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AUGUST 18, 2008

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BLSI Sport
Speciale >

Young at Heart

Neither fake nor replica,
the BLS1 Sport Speciale
is a modern tribute
to an old Ferrari

BY LARRY EDSALL

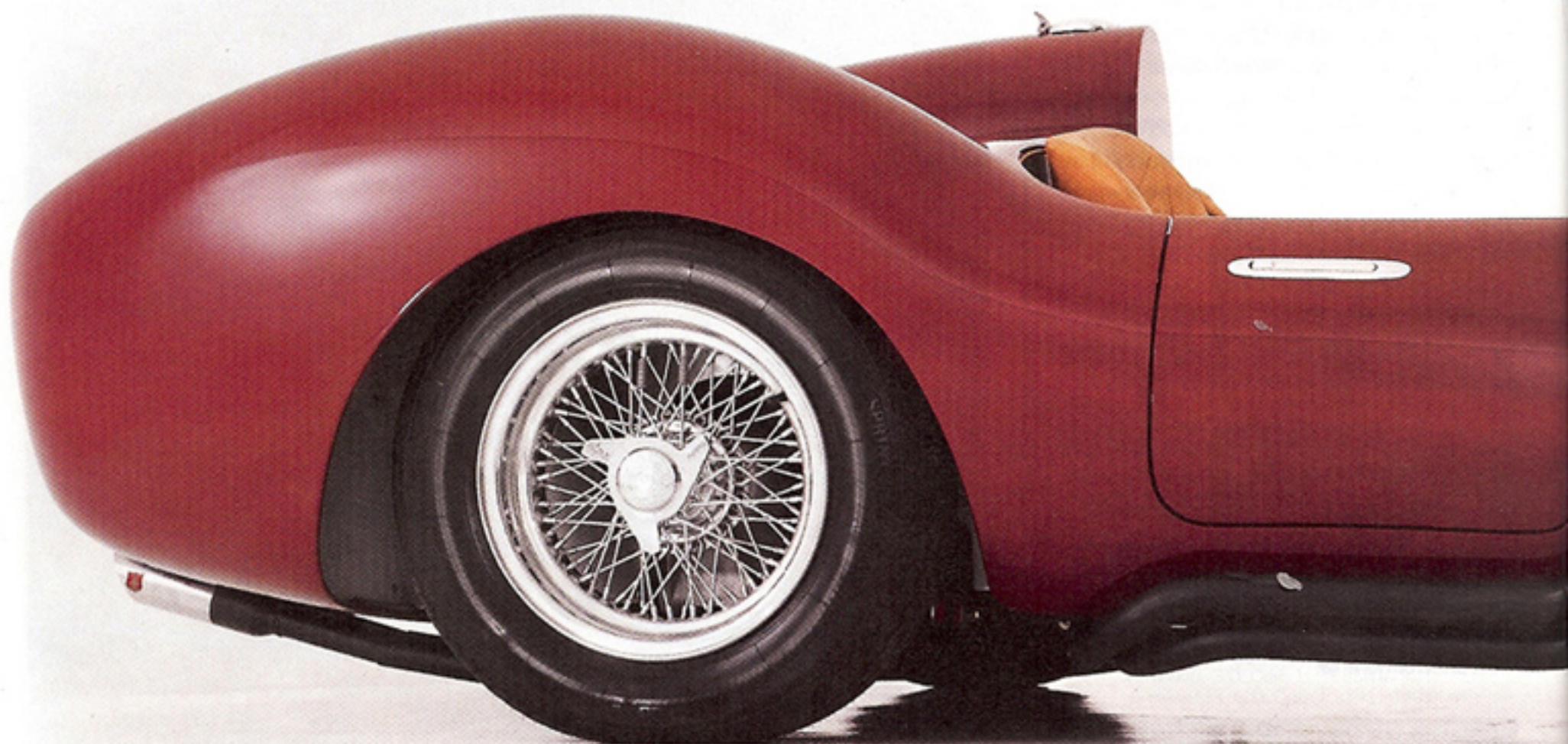
➤ YOU'VE WATCHED TV PROGRAMS focused on vintage vehicles and wished you could own and drive such machines. But for Barry Smith, a former ad-agency owner in Scottsdale, Ariz., it became more than a wish.

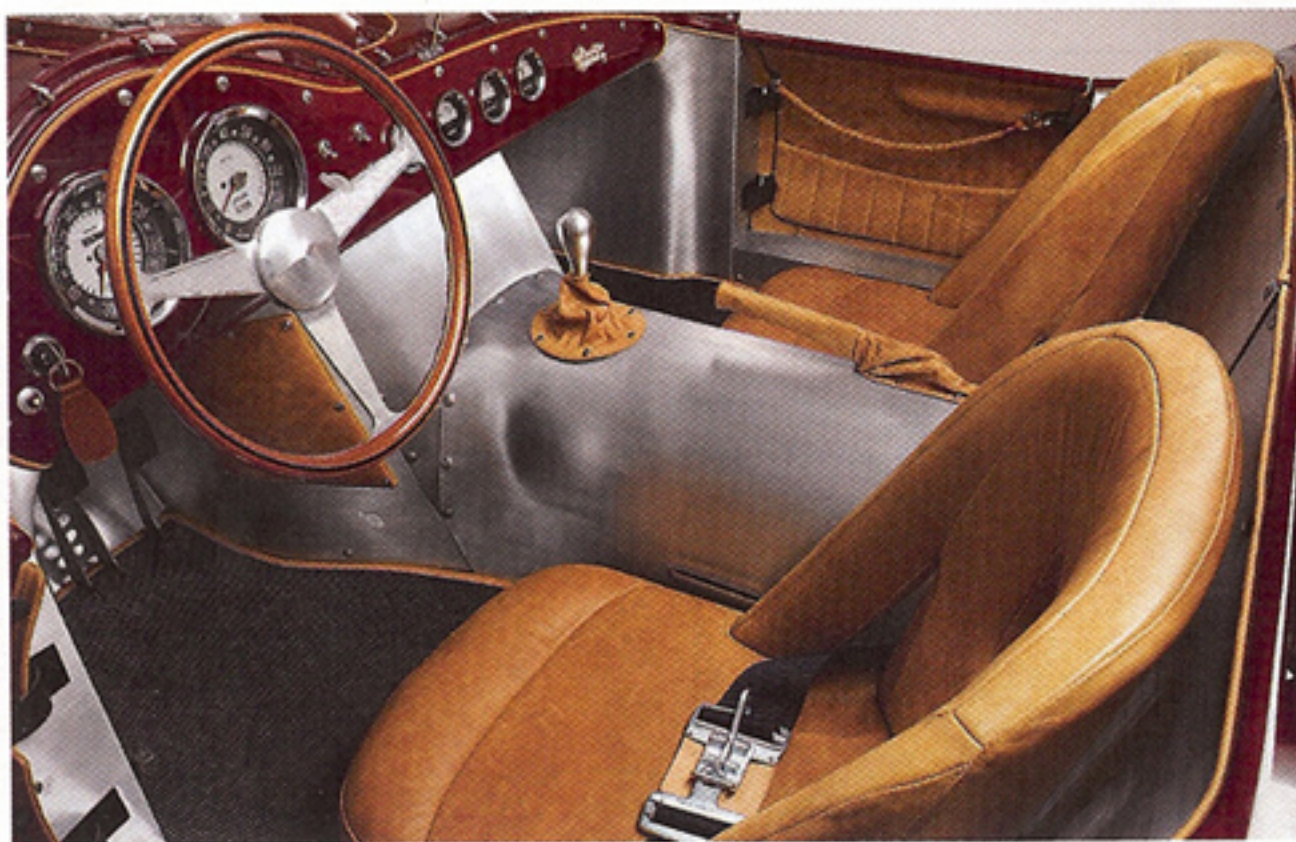
Smith owns a DVD set of Alain de Cadenet's *Victory by Design* series and has watched the show dedicated to Ferrari over and over. He was mesmerized by the Testa Rossas and lusted for a 1957 250 TR. The model he coveted most was a TR60, a car that started a six-year Ferrari win streak at Le Mans.

Smith wanted it so much that he began serious research. He discovered that of the three original TR60s, one was destroyed in a crash, while the two survivors (should either be for sale) would demand a figure approaching \$15 million apiece.

At the time, Smith's daily driver was a Ferrari 360 Spyder, a surprise birthday present from his wife, Lynn. (Another part of that surprise: She'd used his Porsche 911 Turbo as a down payment.) Since then, Smith has replaced the Spyder with a 1996 Lamborghini Diablo roadster. He and his wife share a Porsche 550 Spyder replica, and she has a customized Shelby Daytona Coupe replica, as well as an Infiniti FX35 for grocery getting.

The Smiths exercise their exotics, but





even Barry realized that an original TR couldn't be jeopardized in such a way, nor was he eager to hire a full-time mechanic to tend to its fanatical needs. "I like to drive my cars," he says, not keep them locked in a museum.

But, oh, how he lusted for the TR. If he couldn't buy one, perhaps he could find someone to build him one that would look, sound and respond nearly like the original. Another bonus to this re-creation: Modern

mechanical parts would make it comfortable to drive on a frequent basis.

Smith started calling restoration shops and coachbuilders, searching for someone who could create his dream. Most told him he must be crazy, especially since no blueprints existed for such a project. All he had been able to find were the TR's mechanical specs and a selection of photographs.

Working his call list, he got to Jason Wenig at the Creative Workshop in Dania

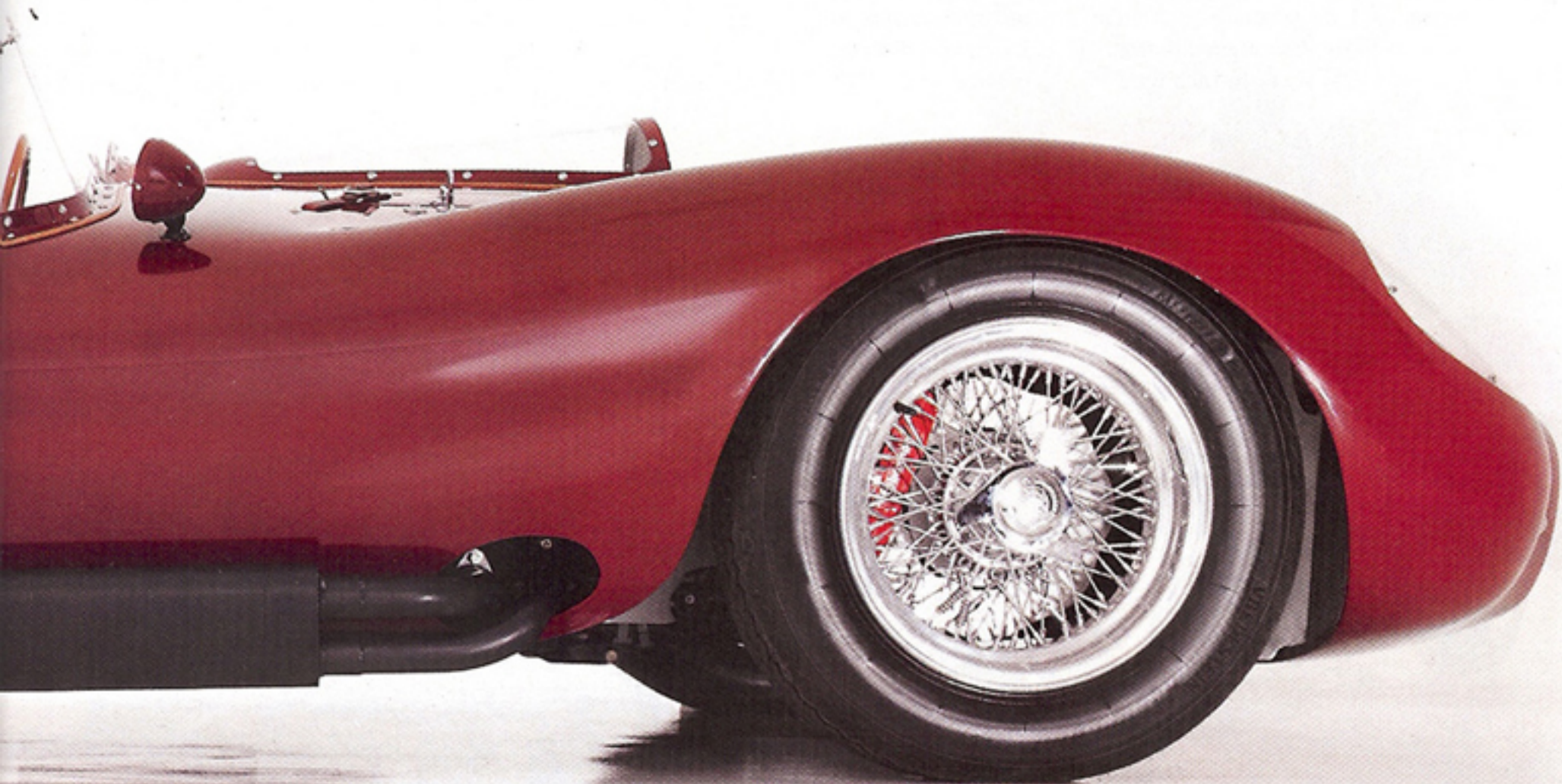
Beach, Fla. "I said, 'We can do anything,'" Wenig boasts. "The more eclectic and unique, the more excited I get." The shop specializes in one-off coachbuilt cars and concours restorations.

Wenig is a lifelong hands-on car guy. He and his wife, Kim, worked in New York City. He had been involved in an Internet startup that united his profession—marketing—with automobiles.

"When the company imploded, my wife and I said, 'Let's do something really stupid and nutty,' and we sold almost everything, put the rest in a trailer and drove to Florida." That was the summer of 2002, when they bought a small auto-restoration business based in a dilapidated, 70-year-old barn at a former granary.

The Wenigs were not as unprepared as it might seem. Jason spent several months working on a business plan for what he called "converting" classic cars by updating and upgrading them with modern technology so people could "use them more readily." What he wanted, he explains, was to improve original engines so people with Austin-Healeys wouldn't need a Chevy 350 transplant, or those with "Borgwards and Tatra's would have an opportunity to drive them and not worry about the weak links."

The Wenigs' workshop was well established if somewhat unknown as Smith



YOUNG AT HEART

launched his quest to re-create the TR. But Wenig doesn't do reproductions. "I would never disgrace a marque by trying to replicate someone else's work," he says.

Still, he was eager "to interpret it and to capture what hopefully was getting [Smith] excited and make him feel like he did when he first saw that Ferrari."

Wenig's goal is to "put yourself in the shoes of the designers or engineers at that time and to ask what they would have done with better technology if it had been available."

As a car builder, Wenig saw his role as creating a vehicle that met Smith's mandates but was not a clone. "Barry knows what he likes and obviously has very good taste, and he takes very good care—meticulous care—of his vehicles." Wenig says he wanted to "build the car Smith wanted but didn't know he wanted."

The result is the BLS1 Sport Speciale. It didn't come cheap, as \$500,000 bought period-correct techniques and, in many cases, period-correct parts.

Wenig assembled 10 specialists with old-world skills and modern technological minds. While they used contemporary chrome-moly instead of aged steel, they used the same "birdcage" construction for the chassis; they hand-formed the *superleggera*-style aluminum body. The car has Veglia instruments, a vintage Nardi steering wheel, Marchal lighting and Magneti Marelli switches. They persuaded an Italian wheel company to use the original Borrani molds to create a new set of 16-inch wire

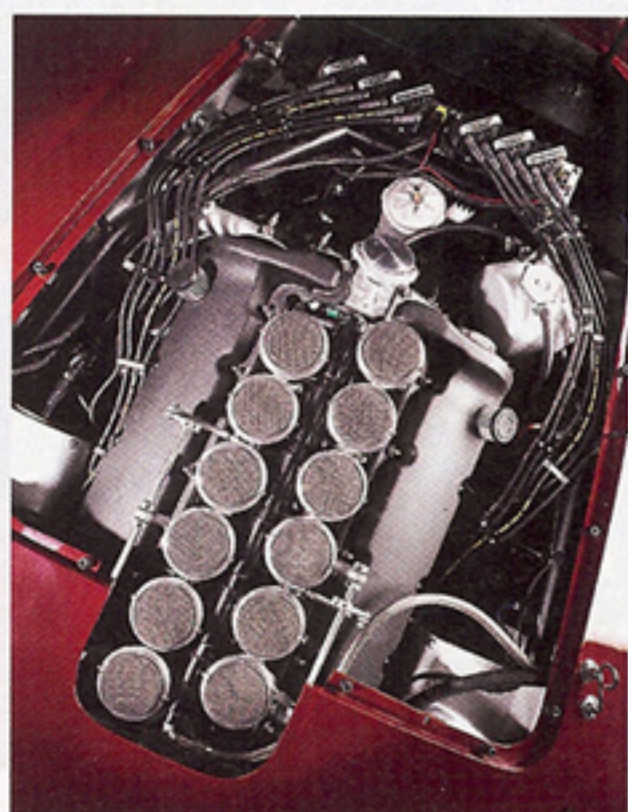


wheels, though slightly wider now.

"The things you touch and see are original," Wenig explains. "These are all absolutely authentic 1950s restored. But the things that stop, steer and accelerate the car are cutting-edge."

We therefore find Brembo front and Wilwood rear brakes, an Auburn limited-slip differential, insulation to protect the passenger compartment from engine heat and even clear Mylar chip protection for forward-facing body surfaces.

While the TR60s drew power from a 3.0-liter Ferrari V12 topped by a six-pack of Weber carburetors, the BLS1 (B for Barry, L for Lynn, S for Smith) is propelled by a 6.0-liter BMW V12 modified to 450 hp



and 480 lb-ft of torque by the factory and Korman Autoworks. To mimic the Webers, a custom Hilborn-style fuel-injection system features a dozen stacks.

Wenig says the BMW powertrain (engine and six-speed manual topped by a shifter machined from a block of stainless steel) was used because it had to be reliable and serviceable. Also, to use a Ferrari engine would encourage people to consider the BLS1 a replica rather than a one-off for show-and-go.

As the car makes appearances at events, Wenig says there have been "almost humbling accolades" for the Sport Speciale. As for Barry Smith, he just smiles as he drives his car along the Arizona desert highways. 🏁

