILLUSTRATIONS

COVER: 1954 Alfa Romeo BAT 7. The Blackhawk Collection.
Image © 2016 Peter Harholdt

INSIDE FRONT COVER: 1955 Chrysler Ghia Gilda. Collection
of Kathleen Redmond and Scott Grundfor. Image © 2016
Michael Furman

PAGE 3: 1950 Cisitalia 202 SC. The Collier Collection @ The Revs
Institute®. Image © 2016 Peter Harholdt

PAGE 4: 1970 Lancia Stratos HF Zero. The XJ Wang Collection.
Image © 2016 Peter Harholdt

GLOSSARY

berlina | The Italian term for a five-passenger luxury sedan.

berlinetta | The Italian term for “coupe,” a two-door, two-seat car with a fixed roof.

cabriolet | An automobile resembling a coupe but with a roof that folds down, commonly called a convertible.

carmaker | An automobile manufacturer such as Alfa Romeo or Ferrari; during the period of this exhibition, it was common for the carmaker to supply only the chassis and engineering of the automobile.

carrozeria (plural carrozzerie) | The Italian word for a coachbuilding workshop; a shop where auto bodies are designed and assembled after receiving the chassis from the carmaker.

chassis | The physical frame, wheels, and machinery of an automobile, on which the body is supported. Most of the cars in *Bellissima!* feature a chassis from a carmaker and a custom body made at a carrozzeria.

coach work | Auto body work; the term derives from the carriage-building trade that preceded the automotive industry.

coefficient of drag (Cd) | The ratio of the drag or pull on an automobile moving through air to the product of the velocity and surface area of the body; automotive designers use Cd to measure resistance as they create aerodynamic vehicles.

concept car | A prototype automobile showcasing new styling and/or new technology. Concept cars are usually displayed at trade shows to gauge popular reception.

FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) | The international organization that runs and regulates many auto races.

homologation | The process of a car becoming eligible to compete in certain international racing classes. The carmaker must meet requirements such as production quotas (to prove that the vehicle is available to the general public) and comply with technical guidelines for chassis construction and other specs.

production car | A mass-produced vehicle, in which identical models are offered for sale to the public and can be legally driven on public roads.

streamlining | The design practice of contouring an auto body to offer the least possible resistance to a current of air, maximizing efficiency and speed.

IN THIS EXHIBITION

1946 Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 S

Collection of Christopher Ohrstrom, The Plains, Virginia

1950 Cisitalia 202 SC

The Collier Collection @ The Revs Institute®, Naples, Florida

1952 Cunningham C3 Continental

The Collier Collection @ The Revs Institute®, Naples, Florida

1952 Lancia B52 Aurelia PF200 Spider

Collection of Linda and Bill Pope, Paradise Valley, Arizona

1953 Fiat 8V Supersonic

Collection of Paul Gould, Patterson, New York

1953 Alfa Romeo BAT 5

The Blackhawk Collection, Danville, California

1954 Alfa Romeo BAT 7

The Blackhawk Collection, Danville, California

1955 Alfa Romeo BAT 9

The Blackhawk Collection, Danville, California

1955 Chrysler Ghia Gilda

Collection of Kathleen Redmond and Scott Grundfor,
Arroyo Grande, California

1955 Lincoln Indianapolis

Collection of James E. Petersen Jr., Houston, Texas

1955 Maserati A6G 2000 Zagato

Collection of David Sydorick, Beverly Hills, California

1957 Moto Guzzi V-8

Collection of the Gilbert Family, Los Angeles, California

1961 Ferrari 400 Superamerica Pininfarina Series II Aerodinamico

Collection of Bernard and Joan Carl, Washington, DC

1962 Ferrari 250 GTO

Collection of Bernard and Joan Carl, Washington, DC

1963 ATS 2500 GT

Collection of Bernard and Joan Carl, Washington, DC

1963 Chrysler Turbine Car

Collection of FCA, Auburn Hills, Michigan

1966 Ferrari 365 P Tre Posti

Collection of the Luigi Chinetti Trust, Stuart, Florida

1968 Bizzarrini 5300 Strada

Collection of Don and Diane Meluzio, York, Pennsylvania

1970 Lamborghini Miura S

Collection of Morrie's Classic Cars, LLC, Long Lake, Minnesota

1970 Lancia Stratos HF Zero

The XJ Wang Collection, New York, New York

1973 MV Agusta 750 Sport

Collection of Peter Matthew Calles, Bethesda, Maryland

1974 Ducati 750 Super Sport

Collection of Somer and Loyce Hooker, Brentwood, Tennessee

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