

THE 1953 SCUDERIA MILANO RUGGERI-SPELUZZI AIR-COOLED TRANSVERSE-8 2.5-LITRE FORMULA 1 PROJECT

Here Bonhams is delighted to offer for sale by auction one of the great 'might-have-been' projects from Formula 1 racing history. It comprises nothing less than a kind of Italian-manufactured forerunner of the rear-engined, transverse straight-8 engined Bugatti Type 251 prototype, conceived and 'almost' completed in Milan over the seven or eight-year period immediately preceding the Molsheim machine's one-off race appearance in the 1956 French Grand Prix at Reims-Gueux. The Ruggeri-Speluzzi would never reach so far, and its motor racing debut – in part perhaps dependent upon the result of this very Sale – has yet to be made...

The project's story began in 1947 with the enthusiastic Milanese brothers Arnaldo and Arialdo Ruggeri, of Busto Arsizio outside the city. Their Scuderia Milano racing team had been very active with Maserati cars – campaigned up to and including the Indianapolis 500-Miles of 1947. They then engaged the technical qualification and expertise of engineering Professor Mario Speluzzi of the Milan Politecnico institute, and technician Enrico Franchini to improve and perfect their ageing stable of Maserati vettura and Grand Prix cars. First fruit of this cooperation would be the Maserati-Milan highly-supercharged 4-cylinder 1.5-litre design of 1949-50, but into the early 1950s as support for the old 1.5-litre supercharged/4.5-litre unsupercharged Grand Prix Formula evaporated, major competition at Grand Prix level fell back upon unsupercharged 2-litre Formula 2 at World Championship level through 1952-53.

A replacement, entirely postwar Formula 1 had been proposed and accepted by the FIA governing body. It was to take effect on January 1 1954, would apply until 1957, and while it slashed the supercharged engine allowance to only 750cc, it offered unsupercharged engines a full 2500cc capacity. A first Ruggeri-Speluzzi engine is believed to have been completed and tested during 1953. Prof. Speluzzi equipped the prototype unit with Solex carburettors and there is evidence that it was test run for at least eight hours on one of his Milan Politecnico department's test-beds, delivering a reputed 310bhp at an ear-splitting 9,000rpm. A second engine – equipped in this case with eight dell'Orto motor-cycle carburettors, was then tested in the Scuderia Milano's workshops, again with very promising results.

Renowned American motoring historian Griffith Borgeson would later describe how the project's subsequent 1970s owner – Giovanni Litrico – told him of being visited by one of the elderly Ruggeri brothers, who upon seeing the remains cried "La mia macchina!", and burst into tears. He then explained how the initial Speluzzi straight-8 engine did not feature an integral spur-gear transaxle, while its successor was more compact and did include the transmission, such a distinctive feature of the later Gioachino Colombo-designed Bugatti 251. Indeed there are so many similarities between the two projects that knowledge of the former must surely have informed work upon the latter...

The transverse-mounted air-cooled straight-8 engine itself was effectively an all-aluminium unit with a quoted bore and stroke of 72mm x 76.5mm, displacing 2490cc.



Meanwhile, a chassis intended for the new Ruggeri-Speluzzi 'cross-engined' project had been designed primarily by Arialdo Ruggeri, featuring amongst other factors within-the-wheelbase pannier fuel tanks a la Vittorio Jano's magnificent 1954-55 Lancia D50 V8 and a sophisticated suspension system with driver-adjustable torsion-bar springing. He later recalled to Ing. Vittorio Fano, Secretary of the Associazione Italiana per la Storia dell'Automobile' for the *Manovella* magazine, that construction of the car had commenced in the Milano workshop in 1952, and that the prototype was ready to run early in 1954. He further claimed that Milano's sometime senior driver, Luigi 'Gigi' Villorosi, tested the completed car at Monza Autodrome, reaching a top speed of 330km/h (200mph)...which is extremely unlikely, but typical of the wildly exaggerated contemporary claims made by all Italian manufacturers from Ferrari and Maserati down...

Sadly, however, the Ruggeri brothers proved completely unable to raise the financial backing necessary to continue racing development seriously into the new Formula. Catalan Spanish racing driver Juan Jover – a long-time friend of Arialdo Ruggeri's – offered some assistance which sponsored mock-up assembly of a third-generation power unit before all hope of completing the car to race-ready trim was finally abandoned, reputedly as late as 1955-56. Arialdo Ruggeri's financial problems had finally overwhelmed his resources, and reputedly he resolved them by emigrating to Argentina.

It appears that a body-panel set – designed to streamline only the car's nose while leaving its complex rear-mounted mechanical aggregate exposed to the airstream – was then scrapped, while numerous related components which might have been of use in alternative ways were "lent, liberated or sold" to other related team cars or elsewhere within the Italian racing community. Ultimately, around 1958, leading Italian motor sporting figure Count Giovanni 'Johnny' Lurani purchased the car together with all remaining parts – which possibly did not include the second engine.

He then retained the car in his famous home garage – decorated upon its interior walls by the autographs of his many illustrious racing-fraternity visitors – until the early 1970s when he and his classic car-dealing friend Corrado Cupellini offered it for sale. The entire collection of Ruggeri-Speluzzi components and related drawings was eventually acquired by Turin-based Sicilian Giovanni Litrico. He apparently made some attempt to complete the project, where Ruggeri had failed. But modern-era work got little further than an attempt to complete the transmission, while Signor Litrico subsequently displayed the third or mock-up engine in at least one *Salone dell'Automobili* exhibition in Turin's Valentino Park hall during the late 1980s or early 1990s.

Prof. Giovanni Speluzzi had been one of the automotive world's leading experts in supercharging technology and he was evidently a highly charismatic, much-admired and popular instructor at the Milan Politecnico, counting both 'Johnny' Lurani himself and Ing. Fano amongst students who had been both charmed and inspired by his work. Perhaps an inclination towards glamorous theory as much as practicality is revealed by Count Lurani's recollection of Speluzzi as having been "...a bit of a poet, as well as a clever engineer".

In recent years the entire project has been saved for future posterity by the current vendor, himself a highly-respected Italian car specialist of particular Maserati renown. It is offered here as viewed, accompanied by "a mountain of spares including a complete spare engine. The drawings for the chassis seem to have come out of the backdoor of Colombo's office whilst he was designing the Bugatti in Milan...and some of them even appear to have had the Bugatti name cut out of them...".

Plainly the full story of this intriguing Ruggeri-Speluzzi project and that of the Colombo-designed Bugatti 251 remains to be fully disentangled, but as a potentially staggeringly-exotic and glamorous Historic Grand Prix car project we absolutely commend this most remarkable piece of early-postwar Italiana – a fabulous beast, indeed.

£140,000 - 180,000
€170,000 - 220,000

