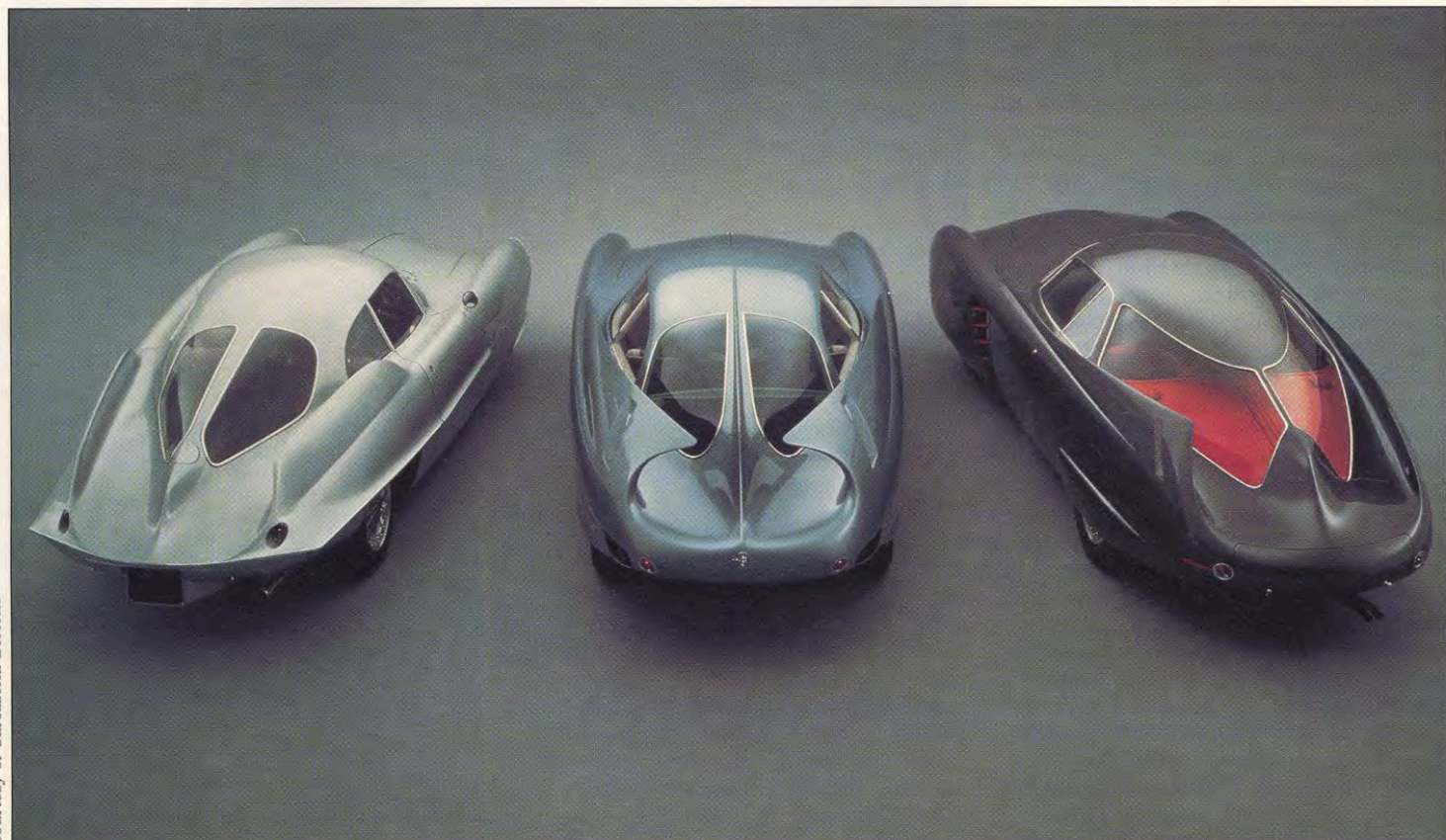


FRANCO SCAGLIONE



courtesy of Carozzeria Bertone

UNSUNG MASTER OF AERODYNAMIC DESIGN

The name is pronounced *scalyóneh*, and throughout most of the fifties and sixties its bearer was recognized rather universally as being one of the world's finest designers of car bodies. Most specialists in that field continue to rank him among the greats of coachbuilding history. He was an artist whose remarkable taste in sculptural form was blended with an instinctive feeling for the laws of fluid dynamics, and out of these ingredients he gave birth to a one-man school. About 40 of his designs were realized in glass and metal over that two-decade span. They rarely went beyond the prototype or one-off stage; most were intriguingly beautiful, and some were sublime.

According to Nuccio Bertone, for and with whom Franco Scaglione worked for eight years, the reason why so few of those cars were produced in series was that Franco was a sketch artist, with no grounding in shop and series-production practice. Thus, while perfectly banal designs made fortunes for others, Franco's material recompense was never

by Griffith Borgeson



courtesy of the author

more than "adequate" in the words of his daughter, Giovanna, and, according to Bertone, he always spent it immediately. The trend of styling evolved away from his instinctive idiom, and in 1976 he turned his back on the world which had been his very life. He disappeared so totally that all who had known him gave him up for dead, and he was referred to as such by the press.

He remained forgotten by all but a few until June of 1992, when Maurizio Tabucchi, a writer for the important magazine *AutoCapital*, found himself in a small town in the back country of Tuscany, where he stumbled upon the famous designer, in the flesh. The journalist requested an interview, but Franco, feeling abandoned by the world and suffering from advanced lung cancer, refused, asking that his right to privacy be respected. For reasons which we shall consider later, he called Tabucchi back in March 1993. It was in the June issue of the Milanese magazine that it became known to his old milieu that Franco was still alive. Within less than

two weeks of seeing himself revived in print he well and truly died, as letters from old admirers poured in.

Francò Vittorio Scaglione was born in Florence on September 26, 1916. I first met him in 1963, when he was turning 47. He was slender, stood about five feet six inches tall, and made the impression of being a bit frail. He had pale skin, chestnut hair, and light green eyes. He was well-bred, polite, and very serious. He was one of the first people whom I wanted to meet upon setting up headquarters in Turin. This was because my daily transportation in California for six years had been one of his Arnolt-Bristol competition spiders, and it was one of the most satisfying machines that I ever had experienced (see SIA #132). A very close power/weight ratio assured its spirited performance. And the body, along with its sensuous beauty, slipped through the air with an uncanny lack of turbulence. In learning about that car I also learned about his past.

He had a gift for drawing, which manifested itself in his early childhood. He loved cars and aircraft, and they are largely what he drew. He had a good formal education and on entering the University of Florence, he chose to specialise in aeronautical engineering. Nicely launched, he was drafted into the army in 1938 and sent to an officers' training school at Pavia. With Italy's entry into World War II in May 1940, Second Lieutenant Scaglione volunteered to serve in the 31st Sappers Battalion on the Yugoslav front. In September of the following year he left for the North African front on the motorship *Neptunia* which, on the night of the



courtesy of the author (2)

Facing page, top: Considered by some to be Scaglione's greatest designs, the trio of Alfa BATs. **Bottom:** Franco Scaglione discusses with Nuccio Bertone, in car, the exquisite Arnolt-Bristol design. **This page, above:** Scaglione's first design to be realized in metal, the cyclops-eyed '52 Fiat Abarth 1500 coupe. **Below:** The exceedingly rare Arnolt-Bristol coupe. Only two were built.

16th, was torpedoed and sunk by the British submarine *Upholder*. Many hands were lost, but Franco was picked up by an Italian torpedo boat after spending seven hours in the water. Finally arriving in Libya, he was taken prisoner by the British at El Duda on Christmas Day. Hauled to Cairo, he was put on the *Ile de France* (serving as a troop ship) and taken to India, where he spent two years in a concentration camp at Deradun, then three more in another camp at Yol, at the foot of the Himalayas. He returned to Italy on December 26, 1946, after five years and a day of imprisonment. Mistreatment of inmates was rare, he said, but the elementary necessities of life were lacking, and the only activities served no purpose. "It had

to be lived to be imagined," he said. This is one key to understanding Franco's character to some degree, including his iron control over the expression of emotion.

He returned to an Italy in a state of economic, societal, and physical ruin. He was 30 years old and in no mood to return to university life. He found things to do and continued to draw cars — cars that would owe much of their high performance to aerodynamic efficiency, cars in tune with a future that he could sense. It finally occurred to him in 1951 to propose his services as a designer to all of the active specialist coachbuilders in Italy. Only two took the trouble to reply: Pinin Farina and Bertone, who were willing to look at his ideas. His first





Above and below: The BAT 5, first of the three aerodynamic and aesthetic masterpieces from Scaglione's pen, was completed in 1953. **Bottom:** 1954 BAT 7. Inspiration for the Corvette split-window coupé?



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continued

try that year was with Pinin, and their relationship fell apart in less than two months. He moved on to Bertone, where his career began.

The first fruit of their collaboration arrived in 1952, and what I have learned about both men gives a strong feeling that Nuccio's influence upon all of his designers has been a very benign one. There is confusion as to which was the first Scaglione-signed body, there having been a widespread belief down through the years that Franco had done the Arnolt MGs, coupés and cabriolets. In reality, those sleek designs were among the very early freelance works of Giovanni Michelotti, and they bear no hint of the Scaglione touch. His work's first manifestation in metal was the Bertone-built Fiat Abarth 1500 of 1952. It was pure Scaglione and, central headlight aside, it anticipated the BAT series to come. The voluptuous fenders, which seemed like thirties Figoni et Falaschi come of age, quickly became a house hallmark, known in professional circles as "*parafanghi Bertone*."

The Italian industry had abandoned

the ladder-type frame in favor of monocoque construction, thus dealing a death blow to traditional coachbuilding. Nuccio Bertone reacted in 1952 by going afield to England, via the importer in Rome, and obtaining a pair of MG ladder-frame chassis on which to bolt the Michelotti one-offs, the better to attract



visitors to his stand at that fall's Turin Show. The idea of building more than one of each was non-existent and, in fact, the chassis were on loan from Rome. The cars were seen at the show by a small-scale importer from Chicago named S.H. "Wacky" Arnolt. In them he immediately recognized products that he could market in the USA, and he said casually to Nuccio, "I like these cars. I'd like to buy them." "Both of them?" their builder asked. "No," said Wacky, "I'd like a hundred of each to start with." In the mind of Nuccio Bertone this incident changed the course of history for post-World War II Italian coachbuilders by opening the way to them as producers in considerable series.

Arnolt's MG operation resulted in 380 of those cars coming out of Bertone's old shop in Corso Peschiera in Turin. To Nuccio's enduring credit he met the challenge successfully of converting from artisan techniques to production in ever-growing volume. This joint success encouraged Wacky to conceive a more ambitious sports car, the one based on the British Bristol two-liter chassis which became the Arnolt-Bristol. Scaglione designed the bodies for it: a stark competition *barchetta*, a street version with full road equipment, and a beautiful coupé, of which only a couple were made. Total production of these cars was 180 units.

All of these bodies were strictly hand-made. There were no metal dies, and elements such as the Arnolt-Bristol fenders could not have been stamped even if that investment had been made. The pieces were shaped to fit one or more wooden forms and were welded together, then filed and sanded. The end result looked as though it had been sculpted by machine from a solid mass of steel or silver. Nuccio told me that he made no profit from those cars that he built for Arnolt.



courtesy of the author (2)

He went along for the ride, in order to gain experience in volume production and to establish himself in that field. Scaglione's inspired designs were cornerstones of the success which came.

Alfa Romeo, traditionally a very small-volume car manufacturer, was the first to draw the conclusions inherent in the Arnolt-Bertone phenomenon: "If an American importer can make money by buying chassis in England, shipping them to Genoa, trucking them to Turin, fitting them with bodies, then getting them to Chicago, we are overlooking a good thing." This was the feeling of Alfa president Giuseppe Luraghi and technical director Orazio Satta, with both of whom Scaglione had close and cordial relations for many years. The first project that Alfa assigned to Bertone and his top consulting designer was for a production coupé to go on the Disco Volante 1900 competition chassis. This resulted in the 2000 Sportiva which made its bow at the Turin Show in '54. A *barcetta* version also was done one-off, but no production took place, perhaps because it would not have been economically viable. However, also back in '53, Alfa assigned to Carrozzeria Bertone a project which carried the name *Berlina Aerodinamica Tecnica*, BAT for short. The object of the exercise was to explore aerodynamic possibilities of closed bodies tailored to the rather new 1900 chassis, the marque's first venture into relatively large-volume production. Working closely with Satta and others at Alfa, as well as with Nuccio, Scaglione produced a series of studies, the fifth of which was produced as a one-off called the BAT 5. It was stupendous then, and it remains so today. It was pure Scaglione, going back to the Fiat Abarth and ahead to the IMX in feeling and form. It catapulted

Above and below: Prototype 1954 Alfa Romeo 2000 Sportiva coupe looks positively conservative compared to final BAT 9, built in 1955 and still startling to behold today.



Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale

The Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale was a masterpiece which did great credit to the designers of its engine and chassis, and which stands as a monument to Scaglione's mastery of his medium. There is widespread confusion about how many of these machines were built. In an article on the cars in *AutoCapital* for June 1993, Carlo Chiti says that a production run of 50 cars was envisaged at the outset, but that only 18 were made. He adds that two prototypes were built in their entirety at Autodelta and the remainder at Carrozzeria Marazzi, also in the outskirts of Milan. In his famous "bible" of Alfa production, Luigi Fusi lists the serial numbers for 25 chassis. Today Bruno Bonini, who participated in the original project, states that he put only six such cars through their baptism on road and racing circuit.

Signora Elvira Ruocco, the able head of Alfa's Historical Documentation Center, says :

"We consider that on the same chassis were realized the Pininfarina 33 Coupé and the 33 Wedge, as well as the Giugiaro 33 Iguana. The total number of chassis produced was 11."

The Scaglione 33 Stradale were capable of a top speed of about 160 mph and of burning rubber from zero to 62 mph in a shade under five seconds. The cars' price tag was over five times that of the contemporary Ferrari 365 Coupé, which tells what one needs to know about the Stradale's restricted market potential. One of these cars is said to have been acquired by aircraft and motorcycle tycoon Count Corrado Agusta. The Shah of Iran, always a man of impeccable automotive taste, added one to his personal *écurie*.

courtesy of the author (2)



Left: Alfa Giulietta Sprint coupe in prototype form as produced at Alfa and, **Right,** in production guise after refinement by Scaglione.

Scaglione gave it rendered the car exquisitely perfect, and an all-time classic. When production of that basic body was suspended ten years later, Bertone had built 31,181 of them.

Another absolute high point in Scaglione's career in coachbuilding art and in automotive aerodynamics was the Giulietta Sprint Speciale coupé, which first appeared in 1957. Nuccio used this divine machine as an example of Bertone's inability to design a car for viable production, saying that Alfa "severely penalized" the carrozzeria on this account. Luraghi told him, "You should build just one — for me!"

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continued

Bertone, Alfa, and its designer into positions of world distinction. BATs 7 and 9 were built in '54 and '55, and Nuccio assured me that, when the acronym was created, no one was aware of the English-language pun, relative to some-

what bat-wing fenders. Bertone's real entry into large-scale production came in 1954 with the Alfa-Romeo Giulietta Sprint, one of the more significant phenomena in Italian automotive history, and a whole saga in itself. The general form and the engineering for this body had been developed by Alfa itself. The rough "mule" was turned over to Bertone for professional refinement. That which he and

Franco's stylish fastback coupé for the rear-engined German NSU Sport-Prinz was manufactured from 1958 through 1967. Bertone built 2,715 units and Drauz of Heilbronn, Germany, 18,116, for a total of 20,831. This was Franco's last body to be made in anything approaching such numbers.

After his definitive break with Bertone in 1959, the men never saw each other

The Cars of Franco Scaglione

YEAR	CAR	BUILDER	UNITS PRODUCED
1952	Fiat Abarth 1500 Cabriolet	B	1
1953	Ferrari Abarth 166 MM	B	1
	Fiat 8V Spider	B	1
	Alfa Romeo BAT 5	B	1
	Arnolt-Bristol Spider, Coupé	B	180
1954	Alfa Romeo BAT 7	B	1
	Alfa Romeo 2000 Sportiva Spider, coupé	B	2
	Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint 54-62	B	24,084
1955	Alfa Romeo BAT 9	B	1
	Alfa Romeo Giulietta Spider	B	1
1956	Fiat Abarth 760 T.215A & 216	B	2
1957	Aston-Martin DB2/4	B	1
	Jaguar XK150	B	1
	Fiat 1100 TV	B	1
1958	Alfa Romeo Abarth 1000 Coupé	B	1
	NSU Sport-Prinz Coupé 58-67	B, D	20,831
1959	Alfa Romeo 2000 Sole	B	1
	Maserati 3500 GT	B	1
	Fiat Osca 1500	B	1
	Alfa Romeo Giulietta Sprint Speciale 59-62	B	1,252
1960	Porsche Abarth GTL 365B 1600 GS Carrera Corsa	V	26
1962	ATS 2500 GT Berlinetta	A	8
	Alfa Romeo Giulia Sprint 62-64	B	7,107
1963	Lamborghini 350 GTV Coupé	T	141
	Prince 1500 Sprint (Japan)	PS	1
	Stanguellini Guzzi Colibri Record		1
	Giulia Sprint Speciale 63-65	B	1,400
	Apollo Buick GT	I	
1964	Ventura Buick	S	1
1966	Titania Veltro 1500	S	1
1967	Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale Coupé	AD, M	6
1970	Apollo Buick	I	
	IMX Italia Ford V8	I	
1971	Indra Spider/Cabrio Opel 2800	I	
1972	Indra Coupé Opel 2800 or 5800 V8	I	
	Murena	I	5

A = Allemano; AD = Autodelta; B = Bertone; D = Drauz; I = Intermeccanica; M = Marazzi; P = Prince; S = Scaglione
T = Touring; V = Viarengo e Filippone

courtesy of the author



Left: 1956 Fiat Abarth streamliner, a single seater for attacking small displacement speed records, shared aerodynamic purity with Scaglione's road cars. **Right:** Scaglione's sublime Giulietta Sprint Speciale coupe proposal with a grille design more suited to Ferrari than Alfa. **Below:** First Lamborghini was a stillborn Scaglione effort.



courtesy of Craig Morningstar

again, and Franco was largely inactive until 1962. Then he created the body for the exciting and highly promising Chiti-designed 2.5-liter ATS. Test driver Teodoro Zeccoli worked with him on perfecting its aerodynamic form, and the three men would work together again at Autodelta. Lamentably, only about eight ATS had been built when dissension among its owners killed the enterprise, which might have become a rival of Ferrari.

In 1963 Franco had the privilege of doing the body for the original Lamborghini, the 350 GTV. Viewed from side and front, it was quite up to his standards, but the rear-end treatment found few admirers. In plan view the "greenhouse" tapered, leaving room for only one rear seat. This 2+1 layout and a dead-flat slab between the rear fenders had no future. Like Giotto Bizzarrini, who had designed the four-cam V-12 engine, Franco had to engage a lawyer in order to be paid. He did no further work for Lamborghini. The 141 units shown in the sidebar refer to the original body, with rear end transformed by Carrozzeria Touring.

Ing. Carlo Chiti became the head of Autodelta, the Alfa Romeo racing division, keeping Zeccoli with him as a test and competition driver. When in 1966 Alfa management approved a program for the design and development of a street version of the successful Tipo 33 Sports Prototype competition coupé, everyone voted for Scaglione to undertake the job. For a year and a half he commuted daily between his home in Turin and Autodelta, on the outskirts of Milan, working on this task. The original plan had been to build a run of 50 of these cars, chiefly as Alfa's answer to the Fiat Dino. In the end, it was deemed preferable to concentrate upon promoting the new Alfa Montreal, and only a handful of 33 Stradales were made. The model is another ageless Scaglione masterpiece.

Frank Reisner, the creative force behind Turin's small, exclusive Intermecanica company, began calling on Franco for design collaboration in 1964. In 1970 he was responsible for that firm's Buick-engined Apollo and its Ford V-8-powered IMX Italia. They bore that voluptuous, sleek stamp which had marked Scaglione's work since the Fiat Abarth of 1952. Then in 1971 Franco did the Intermecanica Indra Spider/cabriolet which was powered by the Opel in-line six 2.8 engine. Here he embarked

upon a new stylistic mode marked by angularity and broad, flat surfaces, although the body's frontal aspect bore a striking affinity with that of his Arnolt-Bristol of almost two decades before. In 1972 a notch-back coupé Indra joined the cabrio, both models being optionally available with the Opel 5.8-liter V-8. The Indra was tailored to the German market, in which it did not flourish at all, leading to the end of the promising Intermecanica effort.

Scaglione's productive career also



courtesy of the author

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continued

ended at that point. In 1975 and through the Torinese coachbuilder Boano he was engaged by Fiat to do the body design for a big, highly aerodynamic bus — a *gran turismo* in every sense. He worked on this project for about a year and had completed many overall and structural drawings for it, when he could go no further due to failing health. Fiat, having lost the project's author, abandoned *this* BAT — the Bus Aerodinamica Tecnica. Franco's daughter still has some of the drawings, and swears that the bus would have been really splendid.

Giovanna Scaglione says, "Babbo, Daddy, retired from his work first because of his health and, second, because he was convinced that no one cared about his work any more." This could be a way of expressing the fact that the vastly complex mass of factors which determine what is *à la mode* at a given time had taken a course which was parallel to but different from the one which he sensed to be in tune with the future. The petroleum crisis of '73 confirmed his correctness in making aerodynamic logic the base of his art. As the industry began to pursue the same logic, it used forms that were more economical to fabricate. Franco's pioneer status was acknowledged by Nuccio, who wrote to him, "Your passion for aerodynamics carried you to a complete knowledge of that science. I could but follow you."

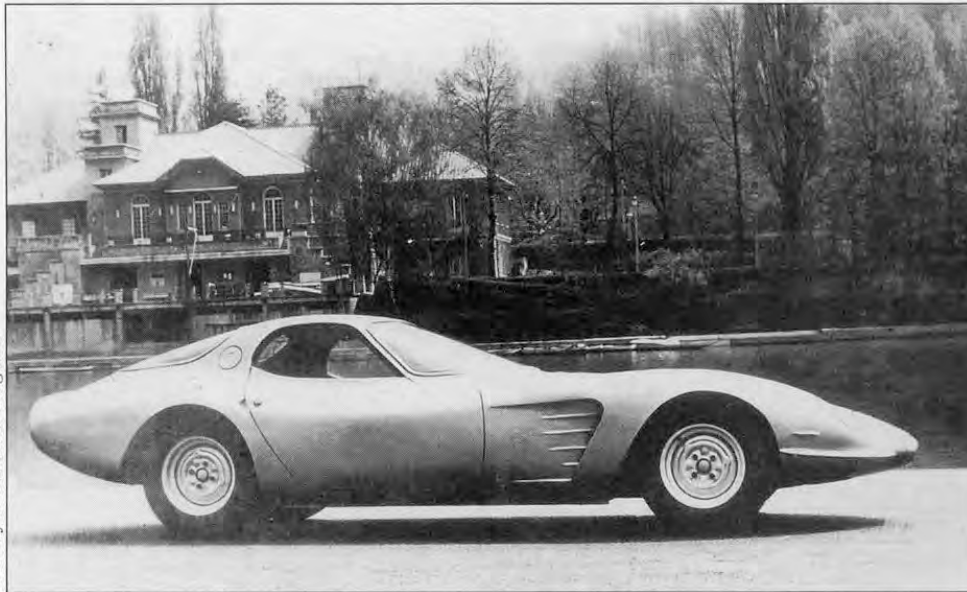
The rift with Bertone was unfortunate because what one lacked the other made up for. Bertone, unlike most big-name and smaller coachbuilders, never pretended to be the star designer of his company, giving honest credit to designers who, in most other firms, would have remained anonymous. But it was difficult for Nuccio to be fair and at the same time to serve the best interests of his firm upon which, among other things, the financial security of hundreds of families depended. Very early on, Franco began to acquire notoriety, even fame, in spite of his own modest and unassuming comportment. His daughter feels that it was this which caused the rift: The conflicts within the situation eventually became intolerable.

Franco was an intensely private person, for whom sentiments were not to be externalized in a perceptible manner. Other Italians tended to regard his character as being "British." Bertone described him as being weird and capricious and said that the few people with whom he associated were the same, but less so. Franco did not like to talk about himself, which explains the



courtesy of Giovanna Scaglione

Above and below: Titania Veloce 1500 project never got beyond this single prototype. It might have made a beautiful and logical small companion to the Jaguar E-Type. **Bottom:** Many critics consider Scaglione's Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale one of his finest design achievements.



courtesy of Giovanna Scaglione



courtesy of the author

courtesy of Giovanna Scaglione



Left: IMX Italia was Italo-American hybrid using Ford V-8 power, Scaglione styling. **Below:** Intermeccanica Indra used Opel engines; first the inline six, then optional 5.4-liter V-8. Front has Sting Ray feel to it, sides are more like Italia. Indras were meant for German market. **Bottom:** Franco Scaglione, in dark glasses, at the Geneva Auto Show in 1972 discussing Indra with Opel executive.

courtesy of the author (2)



lack of biographical information on the man. Rumor-mongers made up for that, inventing tales about his "other life" as a jazz musician and drug abuser. Both assertions seem to be without foundation other than that he liked to go to performances of good classical music and of good jazz. He never played a musical instrument, but the way he chain-smoked cigarettes was frightening.

Giovanna is fully aware of what a complex man her father was. She says that one had to know him in depth in order to discover what he really was like, which was quite wonderful. He married Maria Luisa Benvenuti of Rimini in 1948. She is in good health today and she and Giovanna live together in Franco's retreat at Suvereto, a little town of some 3,000 souls, off the beaten track in the Province of Livorno. His widow says that "He was ever a kind and affectionate husband." His daughter says, "As a father, he was the best that a child could desire. I have a very beautiful memory of my father, from when I was a little girl until his death. He was always most affectionate and most attentive to all of his daughter's problems, always!" He had, she says, "an innate respect for all persons, and a desire to help others in difficulty, both morally and materially. His reasons for being were family affection and love of his work."

His greatest rewards were not material, but came when he felt that he had given the best of himself and to have others judge that to be good. As we have seen, it was his conviction that the world no longer appreciated his work that made him reject the world in 1976. Then in 1992 Carrozzeria Bertone celebrated its 80th anniversary. In doing so, the three original BATs were borrowed from their overseas owners and sent on a tour of Europe. They were received everywhere with acclaim — as Nuccio wrote to Franco, "with admiration, stu-

por, and respect." That reward enabled Franco to purge himself of much unfounded bitterness and to return to the public stage just long enough to take a final bow.

The BAT festival of '92 undoubtedly had much to do with Franco's decision to grant his last interview. In it, he gave further insight into the motives for his retirement :

"I have never created a line with a (calculated) reason. In a way, they give birth to themselves. I continued to draw until the right lines no longer emerged." □



courtesy of Giovanna Scaglione