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DESIGN

What's New at Pininfarina? The Do-It-Yourself Ferrari

By PHIL PATTON

THE Ferraristas are restless.

Discontent is nothing new to these hard-core devotees of all things Ferrari, whose grumbling about the latest models is a tradition as old and deep as their affection for the marque. The complaints tend to fade away once the acolytes get used to the new cars.

But in recent years, especially since the introduction of the 612 Scaglietti in 2004, complaints about Ferrari design seem to have increased among owners and fans — in magazines, on blogs and in online forums.

Many of the barbs are aimed at Pininfarina, the Italian firm that has been the primary designer of Ferraris for more than half a century. The sniping redoubled in response to the most recent model, the Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano.

What is new, however, is that Pininfarina is responding. As if to answer the grumblers, Pininfarina has begun building one-of-a-kind Ferraris and has even established a special projects division to let owners custom design their cars.

If you don't like the Ferraris we design, the company seems to be saying, why don't you do your own?

One aficionado who took up the challenge was James Glickenhaus, an investment manager, film producer and Ferrari collector from Westchester County, N.Y., who invested an estimated \$4 million to build a supercar tailored for him. This one-of-a-kind supercar, called the P4/5, can be seen today at the Americana Manhasset Concours d'Élégance on Long Island.

Andrea Pininfarina, chairman and chief executive officer of Pininfarina, said in a recent telephone interview that the special projects division, which developed the P4/5, was about aesthetics as much as commerce. "It is a chance to demonstrate our unique creativity," he said.

"It reinforces our ability to make tailor-made designs." Mr. Pininfarina is the grandson of Battista Pinin Farina, who founded the legendary coachbuilder and design house in 1930.

In the case of Mr. Glickenhaus's car, inspiration came from a Ferrari racecar of the 1960's, the P3/4. Pininfarina fitted a new body of carbon fiber and metal, along with a new interior, to a chassis and drivetrain from the \$1 million Ferrari Enzo.

A global positioning satellite navigation system was added, as was an iPod-based audio system. The driver's seat was molded to a cast of Mr. Glickenhaus's body. The process took place with Ferrari's cooperation, of course, but it was directed by Pininfarina.

Mr. Glickenhaus was in Italy throughout the birthing process, from the first hand sketches through the fabrication of the carbon fiber body to the wind-tunnel testing of the final product.

"Pininfarina is the greatest designer in the world," said Mr. Glickenhaus, whose collection includes a Ferrari 330 P3/4 believed to have raced at Le Mans in 1967. "Pininfarina creates real works of art."

Another of Pininfarina's one-of-a-kind projects was a car for Peter S. Kalikow, the New York developer and chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The car is a tweaked Ferrari 612 — what Bill Gates might call Release 1.1 of the Scaglietti. Mr. Kalikow and Mr. Pininfarina call it the 612K.

Such special-project cars have a long history. The 612 production car was inspired by a special commission for Roberto Rossellini, the film director. Mr. Pininfarina said such personal models would continue. "We will do two or three a year," he said. "It shows how we can offer selected customers a unique opportunity: customized design, engineering and construction of their car."

Mr. Pininfarina and his brother Paolo, who heads the company's product division called Extra, represent the third generation of the family in the executive offices. "The future of our relationship to Ferrari is brilliant," he said, promising that models for 2008 and 2009 would bear him out.

Some people — perhaps most reasonable people — might see the collaboration of Pininfarina and Ferrari as a great success, producing a long procession of astonishing and lovely cars. Others, however, see the last two or three as not quite as good as those that came before. These are often the same critics who ridicule Ferrari's efforts to make its sports cars more practical for daily driving while also serving as trophies of technology.

Christopher Mount, curator of the 1994 exhibition "Designed for Speed: Three Automobiles by Ferrari" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, said criticism of Ferrari design was perennial. "It goes in waves," he added. "People complained about the F40. Ten or 12 years ago people were saying the cars were too tame, that the company should get rid of Pininfarina."

In response to the 599, Joe DeMatio of Automobile magazine urged Ferrari to "dump Pininfarina." Others have criticized the car as too conventional, too Japanese or too American. Some suggested that without the trademark flying buttresses connecting the cabin to the rear deck, the car looked like a Corvette.

In the midst of this grousing, Pininfarina announced the departure of Ken Okuyama, the firm's director of design and the creator of the Enzo, the Scaglietti and the Maserati Birdcage 75 concept car. Those who find something lacking in the Scaglietti and 599 have inevitably linked Mr. Okuyama's departure to the criticism.

The press release announcing the departure was oddly worded. "The company's decision comes as a result of the various external activities Ken Okuyama was carrying out beyond his responsibilities within Pininfarina." To some Ferraristas, this suggested that Mr. Okuyama had lacked concentration on his day job. He had worked on a line of nonautomotive products outside Pininfarina under his own name.

But Pininfarina might also be accused of having its own distractions: many design and engineering clients and projects designing shoes and kitchens, whirlpools for Jacuzzi and cellphones for Motorola — even a boutique hotel, the Keating, in San Diego.

The company has long had businesses that extend far beyond its relationship with Ferrari. For several years, it has engineered as well as designed niche models for larger carmakers including Alfa Romeo, Mitsubishi and Ford in Europe. It has now added oversight of production to the design and engineering functions, notably in the case of the new Volvo C70 convertible and the Alfa Romeo Brera.

But design is the critical test of Pininfarina's soul. Mr. Pininfarina said the decision on a new design chief was critically important. "It will be a matter of months, not of days or of weeks, before I choose," he said. "I am not sure whether he should come from inside or outside the company. I will consider this thoroughly."

In the interim, Mr. Pininfarina will hold the title of chief designer. The choice might come from inside the firm's studios in Cambiano, near Turin — perhaps one of the company's three chief designers, Guglielmo Cartia, Fabrizio Valentini or Lowie Vermeersch. Perhaps it will be

another figure from the company. One name that has been mentioned is Jason Castriota, who did the P4/5.

Auto designers around the world display red Ferrari model cars in their offices; admiration for them is neutral turf. Bob Boniface, director of the advanced design center for General Motors, who grew up driving his father's collection of Ferraris and other Italian cars, said, "Ferraris developed Italian pride when the country was still poor after World War II. They showed the touch of the modeler and designer."

This intensity of feeling is matched by the Ferraristas. Some collectors say there have not been any real Ferraris since the Daytona — a car that dates to 1968. Ferraris are as much legend as brand, and Mr. Kalikow's brief to the designers of his special 612 has already become legendary. The charge was to change the basic car only slightly — so slightly, in fact, that only 10 percent of Ferrari owners would notice the difference.

Some people buy Ferraris to impress people. Others buy Ferraris to impress other Ferrari owners.

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