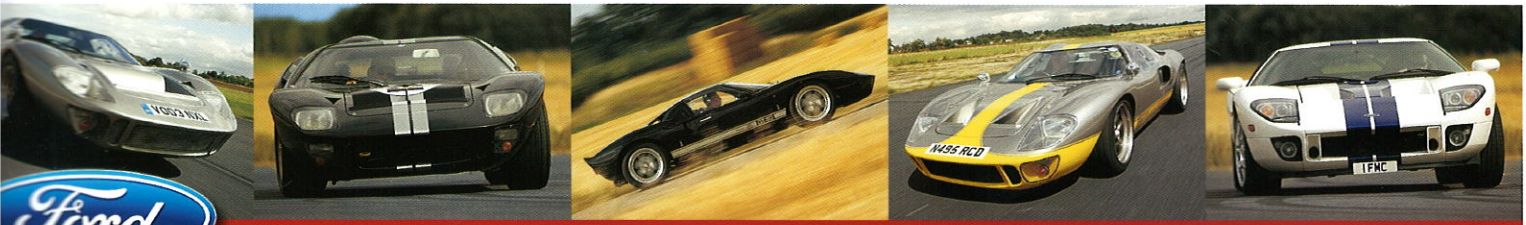


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# HORSING AROUND

Belgium has a long association with Maranello and every June the famous red cars invade the Ardennes forests for the Spa Ferrari Days. **Mick Walsh** joins the party

PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MANN and MATHIEU HEURTAULT

The epic Spa-Francorchamps circuit, set in the rolling Ardennes forests, and the illustrious Ferrari marque are ideally matched. Enzo's racers have a long history at this majestic track, dating back to pre-war days when his team of supercharged Alfa 8Cs drove up from Milan in convoy over the Alps for the 24-hour classic. Ascari, Collins, Hill, Surtees and Schumacher have all scored Ferrari wins at this ultimate driving challenge. Win here, in any class, and you should feel proud. Where other great tracks have been emasculated, Spa, despite various modifications, remains close to its original spirit. If you've never held your breath and dared Eau Rouge's rollercoaster, or taken Blanchimont with the throttle buried deep, flashing under those sinister pines, then your motoring experience isn't complete. Even on a PlayStation, this awesome undulating layout makes you sweat.

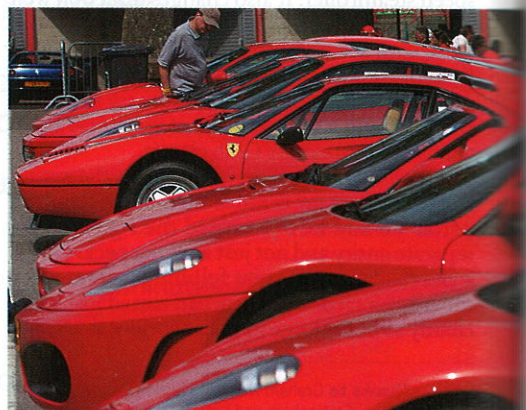
So where better to stage an all-Ferrari festival? Bernie may have cancelled this season's Belgian GP but the Ferrari Racing Days is a guaranteed date. During daylight hours from 9am on Friday 23 June to late evening on Sunday 25, the roar of Latin V12s and V8s relentlessly disturbed the

racing ghosts of the Ardennes. As well as the heated Ferrari 430 Trofeo Pirelli race circus, this event hosts one of the best-supported rounds of the Shell Ferrari Historic Challenge. Other circuits come and go for this exclusive series, but such is the demand to drive Spa that it remains a permanent fixture. "We try to select the best tracks," says Roberto Vaglietti, now head of the newly formed Ferrari Classiche and Corse Clienti. "Spa has a special atmosphere and we have great history here with Formula 1. Entrants can sign up for the season – €4000 for five meetings – or just select one event for €1000. That includes a hotel for two and hospitality."

Entrants aren't all millionaire German bankers, Belgian playboys or Swiss lawyers. Giuseppe Tomasetti runs a Maserati 3500GT in the same group as five Ferrari 250 SWBs and a 4-litre GT0 for a fraction of the investment and looked to be having as much fun. And unsilenced, that Giulio Alfieri-designed straight-six sounded glorious howling through Malmédy and down to Rivage.

Despite a date clash with Dijon, the single-seater group still attracted four 250Fs but Bugatti MD Thomas Bscher blasted clear in the ex-Jean

'If you've never taken Blanchimont with the throttle buried, flashing under those sinister pines, then your motoring experience isn't complete'



Spa-Francorchamps paddock is a sea of red every June

## GREGORY NOBLET Ferrari 275GTB

When your father has a long track record with 'proper' Ferraris, including Le Mans dating back to 1960, there's a good chance Maranello fever is going to grip you. "My father finished second overall with his GTO in the '62 24 Hours," says Grégory Noblet. "I was only five but still vividly recall the event. We lived in Lille and, after the prize-giving, dad changed the plugs, washed the windscreen and let some air out of the tyres before driving the GTO home. My mother towed the caravan with our DS, so I rode with dad in the race car. The noise was fantastic and we arrived home at midnight. There was no chance for me after that. I started racing with a Renault Gordini but my father encouraged me to do something more adventurous so I started doing the Paris-Dakar and the Rallye Atlas.

"My first Ferrari track experience was special. Brian Brunkhorst invited me to co-drive my father's GTO at Elkhart Lake. That inspired me to buy a 246 Dino in '84. In 1986 I bought a Daytona, which I kept until 2002. Driving it home from Mugello was special. I left at 8am and was home in Lille that night. There was no traffic and the car was exceptional. I saw 5500rpm, which is 180mph, and it felt so safe. I'd always wanted an alloy 275GTB and it took a year to find the right car. At the 2004 Le Mans Classic we ran it as a sons' team with Gilles Guichet. I used to do the Gentleman Drivers series but that's got too aggressive with too many hot rods. I like the spirit of the Shell series and you get to drive at some fantastic tracks."



'My father finished second overall with his GTO in the '62 Le Mans'



'The shape and condition were just right. It even smelt original, which is a feeling I get in the art world'

## KLAUS EDEL Maserati 250F

Fine art dealer Klaus Edel started racing with Hillman Imps long before he became involved with historic Maseratis. "My first race car was the ex-Bill McGovern Imp [left] which I ran in Germany in the early 1970s," remembers Edel. "The car had quite a following and we even won our class at the Nürburgring Six Hours. I stopped racing when Group 2 was introduced. Everything just became too expensive."

Developing a business specialising in old masters took Edel away from cars, but the "disease" started coming back in the '90s: "At 50 I decided it was time to get more from life and I bought a Bentley S1 Park Ward drophead cabriolet so all my family could enjoy it. Then I wanted something more exciting so a Maserati A6G2000 coupé with Frua bodywork came next. It was beautiful but, just as Paul Frère said, it was a race car disguised as a road car. I've always treasured originality and, at the Goodwood Revival, I fell for the ex-Gilby Engineering 250F '2507'. The shape and condition were just so right. It even smelt original, which is a feeling I get in the art world. When Carlo Vögele bought the Alfetta he agreed to sell the 250F, and I was lucky enough to have the money. It was a bastard to drive until we found that the limited-slip diff was broken. Once it was sorted by Steve Hart, I really started enjoying it. Most modern tracks are too hard on the brakes and even the Bus Stop spoils Spa. For me the Nordschleife is best. The car feels as if it was built for it. If I wanted to race seriously I'd buy a Porsche Cup car, but the Shell series is perfect just to enjoy driving."



Behra '2516'. In contrast, the drum-braked field produced a glorious grid as '50s sports-racers mixed it with four beautiful Ferrari 250 Tour de France coupés. The battle up front was one of the best historic races I've seen. Bscher eventually won with the big-banger Maserati 450S but had to work hard for it, with young Max Werner in a 300S and Gary Pearson in a Brazilian yellow Ferrari 250 Testa Rossa hounding him all the way. "I love it here," enthused Bscher. "The 250F is beautifully balanced and feels so at home, but the 450S is more of a challenge. When the tyres get overheated it really starts to swim around."

Massimo Sordi's Ferrari 512BB Le Mans looked glued to the ground in comparison as it stormed away from the pack in the disc-braked group, but the brutish competition Daytonas of Carlos Monteverde and Paul Knapfield thrilled fans with a relentless race-long battle.

Ferrari also organises an F1 demonstration for special clients but, other than a few quick runners, the pace was painfully slow. You'd think that, after coughing up £2million for an ex-Schumacher F2004 to live out that ultimate Maranello fantasy, customers might at least take some track lessons. Most runners were like watching a novice guitarist struggle with Hendrix's Fender, with a similarly painful soundtrack. Rather more accessible are the Club Ferrari parades. Two sessions and two hours' track time cost just €200 each day, providing you don't bend your car. One Dutch driver managed to extensively restyle both ends of his 360 Modena despite a pace car.

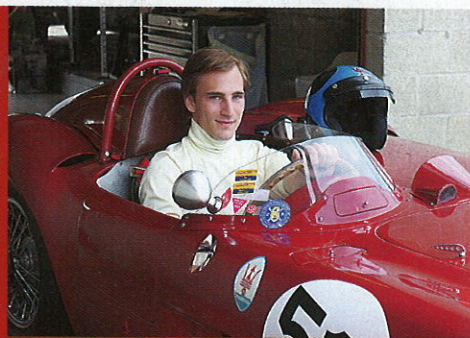
But even if you don't own a Ferrari or Maserati, there are few better places to soak up that scarlet fever. With Cavallino Rampante celebrating its 70th birthday next June, Ferrari Days 2007 should be quite a party. ■

## MAX WERNER Maserati 300S

Like another German who races a red car, Max Werner started in go-karts: "My dad only allowed me to race if I got good grades, but I stopped when it got too aggressive. Riding with dad in his Le Mans Alfa 8C in the late '80s was great. I'll never forget the time we were roaring across London in the rain with me and my brother under the tonneau after the Silverstone Historic Festival. Later dad generously let me try his Maserati 300S at test days and I loved the natural way it handled. Unlike the British drivers, who like to set their cars up hard, I prefer it softer. When it starts to roll in corners it feels a little strange at first but you get more grip because more of the tyre is working for you.

"This car has so much history – Moss drove it to victory in the 1956 1000km at the Nürburgring – and that's a major part of its appeal. We try to keep the 300S as original as possible and it still has its first engine which I'd hate to break. Mario Linke prepares the car and I have to thank him for encouraging dad to let me race it. I now do quite a bit of testing for his customers and that's opened the door to other drives. I'm really looking forward to co-driving a Ferrari 250LM with Andrea Burani at Goodwood, but the 1950s is still my favourite period.

"Friends have asked me why I don't race modern cars but, compared to WTCC cars, which drive like they're on rails, the Maserati has so much feel and character. I could catch the 450S in the slower corners, but once it got the power down it was quicker."



'Compared to WTCC cars, which drive like they're on rails, the Maserati has so much feel'



'It's a nice feeling knowing you're the only one who has raced it'



## MASSIMO SORDI Ferrari 512BB Le Mans

If there was a GTO for the '80s, it has to be the spectacular 512BB LM. It was a pukka factory racer developed from a road car for privateers because Maranello was only interested in F1 at the time. "When the first four ran at Le Mans in 1979," says Massimo Sordi, "I'd just started hillclimbing with my Fiat 600, but my studies put an early stop to my racing. In 1985 I restarted with an Alfa GTA and won the Italian championship. I'd always loved those 512BB Le Mans cars and found one tucked away with Crepaldi Milano. By the time it was completed, the rules had changed so it was never raced. It was like finding a new historic car: it's a nice feeling knowing you're the only one who has raced it. My little Maserati 200S is a contrast because this has about 400bhp and is easy to drive fast. Spa is one of my favourites and the BB gives me a buzz through Eau Rouge. My dream is to race it on the Silverstone GP circuit."



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