

Corso Veloce

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE NEW ZEALAND FIAT OWNERS CLUB

October/November 2018





MARK'S MUSINGS

A few bits and bobs this issue before I bore you with a number of developments in my fleet.

First up, the coming Fiat 124 Anniversario on 17 November is shaping up to be a big event, so make sure you come along to the display at Southwards on early

Saturday where there will be over 28 Fiat 124s from around the country in attendance. It's a rare opportunity to see so many in attendance, right here in our own backyard, and will be great to meet other Fiat enthusiasts from further afield. We're also welcome to put our Fiats on display, where there will be prizes for the best cars, judged by local car nut Mike 'MOD' O'Donnell. Our club is also invited the club to join them for lunch in Martinborough.

Thanks also to former-President-for-life David Birse for being first off the blocks to supply material for the member profile column I threatened to introduce in the last issue, which is reproduced in his own words. I remember when I joined the club that David was onto his third Fiat, the black Uno, which rather dates my involvement!

Finally, a farewell to committee member Bill Bawn who has resigned from the committee as he and his wife are moving to Pauanui (what it is about ex-committee members moving north? We'll have to do something to stem the tide or they'll be no-one left!). Most recently Bill has overseen the development of our new website which is almost ready to go live. Thanks for your contribution Bill.

Mark Stockdale
FOCNZ President

Committee:

President/Editor:

Mark Stockdale

markstockdale@xtra.co.nz

Ph. 021434097

Secretary/Membership:

Paul Morgan

pandcmorgan@xtra.co.nz

Ph. 0272486881

Treasurer:

Mike Lynskey

mike.lynskey@aspeq.com

Ph. 0274359309

Members:

Stuart Becker

stuart.becker@notrocketscience.co.nz

Ph. 021434746

Phil Ward

phil.p.ward@gmail.com

Ph. 02102476669

Club email:

focnz.contact@gmail.com

Club Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/focnz

Fleet news

A bit of a flurry of activity (in my bank account at least!) in the last couple of months as I have sold 2 cars and purchased another. You may recall I have previously said selling cars is a rare occurrence for me, so selling two in the space of a month is noteworthy.

First up, about a year ago I bought a 'barn find' 125 from Northland, sight unseen. It was a one-family-owner car, which had been laid up for the last 25 years or so. The second owner (the grandson of the first) had barely used it before moving to Oz in the 1990s. Anyhow, after talking to the custodian and seeing some photos I decided to take a punt as original cars like that are a rare find, plus I had never even owned a twin cam Fiat before. Upon delivery, I was pretty pleased, with the paint in good condition, albeit most panels had some flaws, and the interior was very tidy and original. Mechanically, it needed re-commissioning, but I hadn't planned on doing anything with it in the short term, with my wagon taking priority. To cut a long story short, after mentioning it to other club members, Horowhenua-based Logan Morris expressed interest in it. Knowing he was capable of doing much of the mechanical work himself, and thus getting it on the road sooner, I decided to sell it to him. Hopefully we'll get to see it running soon.



The 125 on way to its new home

The other car I sold recently was my Mercedes-Benz CLS500. A fine car, and the only reason I sold it was to buy something else. That car? A V8 luxu-barge from the Fiat family this time – a Maserati Quattroporte. I'd taken a bit of a shine to them, and as you can probably tell, I tend to like more exclusive cars. It's also, as I'm sure you'll agree, more in keeping as a Presidential express! (It even has massaging, ventilated rear seats – but I haven't figured out who can chauffeur me yet).

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CLUB EVENTS

Rush Collection, Feilding

A great day in late September with 7 cars and 14 people travelling to Feilding to see the private collection of racing cars and memorabilia along with some classic cars and commercials. We were hosted by Terry and Joy, who own the collection with Terry's son Tim, who races some of the cars. Terry has had a long involvement with Manfeild from its earliest days, and explained the history of some of the iconic racing cars in the collection. Included in the collection were also some road cars, including two very rare NZ-built Crowthers, which were attempts at building a budget Kiwi car.



(left) Mike with some memorabilia from the collection.

(right) One of the Crowthers is hidden behind this display



Mark's fleet news cont'd

The vital statistics of this car (in addition to having 400hp) are that it is a 2008, NZ-new, virtually one previous owner, with 55,000km on the clock. It's in the less-common Executive trim, with a tan/desert yellow leather interior that I think the Italians do so well, and more exclusive than the typical black leather. I'm still getting used to it – it has an electronic throttle which is a little sensitive around town, but it also has flappy paddles – the first car I've ever owned with them – which I quite like. But it also has those typical Italian ergonomic foibles that the Germans don't have, and I found it interesting reading through the sales brochure that "major controls are arranged with ergonomic precision...". No they're not! Some controls, like the trip computer switch, are hidden behind the steering wheel, and aren't duplicated on the wheel boss. It also has more buttons than it needs, with one to raise the rear blind and another to lower it. Any other manufacturer would have combined both functions into one open/close switch. But the worst is the heated seat rotary control, which is mounted on the seat base and can only be operated by feel! Yes, it's definitely Italian!



MEMBER PROFILE—DAVID BIRSE

The early years

Firstly I would like to congratulate Mark for stepping into my old boots and taking on the President and Editor roles, however, you need to take on Membership as well for the 'hat trick'.

Mark made mention of stories from days past. I thought I would share some before I also pass. Of course, for the sake of publication, and prosecution, I can neither confirm nor deny whether the information is true or false.

I joined the FOCNZ after visiting Continental Cars parts department to acquire some 'bits' for my 128 sedan (1100cc version, Italian built complete with Italian owner's manual). Those were the days when Mike, and later David, ran the parts department.

If I remember correctly back then the constitution stated that new members were accepted by invitation of an existing member. These were the good old days with fine gentlemen members like Murray Hutton and Malcolm Moore. Then came the 'young bunch', the Birse's, Riddiford's, Eyles, Wall's, Kitchingman's, Freeman's, Robey's and the likes. Most of us were 'pre' children and had some bloody good events and nights. One of the more memorable was a 'Hoods and Hookers' night in full costume...need I say more. It was also the times when cops were more favourable so a couple (few) drinks weren't really a problem.

My first ever club event was a 'trial'. I managed to talk three nurses into coming with me and unbelievably we won the trial. I'm still convinced the nurse's uniforms may have had something to do with it. From then on it was all downhill.



Trialling was a big part of the Wellington car club scene back in the 80's and it was taken very seriously by some. Some cars would be decked out with three or four people with table arrangements in the back seats with stop watches, calculators, maps, lights and whatever else they thought would keep them on time and track. For the younger people, believe it or not, GPS wasn't available. On a Wairarapa trial we took Robert Russell as our navigator. Robert was serious, Kim and I were more wing it and see. Anyway, Robert was constantly asking for the odo reading and estimated average speed and was busily punching away on the calculator telling me to speed up a little or slow down. Eventually we arrived at the first manned checkpoint approximately 40 minutes late. After that the calculator, and almost Robert, got thrown out of the car and the little 128 and driver had some fun.



On one such 'midnight' trial involving a Mr K and Mr W, we were in Mr K's 125T returning from the Wairarapa at around 12.30am. I was in the back seat watching the speedo touch 100mph whilst coming up the Rimutaka's from the Featherston side.

One thing I have to give credit for. Back in the 80's we drove our Fiat's and Lancia's as the Italian's intended but never did any of our club members get injured or have accidents on the roads.

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 17 November:

Fiat 124 Anniversario. A gathering of Fiat 124 Coupes and Spiders is being held in Wellington from 16-18 November. This is shaping up to be a big event with over 28 cars from around NZ have been confirmed so far. The club will join them on Saturday for a display of Fiats at **Southwards Museum from 9.00am** with judging by Mike O'Donnell ('MOD') who is a former 124 owner and hosts the car how 'Start Me Up' on TVNZ OnDemand. Around 10.45am we will depart for **Martinborough** for lunch at Tirohana Winery (lunch costs \$29 per person). **Phone Mark on 021 434097 if you wish to attend the lunch.**

Sunday 9 December:

Xmas BBQ lunch. The club is once again hosting our annual end-of-year BBQ at the **Otaihanga Domain** in Paraparaumu. A BBQ will be available to cook food, bring what you want to eat and drink. Its family-friendly, so bring the kids too! There's plenty of parking and there are public toilets. Entrance is off **Makora Rd**, which is off **Otaihanga Rd** – take the old SH 1 (now Main Rd) and take the exit at the roundabout to Southwards Museum and stay on Otaihanga Rd and then turn right at the end onto Makora Rd. Aim to arrive by **midday**. For those coming from the south, meet at Plimmerton Weigh Station at **11am** for a 11.15am departure. RSVP to focnz.contact@gmail.com





Every year we would have a Fiat Nationals. There were three North Island clubs, Auckland, Waikato and Wellington, which was officially the Fiat Owners Club of New Zealand.

We would take year about at organising the Nationals which would be held in a convenient location and include motorkhana's, trials and speed/track events. Our club held them in the likes Taupo, Hawkes Bay and Wanganui. I would like to say FOCNZ Nationals were always more fun because we were very social. Check in may include a beer or a wine and that was an indicator of how the evening would progress.

Two memories of returning from Nationals (or they could be fabrications). Taupo, five or six of us driving home in the rain, about three or four metres apart with Mr K in the Volumex Coupe standing up through the sunroof taking photos of the convoy at speeds of 140kph plus. We were still in the 128 and at the tail of the convoy getting completely drowned. The 128 just happened to have its distributor right behind a cut out below the bumper so we got swamped and had to keep stopping to dry out. The decision was made to let the 128 go as lead. Barbara W rightly named the 128 as 'Puddle Jumper' because at speeds of 120 plus it would skip across the puddles. After that trip I solved the dizzy problem by obtaining a rubber kitchen glove to protect the dizzy. Custom made, a finger for each lead and pull the hand part over the dizzy cap.

Another Nationals in the Hawkes Bay Mr K's 125T crapped out on the way home. At the time Mr W had a 132 so offered the tow, on a rope about a metre long. Not a problem except at times on the way home speeds of 160kph were reached. Got very interesting in overtaking.

Another club event at the Upper Hutt Racecourse where we were permitted to have Motorkhana's on the infield, until we were banned because some plonker in a Ferrari attended, who wasn't even a club member and decided to drive around the actual race track. Anyway, Mr and Mrs W were running late and were peddling the-then 131R along the Hutt motorway at serious speed. As they approached the Haywards intersection - no traffic lights back then - a car full of Nuns obviously misjudged Mr W's speed and with the grace of god decided to pull out. Mr W had no option but to hit the stop pedal, no ABS back then. His three-day-old Pirelli P6 tyres grabbed the seal and proceeded to produce some very serious black marks, for many metres, down the highway. The 131 just missed the sacred car. When they arrived at the Motorkhana the flat spots on the tyres were even visible to the partially sighted.

Another very interesting car in our 'convoys' was Mr F's 124 sedan. This was no ordinary 124 sedan, this chocolate brown box had been modified with a turbo, and from what I remember a turbo without a waste gate. This thing was a 'sleeper' for the day, as were most Fiat's of the time compared



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FIAT ALFA

CENTRE

Mal Simmonds

Owner/Operator

Tel/Fax: [+64] 7 827 8918

Mobile: 027 495 2415

Email: malsim@fiatparts.co.nz

Web: www.fiatparts.co.nz

Dino Enterprises Limited

40 Matos Segedin Drive

Cambridge 3495, New Zealand

MEMBER PROFILE—DAVID BIRSE

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to what else was available. Probably the first vehicles to in the same class to put up a challenge were the Nissan SSS.

Back in the 80's things were a lot less business orientated. The club could hire Manfeild for \$160 a day. This allowed us to get partners, family and friends on the track for some driver and skills training. During a couple of club days on the track a very prominent Wellington businessman managed to crash his Ferrari and not long after during a practice day a club member rolled his Uno Turbo end over end in the ploughed trackside when he overran a corner. Also, at an Intermarque event a club member was seriously injured when his modified 124 Coupe went airborne on a mound of dirt which was then used a safety barrier prior to the introduction of tyre walls and Armco.



Another prominent member of the club was Vic Middleditch, a Wellington builder and property developer. One of his more notable projects was to build a mould for a Lancia Stratos in the Strathmore garage, following through to a full road going Stratos replica if I'm not mistaken.

He is also fondly remembered for destroying his immaculate Lancia Fulvia during a night hill climb event on the Happy Valley dump road. He also turned up to an event at Manfeild to try out his brand new Lancia Volumex. On his second or third lap whilst travelling at full noise down the back straight clouds of smoke

appeared behind the car. Immediate thought was that he had blown the engine. He pulled into the pits, where one of the Continental Cars mechanics happened to be, who checked the car over and proclaimed the engine was just bedding in. Vic continued the rest of the day trouble, and smoke, free.

I have owned a variety of Fiat's, starting with an 850 Sports Coupe, the 128, which we had heaps of fun in, then my only new Fiat, the Uno Fire. At the time there was at least a six month wait time. Continental Cars were happy to place an order provided you gave them a minimum of \$500 as a bond. Luckily for me my brother happened to be looking in Archibald Motors in Christchurch and rung me to say they had a new Uno which had arrived that day but the buyer had pulled out. I rang the dealer, paid for the car on my credit card – \$15k – and it didn't even come with a radio. I flew to Christchurch the next day, took delivery and stopped at the first tyre shop I found and swapped the 145/70 13's for something slightly bigger.

Not being someone who changes car often the Uno eventually gave way to a Tipo, due to a growing family even though the town car was an 850 sedan. The 850 was replaced by a Regatta, and then by a Punto and later a Punto Sporting and a Brava as the main car, plus Bravo for our daughter. Also a Tempra wagon which became our tow vehicle for a trailer camper we had. We still retain a 1996 Fiat Coupe 16v Turbo which we purchased with 5800kms on the clock and has now travelled 34,000kms.



Classifieds

1978 Fiat 128 3P for sale

Contact Alan Brown, ph. 0274561482

Email: BrownieAl2@Gmail.com



Custom-built for the boss

Martin Buckley
tells the story of
the bespoke 130
shooting brake
designed for Fiat
head Gianni Agnelli

PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**





Agnelli, inset, adored the gold Maremma, which, as 130 aficionado Buckley points out, is arguably the most attractive two-door estate car ever produced

When Gianni Agnelli took over as chairman of Fiat in 1966, aged just 45, he had already experienced enough living for two men. As the favoured grandson of the firm's founder, he had long been groomed for the top position but, after colourful war service on the Russian Front and in Libya, it was felt that the heir to this industrial fortune needed a little time to relax. Thus, for the next 20 years, the young Agnelli made it his business to have some fun. He was, after all, immensely wealthy, hawkishly good-looking and possessed of an immense charm that, seemingly, no woman could resist.

Agnelli was the prototype of the jetset playboy. In the 1950s, he was a permanent fixture of the gossip columns, rarely spotted without a starlet on his well-tailored arm – he reputedly bedded Rita Hayworth and Anita Ekberg among many, many others – or else on his way to a party of Bacchanalian excesses on his yacht or at the Villa Leopolda, his famous Riviera bolthole.

It was a hedonistic but high-risk lifestyle in which his famous pals sometimes perished in their prime at the wheel of fast cars, Aly Khan (in a Lancia Flaminia) and Porfirio Rubirosa (in a Ferrari 250GT Cabriolet) being the best-known casualties of glitterati indulgence.

Agnelli was probably too good a driver for that, although he came close. In 1952, aged 31, he famously crashed his Ferrari into the back of a truck as he drove along the Corniche above Monte-Carlo. Trapped in the wreckage, with his right leg broken in seven places, it is said that Gianni's only concern was that the young lady he was taking home should be protected from the prying lenses of the paparazzi. So we can add chivalry to the list of virtues of a man who is still regarded as almost a saint in modern Italy, but it should probably be added that he had apparently just been caught in bed with said passenger by his long-term partner Sarah Churchill.

That accident affected Agnelli for life – his subsequent cars had to be specially adapted for his gammy leg – although it never cramped his style nor slowed him down. Neither did his marriage (to an Italian princess, of course) the same year; well into his 70s, the extra-marital indiscretions of the man were still legend.

When he first laid eyes on this Fiat 130 Maremma in 1974, Agnelli had left this carefree image behind. Still beautifully dressed – with his trademark watch over shirt cuff – he was by then Italy's most powerful international businessman, who counted Henry Kissinger and Edward Kennedy among his close friends.

In a country that was increasingly threatened by political unrest and left-wing terrorism, his former taste for custom-bodied Ferraris – such as his Superamerica or the wacky three-seat, centre-steer 365P – no longer appeared appropriate. Agnelli was a leading industrial figure and the number-one target for kidnappers and assassins; he had a cyanide capsule hidden in one of his teeth for just such an eventuality.

Agnelli drove everywhere flat-out, paying little heed to red lights – particularly in his home town of Turin – and was never still long enough to stay in a sniper's sights. Niki Lauda said that being driven by Gianni was one of the most terrifying experiences of his life. Agnelli usually managed to evade the bodyguards who became a



Chic cabin is the epitome of Pininfarina style: the Alcantara with blue plaid cloth inserts is unique to the Maremma, which is otherwise as per Coupé

necessity of his position, and his long-suffering chauffeur generally ended up in the passenger seat talking to his boss about football.

Agnelli adored the anonymity of his dark blue 125 (supposedly his favourite personal car of all). But, as Fiat boss, he was a natural candidate for a 130 – perhaps even an armoured saloon after the kidnapping and murder of former Italian president Aldo Moro from the back seat of a standard example in Rome in 1978.

What is known for certain is that he used a pre-production 130 Coupé (in a non-standard light cherry red hue) and that he actually owned the Maremma. As a close friend of Sergio Pininfarina, it is possible that Agnelli had suggested the idea of the Maremma to him. It is just the sort of glamorous trinket that spoke of the beaches of Cap Ferrat or the slopes of St Moritz to a man who was still a keen swimmer and skier.

The Maremma was a natural consequence of Pininfarina's early-'70s preoccupation with the idea of the luxury station wagon with sports/lifestyle overtones. The Peugeot 504 Riviera Break had garnered attention at the Paris Salon in '71 (but not enough to result in a commission), while a 1972 prototype estate version of the unlovely Fiat 132 barely merited a mention anywhere.

Undoubtedly, the Maremma would have been a stylish way of lifting the fortunes of Fiat's accomplished but unpopular 130. The launch of the Coupé by Paolo Martin, in 1971 – complete with bigger 3.2-litre V6 and restyled cabin – had put a more positive spin on the model's image. A shooting brake could have been a way of maintaining that momentum of goodwill towards a car that was widely admired but rarely bought.

Named after a coastal district of Tuscany, the Maremma made its debut at Geneva and then did the motor show circuit. It was featured on

the cover of *Quattroruote*, posing on a Côte d'Azur beach. Pininfarina's press release talks about the 'commercial' image of the traditional station wagon and the firm's attempts to change that impression with this long, low-slung creation that was anything but most people's idea of a utilitarian load-lugger. 'The line of the car,' says the blurb, 'is lightened by huge glass surfaces which offer passengers the best visibility.'

The text goes on to explain how wind-tunnel tests resulted in the spoiler above the hatchback in the name of both stability and reducing the 'tail swirls' that tended to make for dirty rear

windows. The panels and glass were identical to the production Coupé up to the B-pillar, which was covered by a broad stainless-steel trim. Aft of that point, the metalwork was unique but with production lights and bumpers.

What could so easily have ended up an incoherent mess is perhaps the most elegant two-door estate car ever, with a long roof that flowed into the previously mentioned spoiler. The adaptation was not the work of Paolo Martin but a 26-year-old called Lorenzo Ramacciotti, who had only joined Pininfarina two years earlier and went on to become group chief of



Load bay also luxuriously appointed, with deep-pile carpeting protected by metal strips; backrest not split, though, which you might have expected



Clockwise: tailgate was fashioned from a Coupé bootlid; Opera was meant to replace 130 saloon; on the Riviera; torquey 3.2 V6; big doors give easy access

design at Fiat Auto. At the following year's Geneva Salon, Pininfarina presented the Opera, a four-door version of the Coupé that is also attributed to Ramaciotti and was supposedly intended as a replacement for the 130 saloon.

First registered for road use on 11 April 1975, the Maremma was run by Agnelli for three years before he gave it to its current owner in September 1978. Then, other than an appearance at the Padua show in 2005, the Fiat disappeared for 35 years before going on display in Turin during 2013 at the Auto dell'Avvocato exhibition.

Since these photos were taken, the Maremma


has been restored – although when we saw the car it was still a very sound, original and fully functioning vehicle. The third door, fabricated from a standard Coupé bootlid, rises on gas struts to reveal a huge and deeply carpeted load space accessible over a high sill. The rear seat folds, of course, but the opportunity to split the backrest 50:50 was not taken. The long doors mean that getting into the back is not a problem.

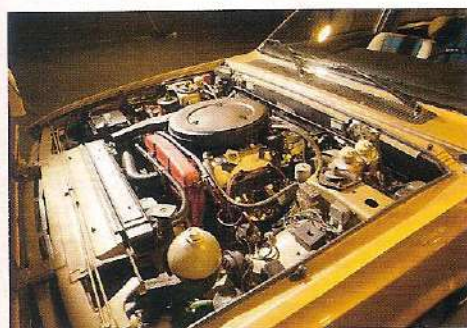
Inside, the dashboard, the padded-and-fluted headlining and the elegant door furniture are familiar 130 Coupé details, but the Maremma has a unique style of seat trim with blue plaid cloth

centres – and pale Alcantara elsewhere – that gives the cabin a less regal atmosphere. Air-conditioning was probably the most substantial 130 option and a virtual necessity in Italy, so it's no surprise that the Maremma has it.

There is no suggestion that the Fiat is anything other than mechanically standard: in other words, 165bhp for lively but far from tyre-shredding performance. Given Agnelli's reputation for aggressive driving, you might have expected to find a manual gearbox. Or perhaps his natural mistrust of automatics had mellowed by the age of 54? The Borg Warner three-speeder certainly suited the character of the 130 better than the ZF five-speed transmission.

It's hard to say whether the Maremma was ever seriously considered for production. To be honest, by 1974 it was probably too late to save the 130 anyway. Loyal domestic buyers were proving doggedly resistant to the car's thirst and size. Internationally, the big V6 Fiat – even in Coupé form – had failed to breach the snob-appeal threshold in the face of opposition from BMW, Jaguar and all the rest.

There was a general feeling abroad, just a few years after the launch of the model, that the 130 should have been born a Lancia rather than a Fiat. By the time the Coupé was killed off in 1977, the group's big-car ambitions had already refocused on the Gamma – a supposedly more rational front-drive concept that had a charm of its own but never quite recaptured the gravitas of the 130. It seems that Agnelli might have had similar thoughts on the subject. He is not credited with ever using a Gamma, although he must have cast a wistful eye over the Olgiata show car in 1982 – a shooting-brake version of the Gamma Coupé that owed a great deal to his much-loved Maremma, right down to the gold paint. 



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